

# THE INCLUSIVE CITY



Towards a better inclusion of  
undocumented migrants in  
Amsterdam society

Participatory action research  
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*"I could have been a full person."*  
- Participant living undocumented

## Foreword and acknowledgements

In front of you lies the end-report from the participatory action research: ‘The Inclusive City’. This action research focuses on a better inclusion of undocumented migrants in Amsterdam. Participatory action research is a method that aims to tackle complex issues by co-creating solutions together with the local community that experiences the issue. For this it focuses on the talents, creativity and power that are already present within the community.

In the Netherlands there is a discouraging policy towards undocumented migrants: people that do not have a legal residence permit. They are excluded from most rights and social services. However, in 2018 a new municipality was chosen in Amsterdam. This municipality aims to be an inclusive city for all Amsterdammers.<sup>1</sup> As undocumented migrants are excluded of most rights, the question arises: what are, despite all juridical restrictions, possibilities to become more part of Amsterdam society?

This action research has been done as part of a traineeship from the organisation 7Senses.<sup>2</sup> 7Senses has at aim to support local communities worldwide by doing action research. The research is also done in cooperation with Amsterdam City Rights<sup>3</sup>, a project in which undocumented and documented citizens of Amsterdam closely work together, of the foundation Here to Support. The action research started in January and was finished at the end of May.

Although I’ve been living for twelve years in Amsterdam, for the last six months, I’ve seen a complete new world in this city. I’ve met dozens of new people; people that are coming from all different corners of the world, who are all bringing their unique story to this city. People that despite the extreme conditions they have to live in, despite a system that is neglecting them as full human beings, are still willing to share their inspiring visions and attitudes. I see the city with new eyes; these different worlds, living so close to each other, while simultaneously so separated. I truly hope that at a certain moment in time, these worlds will become one, in which it’s not our juridical position that decides if we are allowed to join or not, but that it’s the fact that we are all full human beings with our full potentials that can build together the city that we live in.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-diversity/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.7senses.es](http://www.7senses.es)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.amsterdamcityrights.org>

I owe many thanks to all the participants of this action research, thank you so much for taking the time to share your experiences, expertise and ideas. I'm truly inspired by your resilience and perseverance. Thanks as well to Amsterdam City Rights for the cooperation in this project. Thank you Thomas, for your excellent mindmap skills, but even more for your support in so many ways. And last but not least, many thanks to Madelon Eelderink and my co-trainees for the great inspiration, pep talks and insights.

Karin

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## Abstract

In Amsterdam lives a large group of undocumented migrants: people without a residence permit that are excluded from most rights and social services. This participatory action research focuses on the question how undocumented migrants can become more part of Amsterdam society.

The action research takes place in a time of transition; the city of Amsterdam takes part in a national pilot regarding policy-change towards the situation of undocumented migrants. 2019 is in this a year of transition in which a new system for shelter and guidance for a selected group of undocumented migrants in the city is provided.

During the process the complexity of the situation became clear; next to the political climate and all the juridical restrictions, undocumented migrants have to live in harsh conditions that affect, next to their often traumatic past, their wellbeing greatly. The group is large and highly diverse, where everybody has his or her own specific needs. This asks for a personal approach of support-organisations, which is not always available. Yet, within the complex situation, there were two values that all stakeholders underlined: firstly the increasing of self-reliance of undocumented migrants, and secondly that the world that is created for undocumented migrants gets more interlinked with the world of other citizens living in Amsterdam.

Within the action research process, stakeholders decided to focus on one specific theme: better access to information and dialogue. During several group sessions with stakeholders the idea for better and more regular dialogue sessions between people with and without documents came up. Improved dialogue, in which participants get the change to share and discuss ideas, opinions and up-dates on an equal level, will make that the voice of undocumented migrants will be better included, and there will be a better flow of information out of which better cooperation can start. It will improve the possibility to be more self-reliant and it can bring worlds of people with and without documents closer.

In the last two group meetings stakeholders discussed what more regular dialogue should look like. Out of all this input a format for inclusive dialogue sessions is co-created. This format can function as a starting point for those who want to organise dialogue where undocumented migrants are included. The dialogue sessions can then be a first step towards a better inclusion of undocumented migrants in Amsterdam society.

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# 1. Introduction: the context

## **Being undocumented in The Netherlands**

In the Netherlands lives a large group of undocumented migrants: people without a legal residence permit like rejected asylum seekers, people that stayed in the Netherlands while their visa got expired, stateless people, or victims of human trafficking. They cannot or do not want to leave the Netherlands for diverse reasons. In the Netherlands there is a restrictive policy towards undocumented migrants: they are excluded from most civil rights and social facilities. They are not allowed to work (even when it's voluntary), to follow regular education, to have a bank account or to make use of social services. This makes the possibility to make autonomous choices, build up a life and have a future perspective extremely difficult. Although living undocumented is not a crime, without the right papers there is the risk of being deported to the country of origin by a decision of the state. Before deportation, undocumented migrants can be held imprisoned in detention-facilities for a maximum of 18 months.<sup>4</sup>

Undocumented migrants are stuck: they cannot go back to the country of origin, nor get the chance to build up a life in The Netherlands. Next to the often extremely traumatic past undocumented migrants have to deal with, the fear of deportation, the boredom, and the worries about their future can cause a lot of stress, anxiety and depression.<sup>5</sup>

What binds undocumented migrants is their juridical position. The similarity they share is that being undocumented puts you in a vulnerable position and makes you an easy target for exploitation and abuse. However, the group is highly diverse: people with multiple different cultural and educational backgrounds; some have been undocumented for months, others for more than 30 years. Some people have a job, are renting a place and can provide in their living by themselves, others are more or completely dependent on support that is provided in the city. Everybody brings their own story, talents and needs to the city.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://meldpuntvreemdelingendetentie.nl/vreemdelingendetentie/>

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty international & Stichting Los. Valse hoop of bittere noodzaak. Opvang van mensen zonder verblijfsrecht. Mei 2017.

## **Being undocumented in Amsterdam**

There are thousands of undocumented migrants living in Amsterdam.<sup>6</sup> In the city there are roughly four ways in which they foresee in their housing: Firstly, there are people renting a place. Renting a place is often expensive and it's easy for house-owners to exploit people. Secondly there are people living in one of the buildings from the action group 'We Are Here'.<sup>7</sup> This group of undocumented migrants started squatting buildings in the city from 2012 on. In this way the group provides temporarily places to live and gains at the same time visibility and attention for their situation. Thirdly, there are undocumented migrants living in the shelters of the municipality. Fourthly, there are undocumented migrants without a permanent or semi-permanent place to live. They are living on the streets or are dependent on the places of friends.

In Amsterdam there are several organisations, churches and volunteers that support undocumented migrants in different ways: they provide medical care, juridical support, (language) classes, and other activities. In Amsterdam there are also so-called 'safe spaces'. Places that are specifically focusing on providing a more comfortable place for undocumented migrants where they are welcomed warmly. The most well-known safe spaces in Amsterdam are the Worldhouse<sup>8</sup> and BOOST<sup>9</sup>.

## **Pilot LVV: 24-hour shelter in Amsterdam**

In 2014 the municipality of Amsterdam started with the so-called 'bed, bath, bread – shelters' (BBB). At these BBB-shelters undocumented migrants could find a bed for the night, a sober dinner and breakfast, and a place to take a shower. However, it became clear for the municipality that a more stable and safe life situation, and more social and juridical support are essential for people to think about and work on their future perspective. In December 2018 the newly installed left-wing city council of Amsterdam changed the BBB in a 24 hour-shelter. This change is part of a broader policy-plan<sup>10</sup>, in which better support for undocumented migrants that is focussing on a future perspective is central. The year of 2019 is a year of transition in which the new model will be implemented. In the new model there is place for 500 people that can stay for 1,5 year. There will be smaller-scale shelters

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.stichtinglos.nl/nieuws/wodc-schatting-aantallen-ongedocumenteerden>

<sup>7</sup> [www.wijzijnhier.org](http://www.wijzijnhier.org)

<sup>8</sup> [www.wereldhuis.org](http://www.wereldhuis.org)

<sup>9</sup> [www.boostamsterdam.nl](http://www.boostamsterdam.nl) (Boost is focussing on people with and without a residence permit)

<sup>10</sup> Uitvoeringsplan 24-uurs opvang ongedocumenteerden. Werken aan een duurzaam perspectief. Gemeente Amsterdam, juni 2018.



in different neighbourhoods, and people will be supported on both a juridical and social level. The new model is part of a national pilot.<sup>11</sup> In the country there are 5 cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Eindhoven and Groningen) that will all have a different model to foresee in the situation of undocumented migrants. Based on the outcome of the different models the government will decide which final model will be implemented.

### **Amsterdam: an inclusive and fearless city?**

The municipality of Amsterdam aims to be an inclusive city. On the municipal website it's stated as follows:

*"That's why Amsterdam's policy is not focused on diversity, but on inclusion. It's about ensuring that all Amsterdammers can participate in our city and that no one is excluded or made to feel like an outsider. After all, the more people who participate, the stronger and more dynamic our city grows."*<sup>12</sup>

Next to the inclusive city, the left-wing parties also underline the idea of Amsterdam being a fearless city.<sup>13</sup> The fearless city movement is an international network of cities that state cities should take the lead in providing experiment and improvement for complex problems that societies are facing, which national governments leave behind. Of course Amsterdam cannot step aside from national policies. Yet, the will to be a more inclusive and fearless city is present. But how fearless and inclusive the city can and will be towards the undocumented migrants that are living in the city, is something that's not clear yet.

### **Focus of this action research**

In the current Dutch system are people without the right papers not recognized but criminalized, and are not allowed to take part in society. It must be clear that, to truly become part of society, what people need is a legal residence permit. However, the question arises, how can we make sure that, although people are not legally recognised, lives do not have to get stuck for such long times? Where people, despite all juridical restrictions, can still get the change to develop oneself, build relations, contribute to society or think about future plans. This action research focuses on the expertise and ideas of local stakeholders,

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/3068-ontwikkeling-landelijke-vreemdelingen-voorzieningen-\(lvv\).aspx](https://www.wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabase/3068-ontwikkeling-landelijke-vreemdelingen-voorzieningen-(lvv).aspx)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-diversity/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://amsterdam.groenlinks.nl/nieuws/amsterdam-fearless-city>

such as undocumented migrants, the organisations that work together with undocumented migrants and the municipality of Amsterdam, to uncover practical possibilities to become more part of Amsterdam society when living undocumented.

### **How to read this report?**

This report will be outlined as follows. In the next chapter more will be explained about participatory action research as a method. It will also present the research design and the used research methods. In the third chapter the results will be presented and the process of co-creation will be explained. The last chapter will contain the conclusion of the research; this chapter will also reflect on the research process and presents recommendations for the field and for further action research. At the appendix the digital versions of mindmaps that were used during the action research process can be found.

## 2. Participatory action research: the method

This chapter will describe more about participatory action research as a method. It also presents the research design and explains which methods are used.

### **Participatory action research**

Participatory action research (PAR) is a systematic approach that is focused on supporting a local community to find solutions to challenges they face in their everyday lives. Key in this research method is the inclusion of local stakeholders in the research process.<sup>14</sup> In PAR, as opposed to conventional scientific research, the primary goal is to co-create initiatives together with the community that will improve the life-situation of the community members. The role of the action-researcher is, instead of primarily collecting and processing data, as well focused on facilitating a process in which the community can co-create and realize suitable solutions together.

PAR focuses on the talents, creativity and expertise that are present within the community. This means that the researcher tries to collect the perspectives from the community members themselves. What are their experiences, needs and ideas? What are the solutions they see? And do they see a role for themselves in this? The action-researcher puts all these perspectives together to see where there is common ground from where there can be worked together to co-create initiatives that are beneficial for all community members.

Another important aspect of PAR is that the results of the research are given back directly to the stakeholders. This is a process in which participants get to know other opinions and ideas, and have the possibility to react directly on that what is presented. In this way it is also a checkpoint for the researcher to check with the participants what they think. If there is something misunderstood, or maybe something changed overtime, this can be directly communicated and changed in the results. In this way, there is a process in which initiatives will be created together that will suit everybody's needs and wishes.

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<sup>14</sup> Eelderink, Madelon. 2019. Participatory action research in development cooperation. Unpublished manuscript.

## **Research design**

### Problem definition

Because undocumented migrants in Amsterdam are excluded of many rights, they do not have the possibility to fully take part in the Amsterdam society. Access to (voluntary) work, education and social activities that they can choose themselves, is difficult and the worlds of people with and without papers are very much separated.

### Objective

The goal of this action research is to facilitate the co-creation of initiatives to improve the possibilities for undocumented migrants to become part of the Amsterdam society.

### Main research question

Which initiatives can be co-created and realised by undocumented migrants and other stakeholders to improve the possibilities for undocumented migrants to become part of Amsterdam society?

### Sub questions

- What are at this moment the possibilities for undocumented migrants to become part of Amsterdam society?
- What do stakeholders think of as necessary regarding the improvement of possibilities for becoming part of Amsterdam society for undocumented migrants?
- What do stakeholders think of as possible solutions to improve the possibilities to become part of Amsterdam society for undocumented migrants?

### Stakeholders

- Undocumented migrants
- Organisations that work together with undocumented migrants
- Municipality of Amsterdam
- Volunteers

## Methodology

During this action research, several different research methods were combined.

### Informal conversations, observation and participation

Throughout the research I have been in close contact with undocumented migrants and supporters, with whom I've had many informal conversations. I participated in multiple meetings, activities and demonstrations. Due to this participation and unstructured observation, information was gained and relations of trust were build.



*Getting ready for the women's march*

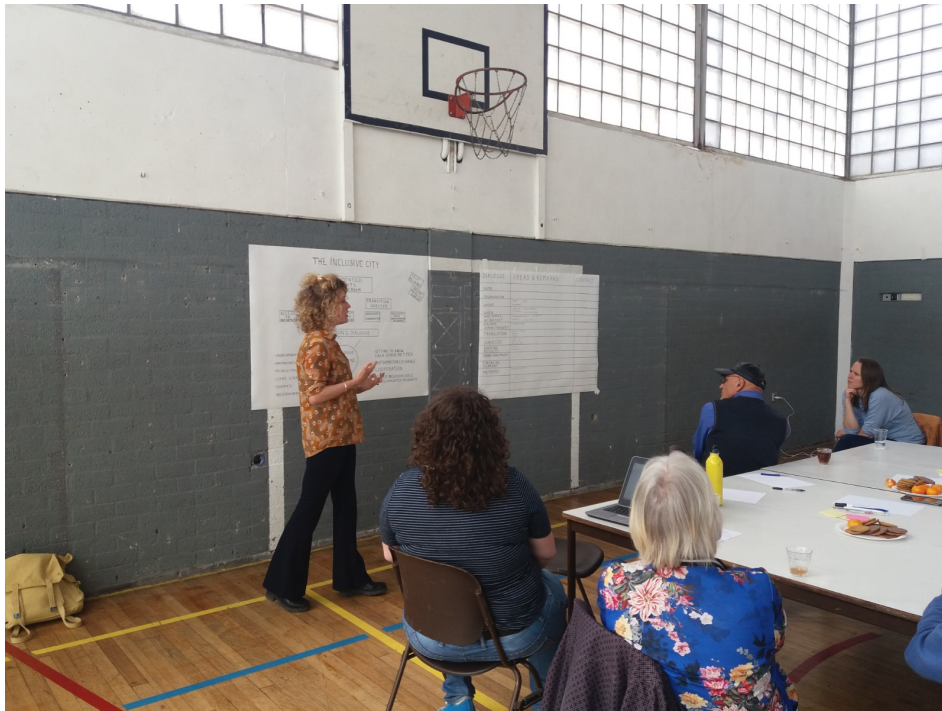
### Semi-structured interviews

I have conducted 25 semi-structured interviews: 13 interviews with undocumented migrants; 3 interviews with employees of the municipality of Amsterdam and 9 interviews with members of different organisations that work together with undocumented migrants.

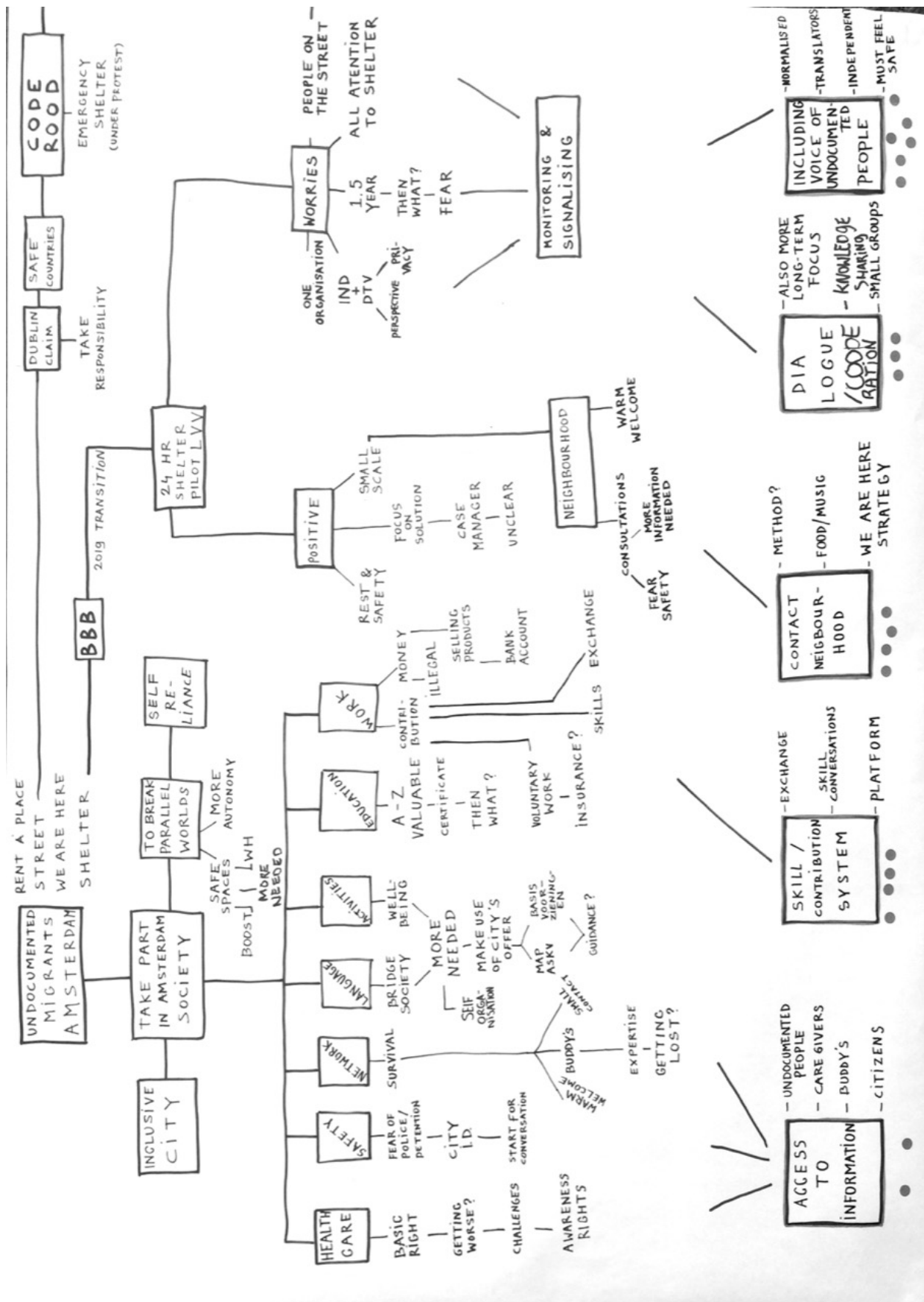
### Focus groups

There have been 6 focus groups held in total. Goal of these focus groups was to share results, to determine which aspects to focus on, and to co-create practical initiatives. Each focus group was set-up by the same structure: Firstly results were shared by making use of a mindmap. This mindmap functioned as a starting point for a group-conversation to see if

there was anything missing or anything incorrect in the results. After the discussion, in smaller groups a brainstorm or dialogue was held to focus more practically what potential initiatives should look like. That what was discussed would be shared in the group afterwards. After each focus group a report was written and was send to all participants of the research. In this way, everybody had the possibility to stay up-dated.



*Sharing results by making use of mindmaps*



First mindmap



### 3. Results

In this chapter the research outcomes are presented. It also gives more insight in the focus groups and how these meetings were used to co-create initiative together.

#### **To start with: the complexity of the field**

During this action research the complexity of the situation became clear. Next to all the juridical restrictions stakeholders have to deal with, there are also many dynamics at play that make taking action not easier. Two of these dynamics will be shortly highlighted:

Firstly, although living undocumented is not easy, there are many undocumented migrants that find their way in the Dutch society. Many of these people stay invisible for support organisations or the municipality. There are also many undocumented migrants that are in need for help; they might need shelter, food, and juridical, medical or social support. They find their way to the shelters or the different support-organisations and thus these are the people that are known by the organisations and the municipality. When living in the harsh condition of being undocumented, next to the often extremely traumatic experiences of fleeing your home country, problems easily accumulate. This requires a personal approach, which in many cases is not possible for support-organisations to provide, since they often not have the means in both money and manpower. Next to this, they have to deal with the juridical restrictions and with a constantly changing dynamic of new people coming to the city. This causes a field in which people have to work ad-hoc under high pressure. This also became clear during the focus groups, where employees of organisations often had to cancel last minute since a more pressing situation occurred that they had to deal with.

Secondly, as undocumented migrants are stuck, and forced in an in-between situation, this causes a lot of in-activity. As one of the participants working at a support-organisation stated: *"It must be clear that it's not the people that are inactive out of nature, it's the system that forces them to an inactive state of being."* In this action research many undocumented migrants participated that very actively gave form to their daily practices and routines. They were following courses, and had things to do during the day. However, most of the stakeholders also referred to the in-active state of many other undocumented migrants. *"Most people stay in bed for the whole day since they have nothing to do and they lost all hope."* stated an undocumented migrant. Or an employee working at the shelter who stated: *"You see people fade because they have nothing to do during the day."* Although there are many activities organised, it's not always easy for undocumented migrants to actually



participate. This question of participation might have to do with the mental state people might be in, but also with more practical aspects like transport that can be difficult and the fact that undocumented migrants have appointments (with their lawyer for example) that they cannot plan themselves. Another important aspect is that if there are activities organised, undocumented migrants stated they must feel safe enough to actually participate. Some people find their way perfectly to activities, others might need more guidance. Without infantilising people, the central question should be: What do you need? Instead of thinking for somebody else what's needed. So although things might be organised for undocumented migrants to participate, there are many aspects that make actual participation more difficult.

To summarize: organisations work in a tense and often ad-hoc situation, and the means to provide a personal approach is not always there, despite the fact that that's what's needed. Secondly, there is the question of participation, where there might be activities organised, but the situation undocumented migrants find themselves in can problematize actual participation. These two dynamics ask for a lot of flexibility when organising activities. In this action research this became clear as well; right at the start of each focus group it was never clear who would actually be able to participate and who would not.

### **Being part of society: what does that mean?**

**The process:** In the **first focus group** the focus of the research was determined. In the **second focus group**, after a three month-period of data collection, first general insights were shared. These insights focused on the one hand at the possibility of being part of Amsterdam society and on the other hand on the new 24-hour shelter and the time of transition the year 2019 is in this.

Undocumented migrants are on a juridical level not recognized as part of the society they are living in. Therefore they cannot participate in the regular system. However, as all participants were asked what being part of society means for them, it became clear that next to the juridical aspect, being part of society has also to do with a physical presence: *"We are here!"* and a more personal feeling of being part of society: *"Sometimes I feel part of society, sometimes not."* The way people feel part of the Amsterdam society highly depends

on their personal situation and the duration of their stay in Amsterdam. Yet, there were seven more practical aspects recognizable that participants mentioned as necessary, regarding being part of a society:

1. You need to feel safe in the city.
2. You need to have access to sufficient health care.
3. You need to speak English or Dutch.
4. You need to have access to education.
5. You need to have the possibility to work.
6. You need to have access to activities like sport and art activities.
7. You need to have the possibility to build a network.

Stakeholders referred to the possibility of being part of the society to the so-called 'parallel worlds': there is a regular world in the city for people with documents, and there is another world in the city created for people without documents. A parallel world, that stays invisible for most citizens of Amsterdam.

*"Everything for undocumented migrants is organised in a parallel world. There are thousands of courses in the city, but for undocumented migrants there are special courses organised that are only for them."*

(Member of support organisation)

These seven practical aspects underline the idea of parallel worlds. In the parallel world undocumented migrants might, until a certain level, find support, health care, activities, learning trajectories and possibilities to build a network that are specifically created for them. The first research question was: what are at this moment the possibilities for undocumented migrants to become part of Amsterdam society? The answer is that they can become part of the parallel world that's created for them. The possibilities in this parallel world are limited, and do not meet the needs or wishes of the diverse group of undocumented migrants.

## **2019: a year of transition**

As in 2019 the new 24-hour plan from the municipality will start, 2019 can be seen as a year of transition.<sup>15</sup> Many participants expressed how happy they are that the night-shelter changed into a 24-hour shelter. Other positive aspects participants mentioned are firstly that the new plan acknowledges the need for rest and safety for undocumented migrants before it's possible to think about a future perspective. Secondly, that there will be focused on a future perspective and that there will be guidance provided. Thirdly, the shelter will be more small-scale than the shelters are now (max. 80 persons). However, apart from these positive aspects, undocumented migrants and members of organisations referred to the process of transition as 'very chaotic' and stated that they have many questions and fears regarding the new plan. These questions and fears can be categorized in three aspects:

### 1. What do we say yes to?

The new shelter-plan is part of a pilot that's initiated by the Dutch government. Many employees of organisations expressed their fear of what exactly they might cooperate in, as their vision on the situation of undocumented migrants and the vision of the Dutch government greatly differs. What, they questioned, will be the end-goal of this pilot: to search for the best way to send as many people back to their home countries or guidance towards a future perspective for them?

### 2. All attention to people in the shelter

The second aspect is that undocumented migrants and supporters expressed the fear that all attention will go to the people in the shelter, while there are only 500 places. Organisations stated that the biggest problem in this will be that there will be no emergency shelter. This will cause that many people will be on the streets. On the one hand there is a more humane approach towards undocumented migrants living in the shelter, on the other hand more undocumented migrants will be excluded from the shelter, whom might end up living at the streets again.

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<sup>15</sup> Uitvoeringsplan 24-uurs opvang ongedocumenteerden. Gemeente Amsterdam, 11 december 2018.

### **People on the street**

That with the new system more undocumented migrants will be on the street became already clear at the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2019. At this day the winter shelter closed. The winter shelter is a service of the municipality and provides a night shelter for all homeless people in Amsterdam, who cannot foresee for shelter in winter themselves. With the closing, around 60 undocumented migrants were on the street with no place to go to. Organisations and supporters set up an action for this group, called 'De kille nachten' where for 9 nights different churches in the city opened their doors for the group to provide shelter. After these nights, other places, like a nightclub, an Islamic school and a community centre opened up their spaces for the group. In June 2019 the group got a more permanent place to stay, provided by citizens of Amsterdam. The group exists of mostly young (16 – 25 year) Eritrean men with a Dublin-claim; according to the Dublin treaty, asylum seekers that are coming to Europe have to ask asylum in the first country of arrival. People that are travelling to other countries have to be sent back to this first country. Yet, in the Netherlands after a stay of 18 months, the Dublin-claim expires and people can ask for asylum again. Most of the group members are on the waiting list to get placed in one of the municipal shelters, but since these are full, and the waiting list is long, this will take a lot of time.

### 3. Inclusion voice undocumented migrants

The third aspect is that undocumented migrants and supporters rose the question to what extent the voices of undocumented migrants will get included in the new plan. Will they also get a seat at the table to express their needs and ideas? Will there be independent places where they can complain? And as they are depending on the new shelter, to what extent can they feel space to be critical towards the system they are in? Participants stated that undocumented migrants are afraid of possible consequences when they are critical towards the system. They then rather stay silent.

*"The people in the shelter are afraid to express their opinion, they are afraid to express their opinion, because they think being critical might have consequences for them, so they rather stay silent." – Resident of the municipal shelter*



*Focus group: Sharing and discussing first research results*

### **What do stakeholders think that should change?**

Stakeholders differ in their ideas to what extent undocumented migrants should have the possibility to become part of the Amsterdam society. Supporters and undocumented migrants stated that the biggest change that is needed is that undocumented migrants should have the right to work and get access to education. The municipality states that on the one hand the idea of the inclusive city can support undocumented migrants; when they can take more part in the city *“they can become more active, and build self-esteem”* on the other hand they state: *“the inclusive city cannot function as an argument for undocumented migrants to have the right to be part of the city.”* According to them the idea of the inclusive city might be confusing: *“You are allowed to take part, but you cannot stay. So the idea of the inclusive city sounds great, but how to bring it to practice, is a second thing.”* The municipality also underlined the role of the rest of the city in this: *“People in the city, the NGO’s and undocumented migrants should also take initiative themselves. At the end the municipality can arrange a lot, but it’s the people that have to do it.”* Although stakeholders differ in their view how much right undocumented migrants have to take part in the city, all stakeholders underline two values:

### Break parallel worlds

The parallel world for undocumented migrants should be more visible for other citizens so that there will be more awareness about this group. At the same time, instead of maintaining the parallel world and setting up systems and activities only for undocumented migrants, there should be sought for opportunities to see where undocumented migrants can get access towards the 'regular world' of people living with documents. When these parallel worlds would be more interlinked, it will be easier for undocumented migrants to connect to other citizens where instead of the category of being undocumented, mutual interests are central, and the offer of for example, activities in community centres will be broader.

### Self-reliance

The other value all stakeholders underlined is to increase self-reliance among undocumented migrants. Organisations and the municipality linked the idea of self-reliance to the possibility of making more autonomous choices, building up own relations and taking care of oneself. Self-reliance also has to do with the increasing of self-esteem. When you're less dependent you'll feel better about yourself. But as organisations and undocumented migrants stated as well, to be self-reliant you need to have at least a certain amount of information/knowledge about the system you're in. When undocumented migrants have the possibility to be more self-reliant, self-esteem will grow and they will feel more ownership about their life situation.

Next to these two values, five directions that would increase the possibility for undocumented migrants to become part of Amsterdam society have been identified:

1. Better access to information
2. Possibilities to contribute to society
3. Better contact with the neighbourhood
4. Better dialogue & cooperation
5. Better inclusion of the voice of undocumented migrants

These five directions give an answer to the second research question: What do stakeholders think of as necessary regarding the improvement of possibilities for becoming part of Amsterdam society for undocumented migrants? There should be better access to

information, better possibilities to contribute to society, better contact with the neighbourhood, better dialogue and cooperation between different parties and better inclusion of the voice of undocumented migrants.

**Process:** In the 2<sup>nd</sup> focus group participants were asked to choose two of the five directions (by putting a green sticker at the direction they think as most important) to further focus on in the next action research stages. Together we came to a combination of two newly formulated directions:

- Information & Dialogue
- Exchange of talents



*Focus group: Which directions should we further focus on?*



## Access to information and dialogue

**Process:** In the 3<sup>rd</sup> **focus group** it was planned to focus on the direction 'exchange of talents'. This focus group showed how difficult it is to get people together. Only one participant participated. Together we discussed the mindmap but also decided to further focus on the direction 'information and dialogue', due to the full agendas of people.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> **focus group** we focused on the need for better access to information and dialogue. A brainstorm was held in which the group came up with ideas on how access to information and dialogue could be improved.

### Access to information

It became clear that the access to information for undocumented migrants should be improved. Three types of information are seen as important in this:

1. Rights: what are the basic rights, especially for specific groups like people with a Dublin-claim or people from the LGBTQI-community.
2. Understanding the field: undocumented participants expressed the need for a better understanding of the organisations that work together with undocumented migrants. What is the difference between these organisations and if undocumented migrants have specific questions to which organisation can they go to?
3. Social map: It needs to be clearer which places in the city offer things like activities, meals and places to take a shower.

Other parties that stakeholders stated are in need for better access to information are:

- General practitioners need to be more aware about the basic rights of undocumented migrants.
- Undocumented participants and participants of organisations stated that new buddies are in need for more information and a better understanding of the field.
- The prospective neighbours of the new shelters need more information about what it means to be undocumented.



## Dialogue

Both undocumented migrants, as the municipality, as the involved organisations as neighbours of new shelters expressed a need for better dialogue with each other. With dialogue they mean ways to meet and to share and discuss experiences, ideas and needs. However, the motivation for dialogue differs for each group:

- Undocumented migrants expressed a two-folded need for dialogue: on the one hand to press their situation and their needs in this towards the municipality and organisations. On the other hand to have conversations that go beyond the category of being undocumented but rather focus on mutual interests or cultural understanding.
- Organisations expressed a two-folded need for dialogue as well: firstly, to be more aware of changing needs of undocumented migrants, secondly to be more up-dated of projects of organisations and the possibility to share knowledge with each other.
- The municipality expressed the need for dialogue especially to have a better understanding of the perspectives of undocumented migrants. However, they also expressed their friction in this, since it must be clear that dialogue does not mean there is a formal end saying for undocumented migrants. They also stated that it's difficult to have a more in-depth conversation that goes beyond questions of the right to work.
- All stakeholders expressed the need for better dialogue between neighbours from new shelters and undocumented migrants. To get to know each other better, to take possible fears from neighbours away and to exchange interests.

When thinking about creating better access to information and dialogue three aspects were mentioned to keep in mind:

1. There is already a lot of information available, like websites that give insights in basic rights.<sup>16</sup> Is this information still accurate and how can these websites become better known?
2. There is a group of undocumented migrants that is very difficult to reach out to, since they try to stay as much as possible invisible for organisations. Undocumented participants stated that although these people are difficult to reach, as long as an

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<sup>16</sup> For example: [basicrights.nl](http://basicrights.nl)

organisation spreads their information at online and offline places that focus on undocumented migrants, it will find this group as well.

3. Also other parties like different migrant organisations, social services or social organisations should be invited to dialogue, this way more awareness and understanding will be created.

During the focus group, participants stated that discussing topics with a diverse group of people on an equal level, as in the focus group happened, is highly valuable to them. They expressed their comfort discussing in a small group, and how much information can be provided towards each other by having an in-depth conversation. The question thus became: 'How can we make sure that these group sessions will continue when this action research is finished?' This clear question made us decide to focus on setting up a structure in which more regular dialogue can take place.

### **Dialogue as a first step**

**Process:** In the **5<sup>th</sup> focus group** we have built further on setting up a structure in which dialogue can take place. The idea of dialogue-sessions got discussed and a brainstorm was held that focused on what a structure of dialogue should look like. The **6<sup>th</sup> focus group** was the last meeting within this research project: a first dialogue session. A diverse group of people participated. Firstly the final mindmap of results so far was shared and afterwards the group was divided in three groups. Each group formed it's own dialogue table, with a dialogue leader. After one hour, the groups were asked to come together, and shortly share some of their experiences and insights. During the session there was also a blank mindmap at which everybody could share their practical ideas, remarks or contacts for what dialogue-sessions should look like. Out of all the input that was gained during these focus groups, a format for dialogue was co-created. This format can be used as a starting point for those who want to organise an inclusive dialogue together with undocumented migrants.

All stakeholders expressed the need for a better sharing of information and a better dialogue between undocumented migrants, (support)-organisations, the municipality and other Amsterdammers. Meeting, sharing and discussing on an equal level will improve the understanding of each other. Next to this here are several positive results recognizable; firstly the voice of undocumented migrants will be better included. Secondly, the dialogue can have multiple forms and topics: it can function as a structure to bring ad-hoc topics to the light, but it can also focus on the more long-term situation. This is important as many stakeholders expressed the need for dialogue about what will happen after the pilot of the 24-hour shelter. Thirdly, the dialogue will be based on equality. Most conversations undocumented migrants have with professionals are in a help-relation. There is no equality in these types of conversation. Without denying the inequality of the situation, equality in a conversation will focus on the agency of undocumented migrants. Fourthly, as dialogue will provide a better flow of information, it might also cause better cooperation between different parties. Often, people are not even aware of each other's plans and struggles. When participants will be better updated its easier to start cooperating.

*"If we would have the chance to stay in better contact with the municipality and get the possibility to share more of our ideas and needs? That would be awesome!"*

– Participant living undocumented



*Focus group: a first dialogue session.*

### To keep in mind

In the midst of the political situation, the tight laws and the survival mode of undocumented migrants, participants of this action research considered better dialogue as the most viable option for now. Improved dialogue should not be seen as an end-solution but rather a first small step towards a better inclusion of undocumented migrants. Yet, as became clear during this action research, it's not easy to make sure undocumented migrants will actually participate, and employees of support organisations have full agenda's. Next to this, it's challenging to organise an inclusive dialogue with all different languages and (political) agenda's. An inclusive dialogue with undocumented migrants asks thus for a careful organisation. It will cost time and it will be a search for methods and practicalities that work and do not work.

That organising an inclusive dialogue costs time became apparent in the last focus group. To arrange space, time, invitations, dialogue leaders, topics, clear explanations, and drinks and snacks, asks for time. And although in this dialogue-session it turned out that some things like for example the use of translators, could have been organised better, participants thought the dialogue-session had been valuable; this became clear out of the positive feedback that came afterwards.

*"It was a great meeting. We have to keep on sharing our perspectives, to come to a better understanding of each other."*

- Participant living undocumented

*"I really enjoyed this session. It became clear for me how important it is to share ideas and visions in a free space. I realised how many more people are working on these topics, and how much we can learn from each other's different approaches."*

- Participant working at a support organisation

*"I think it has been a very valuable meeting. Within our small group we already have shared a lot of important information."*

- Participant working at the municipality

**Who will organise these dialogue sessions?**

During the focus groups it became clear that stakeholders think there should be an organisation responsible for the dialogue-sessions. Amsterdam City Rights already stated they would like to organise more regular dialogue. However, it can only be beneficial if there are more dialogues organised. The format is open to anybody that wants to organise dialogue-sessions.

Dialogue-sessions will support the increasing of self-reliance. It will also bring together separate worlds. It will be a first step towards a better sharing of information and hopefully towards better cooperation so that new initiatives can start from there. To answer the main research question: Which initiatives can be co-created and realised by undocumented migrants and other stakeholders to improve the possibilities for undocumented migrants to become part of Amsterdam society? The first initiative will be to have a better-included dialogue, so that undocumented migrants can think together with other stakeholders how to improve the possibility to become part of Amsterdam society.

## Format inclusive dialogue sessions

This format for inclusive dialogue sessions can be used as a starting point to create dialogue between people with and without documents in Amsterdam.

Dialogue is important; to meet and get to know each other better, to recognise each other, to share information, experiences and knowledge, to ask each other's opinion and to connect, can be a first step towards change. Yet it's not always easy. How to get people with different (political) agenda's, cultural backgrounds and languages at the same table, while having a constructive dialogue? This format can help you with that. It is completely based on the input of participants of the action research 'the inclusive city'. It contains insights and ideas of experienced people, which are important to take into account when organising dialogue where specifically undocumented migrants are included. The format contains ten steps that form a concrete set-up for an inclusive dialogue.

*"We need to have better dialogue. To make sure that there is not only talked about undocumented migrants, but that they are part of the solution."*

- Member support organisation

**Dialogue:** There are many different definitions of dialogue. For this format we use a broad definition: an open conversation where all participants are equally important.

### 10 steps to set-up an inclusive dialogue

#### Step 1: What's the goal?

It needs to be clear what the goal of your dialogue is. The goal will influence the set-up of your dialogue. It's important for participants to know the goal so that everybody is at the same page. Although goals will always overlap, at least three different goals can be distinguished:

##### 1. To meet

This goal of this dialogue is to get to know each other better. It focuses on cultural exchange and personal stories and experiences. Goal is to find common ground. Positive

results can be that possible stereotypes are discussed and cultural miscommunication can be reduced. This is a good way to start building relations and seek for mutual interests.

## 2. To exchange information and insights

Another goal can be to share information and give up-dates about a new situations or developments. Positive results will be that participants are better informed and to search for better cooperation. This goal can be used well for dialogue between the municipality, organisations, educational institutions and undocumented migrants.

## 3. Political ideas

The goal of a political dialogue is to press a specific topic with the aim to change a situation. With this goal participants have a more clear opinion that they want to share. Results will be that participants have the space to reason their argument well and that there will be a better understanding of each other's opinion.

### **Step 2: Who is invited?**

Who you invite depends on the goal of the dialogue. If it's about cultural exchange you might not invite the municipality and if it's about pressing a political topic you might not invite the neighbourhood. There are roughly four groups mentioned as important to keep in mind when you think about your invitations:

- Undocumented migrants
- The municipality
- Organisations and educational institutions that work with undocumented migrants
- Neighbours of places where undocumented migrants live

Important to keep in mind is the question: who else would be interesting to invite? Are there any organisations that might be interesting to cooperate with? Other migrant organisations, cultural places, support groups? When the dialogue is held in a specific neighbourhood, think about well-known people from that neighbourhood. They might attract others from the neighbourhood as well.

Invite people on time, at least ten days beforehand. Spread the message broadly. To reach out to undocumented migrants spread flyers at the shelters and safe spaces like the Worldhouse and BOOST. Make use of social media like Facebook. Ask support-

organisations to spread the invitation as well. Always ask people to sign up for the dialogue so that you know how many people will participate.

Topics that have been mentioned as important to discuss were: work, education, culture, the migrant as contributor, Dublin-claim, health care, facilities and restrictions in the shelters, self-organisation, basic rights, voluntary work, the inclusive city and the more long-term future for undocumented migrants in Amsterdam.

### **Step 3: What will it be about?**

It must be clear what the dialogue will be about. Will you have different dialogue-tables discussing the same topic? Or will you have different tables discussing different topics? The topic must fit the goal of the dialogue. The participants must know the topics before the day of the dialogue so that they have the possibility to overthink the topic. You can choose to save some space in the dialogue for ad-hoc topics that need to be discussed as well. Also take into account that undocumented migrants are, when seen as a group, highly diverse. Not all topics might be interesting for everybody.

A good strategy can be to not choose a topic that specifically has to do with living without documents, but rather search for more common topics that affect more groups in Amsterdam. This way you can attract different people and people can connect on broader themes than being documented or not.

### **Step 4: Where, when and how long?**

Think about the location carefully. The place must feel safe for everybody to go to, and if it's far out of town, transport can be a big difficulty for people. You can try the regular 'safe spaces' like Worldhouse and BOOST, but if you would like to bring different worlds together, it might be more interesting to think of other places. Maybe there are different places like community centres or cultural spaces that you can think of?

The best time to organise a dialogue-session is between 15.00 o'clock and 18.00 o'clock. This is because undocumented migrants often have appointments or classes in the morning. People that live in the shelter might want to leave around 18.00 o'clock to be on time for dinner.



Time wise, a dialogue should last between the one and two hours. Anything less than an hour, will be too short to have an in-depth dialogue. More than two hours is generally too long for participants to stay concentrated.

### **Step 5: Which languages?**

When migrants are included you have to carefully think about the spoken languages. You want to make the dialogue as inclusive as possible, while at the same time you want to keep the dialogue flowing. Based on the invited participants you have to select beforehand if the main language will be English or Dutch. If there are people that do not speak one of these languages, make sure there are good translators. Translators need to know beforehand they are translating, as you cannot expect people to translate last minute in a careful way. Give a clear briefing to the translators. Let the participants always know at the beginning who is translating in which language.

### **Step 6: How to divide the group in smaller groups?**

Dialogue works best in smaller groups. You can divide the participants into groups of maximum 8 persons. Each group will have its own dialogue. In this way you can make sure that everybody gets the possibility to add to the dialogue. Keep in mind that you want to have diverse groups; you don't want for example all neighbours or only organisations at one table. Think of a way to divide the group before the dialogue-sessions starts.

### **Step 7: Who will be the group leaders and the moderator?**

For each dialogue table a dialogue leader is needed. It's the task of the dialogue leader to make sure everybody gets chance to say something, to keep the atmosphere pleasant, to keep an eye on the time and to make sure the dialogue doesn't go too far from the topic that the group is supposed to discuss. Dialogue leaders need a good briefing before the dialogue start. Leading a dialogue is not always easy, but it's a skill people can train. Try to have a diverse group of dialogue leaders, from undocumented and documented people. It would be good for inexperienced dialogue leaders to get training. An organisation that might be interested to do so is: Amsterdam Dialog<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> [www.amsterdamdialog.nl](http://www.amsterdamdialog.nl)

The dialogue session also needs a moderator. Task of the moderator is to lead the programme. He or she makes sure that there is a warm welcome for all participants, explains the programme, and will make sure that at the end experiences and insights are shared. A moderator is 'the face' of the dialogue-session, so think carefully who would fit best in the context of your dialogue.

#### **Step 8: How will results be shared?**

It's important that possible ideas, agreements or solutions that came out of the dialogue will be shared. You can choose to record the dialogue sessions and let somebody make a report based on the recordings. Or you can make sure that at each table there is somebody taking notes. If a report is made of the dialogue session make sure this report is written in easy language, and that it's not too long. The report can be sent by e-mail and Whatsapp. Ask at the beginning of the dialogue if everybody wants to leave their email-address of phone number and the way they like to receive the report.

#### **Step 9: Will participants represent an organisation or status?**

As a participant of a dialogue you can be there as a representative of an organisation or a specific category. Sometimes it might be helpful to be clear about this representation. Be aware of the categories and the possible distinctions you can make with this. It might take away stereotyping or be helpful when sharing information. On the other hand, it might also cause separation between people or give people the feeling they have to defend themselves. This can count for undocumented migrants, but as well for people from the municipality or an organisation. It also depends on the goal of the dialogue if you invite people as a representative of an organisation or specific group or on personal account. Think careful about what you want to achieve and what will work best for the participants.

#### **Step 10: How to make sure it's "gezellig"?**

Last but not least, make sure the dialogue-session is 'gezellig'. It should be a pleasant event for the participants. Think about drinks, snacks, music or potential other activities. Topics that need to be discussed might be heavy, for that it's even more important that there is at the end of the dialogue time to talk and reflect with each other, this goes well with drinks, food and music.

## 4. Conclusion

The goal of this participatory action research was:

*To facilitate the co-creation of initiatives to improve the possibilities for undocumented migrants to become part of the Amsterdam society.*

After 4 months of data-collection and a process of co-creation, the main outcome of the action research is a format for dialogue, which has been co-created with undocumented migrants, (support)-organisations, the municipality of Amsterdam and volunteers. This format can be used as a starting point for those who want to organise inclusive dialogue-sessions together with undocumented migrants. It contains practical insights and ideas from experienced people that will help organisers by the set-up of their dialogue-session.

This action research took place in a time of transition, in which the municipality of Amsterdam, as part of a national pilot, is working towards a new 24-hour shelter plan for undocumented migrants. Although the restrictions towards undocumented migrants are severe, as Amsterdam aims to be an inclusive and fearless city, this time of transition gives space to think what's needed for undocumented migrants to become more part of Amsterdam society. During the action research it became clear that although visions of participants about to what extent undocumented migrants have the right to take part in Amsterdam society differ, all participants agreed upon two values: to break with parallel worlds and to increase the possibility to be self-reliant. A better and more regular dialogue between all stakeholders will be beneficial to both of these values.

An inclusive dialogue asks for a careful organisation and when done, it will have multiple positive results: it will improve the flow of information between participants, it will improve the inclusion of the voice of undocumented migrants, and it will function as a structure to address short-term and long-term subjects. A better understanding of each other and better cooperation will be the outcome. In this way, undocumented migrants are on an equal level asked about their opinions, ideas and expertise. Next to this highly valuable information, it will increase the agency of people, where they are not seen as the problem, but as part of the solution.

Dialogue-sessions will improve the possibility to become part of Amsterdam society. The research goal is thus achieved. However, it must be clear that dialogue-sessions are not the final solution to achieve inclusivity. It will be a long way before undocumented

migrants can truly be part of Amsterdam society, for this many policy-changes are needed. Dialogue in this can function as a first step where new ideas and initiatives can arise.

### **Reflection on the research process**

Although this action research resulted in many valuable insights, some limitations should be addressed. Firstly, the research took place in a time of transition. This was beneficial for the field, since the research could focus on what's needed within the new plan for the shelters. On the other hand, this also made that given information in interviews or meetings did possibly already change when the research results were shared. There were gaps and insecurities that participants talked about, where it wasn't clear if stakeholders were already working on it or not.

Secondly, there were stakeholders that weren't included in the research that would have made the research more complete. Some stakeholders were invited but didn't react on this invitation, others were too busy to participate.

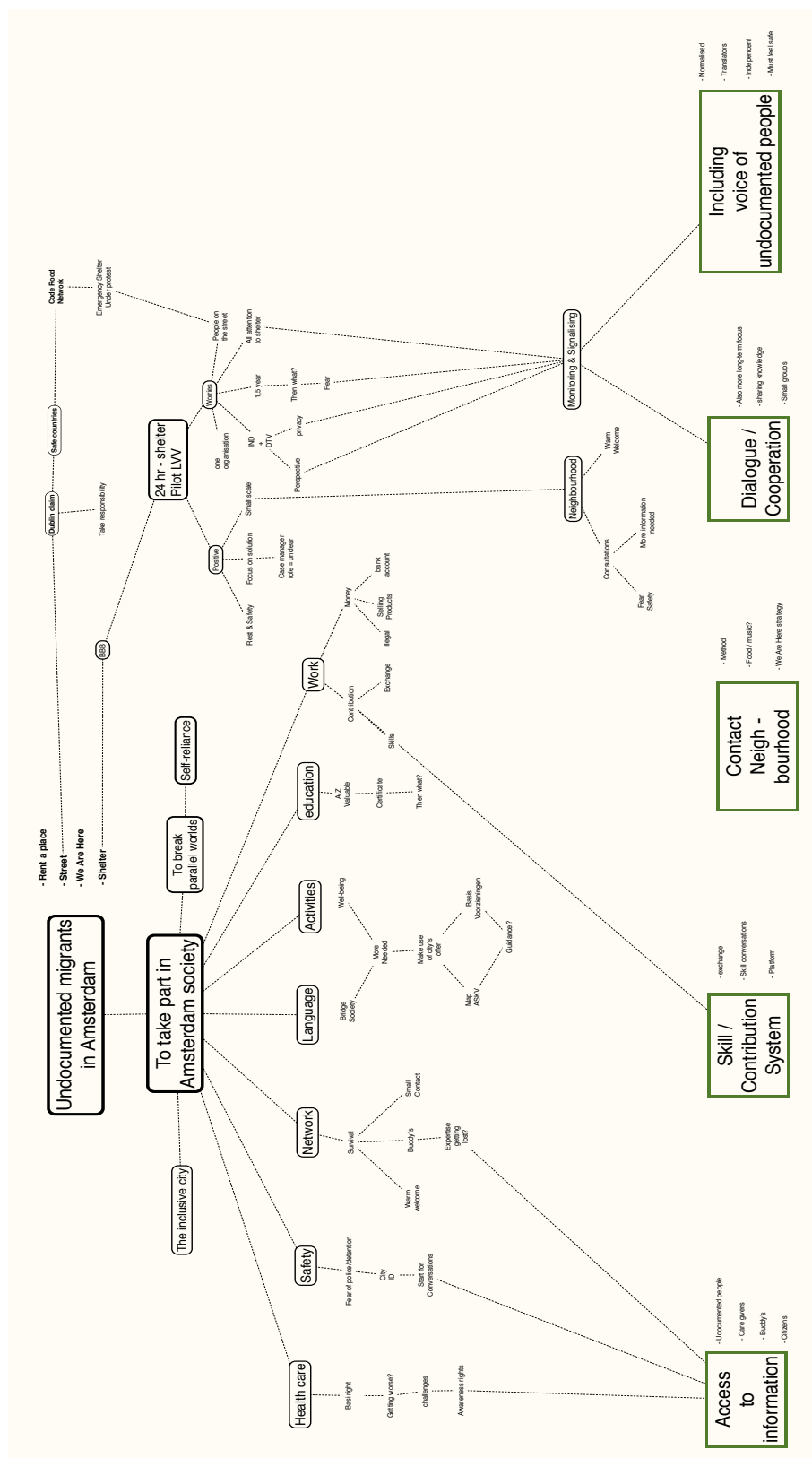
Thirdly, the group of undocumented migrants that participated in this action research could have been more diverse. It was difficult to find female undocumented migrants that were willing to participate, this made that the group of undocumented participants existed of mostly male participants. Next to this, the group of undocumented participants existed mostly out of people that were in contact with support organisations. There are also communities of undocumented migrants that live in the city that are not in contact with any of these organisations. When representatives of these communities would have been included the research would have been more complete.

### **Recommendations**

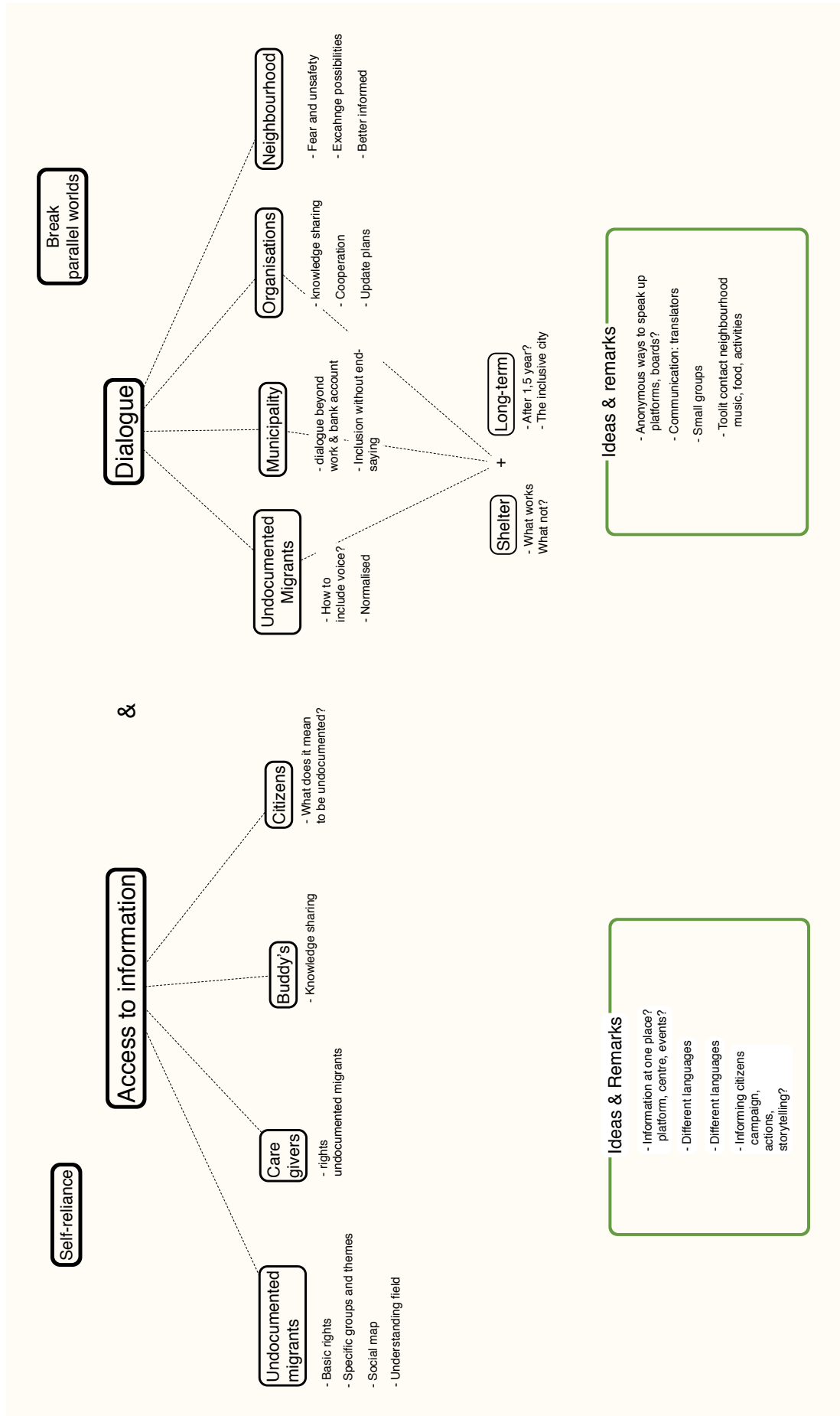
1. **Translators.** To have an in-depth conversation, and to really find out what somebody thinks or wishes, you need to speak the same language. When working together with undocumented migrants this is often not the case. Because of this it's important to make good use of experienced translators. In this way, you will understand each other much better, and cultural miscommunication will be minimized.
2. **Information.** Information about activities, courses and cultural events should be more provided in the city. Information should be gathered at one place (a map, website, centre) that's accurately up-dated.

3. **Language.** Undocumented migrants are in Dutch mostly referred to as 'ongedocumenteerden'. Also in language there are power structures present. When using the word 'ongedocumenteerden' you reduce people to the category of being undocumented. But first of all, they are people, who are undocumented. By being consequent in your language, you do not produce these power structures.
4. **Other groups in de city.** When working together with undocumented migrants, search for communal needs or wishes with other groups in the city. In this way, you move away from the category undocumented/documented and instead search for similarities with others.
5. **Specific focus.** This action research had a broad focus: becoming part of society. During this action research there have been many different themes mentioned that deserve a whole new action research. For future action researchers I would recommend to focus more in-depth on these specific themes like for example contribution, safety or contact with the neighbourhood.
6. **Be creative.** The field is characterized by restrictions; this can cause pessimism or demotivation. To achieve actual policy-change a long breath is needed. In the meantime, a creative approach is required. Search for possibilities and be creative and fearless in this search.

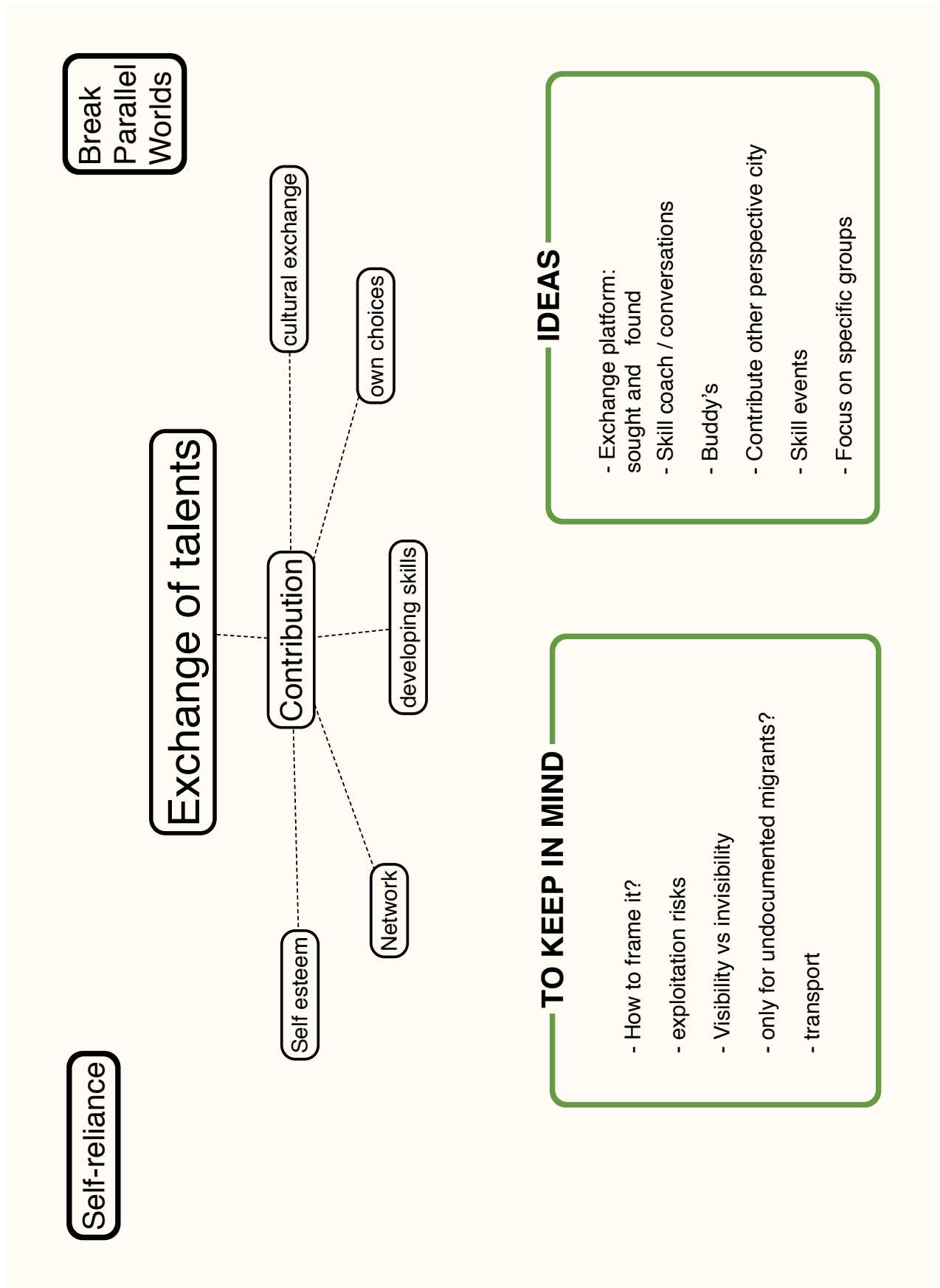
## Appendix



*Mindmap 1*

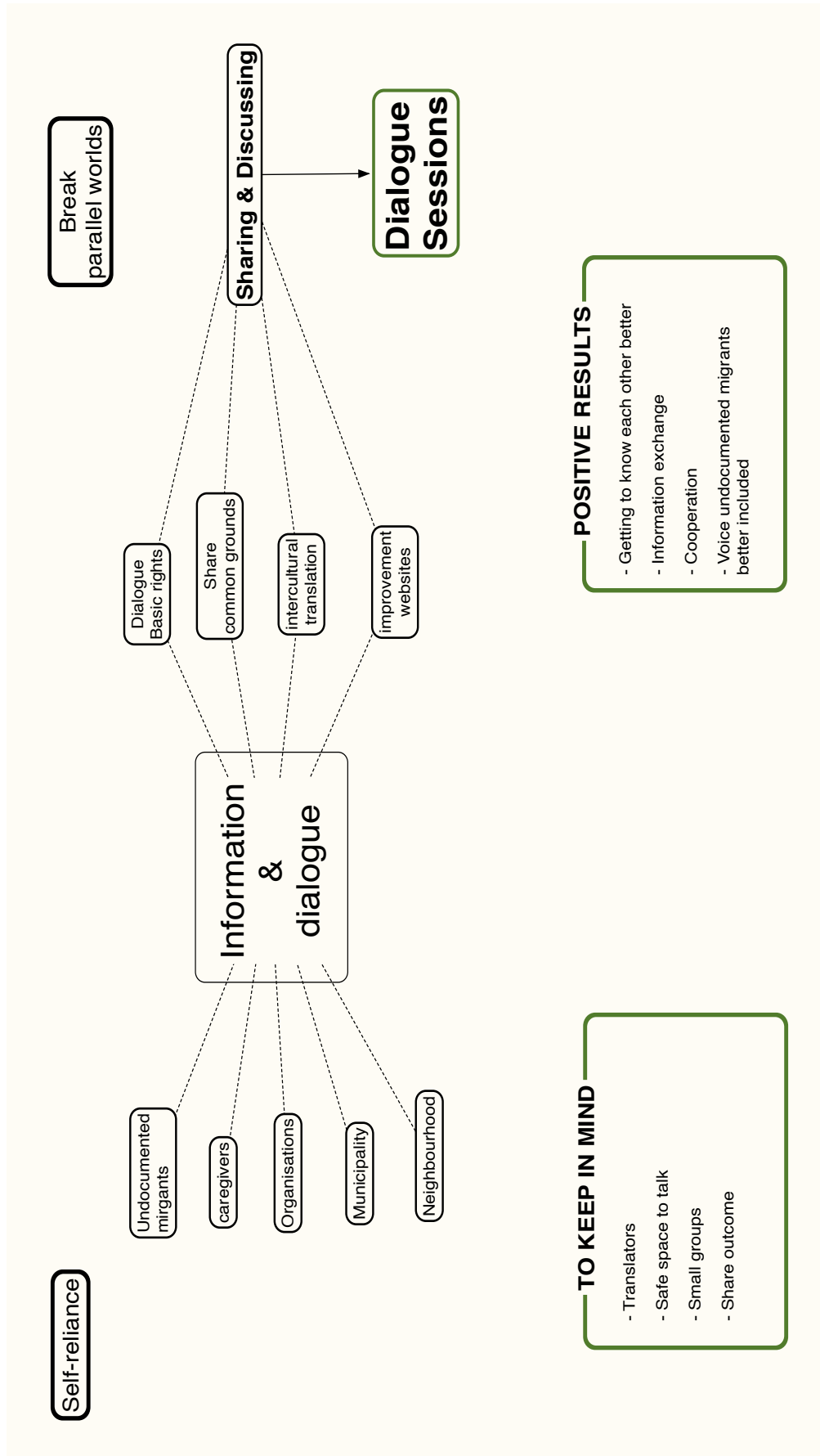


Mindmap 2

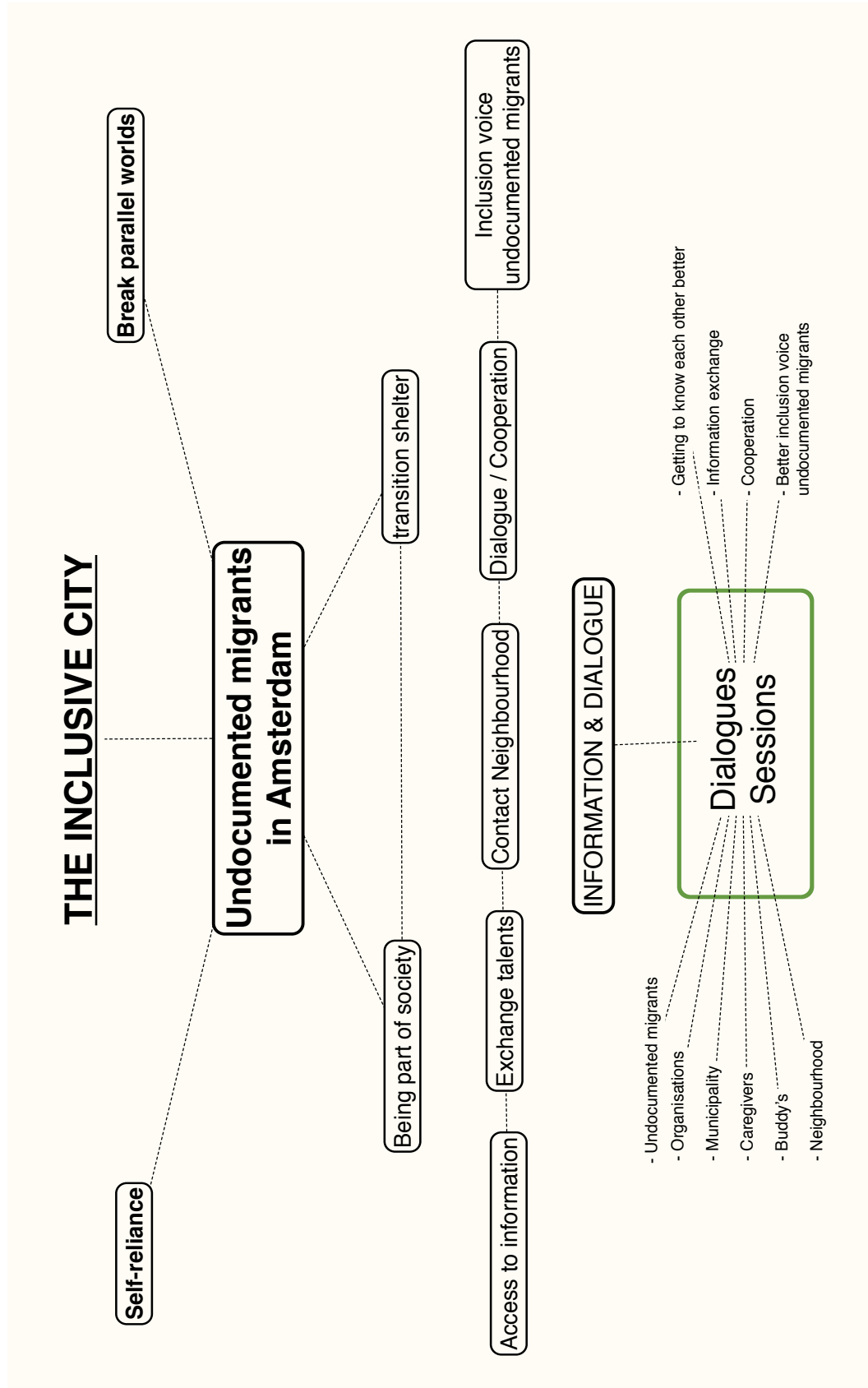


Mindmap 3





Mindmap 4



Mindmap 5