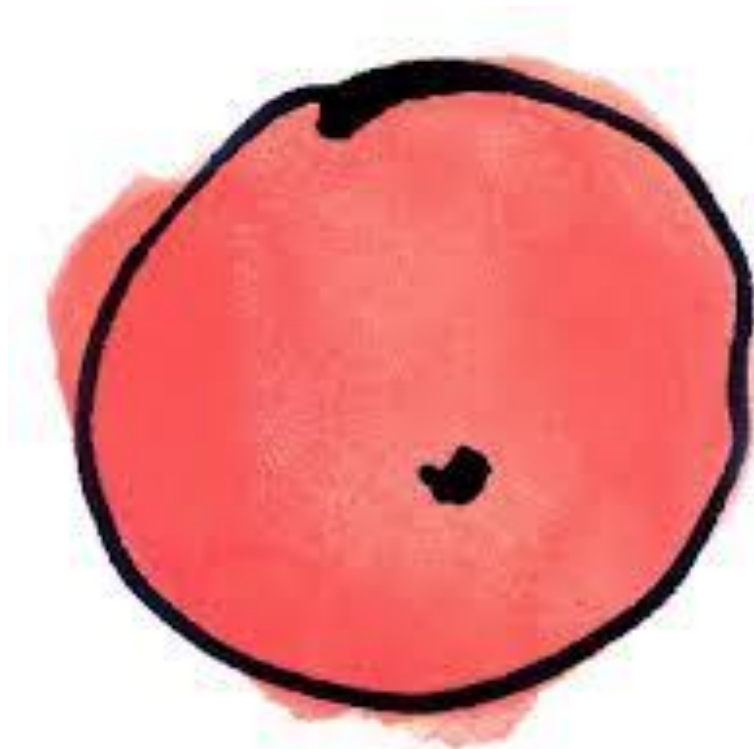# A full stomach and a full heart:
The community kitchen as a space for social cohesion

mixed-methods research on BuurtBuik's social contribution to social cohesion

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"To eat alone is a very bitter thing
But not to eat at all is unfathomable,
[...]
Let us sit down soon to eat
With all those who have not eaten,
let us lay down long tablecloths,
put salt in the lakes of the world
Let us have bakeries the size of the planet,
tables with strawberries in the snow,
and a plate as big as the moon
From which we shall all eat.

For now I ask no more
than the justice of eating."

- Pablo Nerudo, 1958. Excerpt from "The Great Tablecloth" (El Gran Mantel).

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Abstract

Amsterdam's urban food system knows a painful paradox of food insecurity and food waste. BuurtBuik's community kitchen cooks free meals of surplus food while creating opportunities for social contact. This research examined how participating in BuurtBuik as a guest is related to guests' perceptions of social cohesion in the community kitchen and the wider neighbourhood.

Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study combined a survey (n = 33) with two focus groups (n = 9) to provide contextual depth. A multidimensional, multi-level perspective on social cohesion was operationalised to measure and compare perceptions of social cohesion at two levels (community kitchen and neighbourhood) of guests of BuurtBuik Jordaan. Their personal circumstances and their reasons for joining were also considered.

The findings indicated that BuurtBuik can be seen as a socially cohesive "third place". Guests' valued aspects such as acceptance, respect for shared rules, and trust. Social and relational motivations for joining were associated with stronger social cohesion perceptions in the community kitchen, while pragmatic or moral reasons were valued less and were not associated. Culinary conviviality seemed to play a key role in strengthening social cohesion. Neighbourhood social cohesion was significantly lower, but half of the guests reported improvements in this due to participating in BuurtBuik, especially in social networks and participation. Effects were stronger for regular and nearby residents, and factors such as income, food companionship at home, and consistent table partners at BuurtBuiks also played a role. This indicated that social cohesion and its improvements were not experienced evenly by all guests.

Limitations included the cross-sectional design and small sample, restricting generalisability and causality. The study contributes to science through operationalising a theoretical framework on social cohesion that includes the deeper components of this 'catch-all' concept. It contributes to literature on "more than food aid" by positioning community kitchens as both social infrastructure and food provision. Practically sustaining culinary conviviality through funding and volunteer training could strengthen the social outcomes of BuurtBuik. Still, food aid initiatives such as BuurtBuik should be seen as a temporary relief rather than a structural solution to food insecurity. Future research could include a longitudinal and comparative research design. A qualitative direction could be on the 'invisible' rules of culinary conviviality and how the usage of surplus food may be experienced differently across groups.

Keywords: community kitchen, social cohesion, neighbourhood, commensality, food insecurity

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1. Introduction

In Amsterdam, food is everywhere and always available. Restaurants can be found on every corner of the street, and supermarket shelves cannot be empty. Both offer a wide variety of foods regardless of the season. Yet, this abundance of food in our globalised, urban food system comes with a painful paradox. While large amounts of edible food are thrown away, nearly one in ten Amsterdam residents often do not have enough money to put healthy food on the table. For minimum-income households, this even increases to one in three (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024a). At the same time, Amsterdam's supermarkets, households, and hospitality sector combined throw away approximately 53 kilotonnes of solid edible food per year (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024b). This is roughly similar to what 140,000 Dutch adults would eat in a year (own calculation based on Rossum et al., 2023). The paradox becomes even more striking when realising that higher-income Dutch households waste twice as much food as low-income households (Van Dooren et al., 2019). This means they contribute disproportionately more to the contrast of food waste in times of food insecurity. With increasing costs of living, necessities such as heating and healthy food have become even more expensive, forcing many households to decide between a warm meal and a warm home (Snell et al., 2018; Bardazzi et al., 2021; Shapira & Teschner, 2023).

In the meantime, community food initiatives have become essential in the fight against food insecurity (Long et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2023; Morrow et al., 2023). These community-organised voluntary organisations help households to access and enjoy food (Gordon et al., 2023). Amsterdam has around 150 non-profit social food initiatives that provide food for those experiencing food insecurity. Many of these initiatives also improve the urban food system in other ways, for example, by reducing food waste or promoting healthy or local food (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024a). A well-known social food initiative in Amsterdam is the community kitchen of BuurtBuik, which serves free three-course meals from surplus food. The BuurtBuik location in Amsterdam Centre (Jordaan) is used as a case study in this research.

The municipality of Amsterdam has expressed interest in understanding the broader impact of social food initiatives, including their effect on social cohesion (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024a). This is not coincidental, but may be rooted in societal challenges that arise from the large socioeconomic differences between Amsterdam residents (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2023). Rich and poor residents increasingly live in separate worlds, mainly encountering people from similar socioeconomic backgrounds in their neighbourhoods, at school, and at work (Vermeij & Thijssen, 2024). When social groups become more isolated from one another, the shared experiences and relationships that bind a society become weaker (Werfhorst, 2019). A social group itself can be well-connected, but if different groups do not connect with each other, social cohesion in society is low (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). This can reduce trust and solidarity between residents. Therefore, opportunities for contact between different social groups are said to be crucial for a more cohesive society (Werfhorst, 2019; Vermeij & Thijssen, 2024).

Social cohesion is often referred to as the glue that keeps society together (Aruqaj, 2023). In policy, it is seen as a key tool for combating economic and social inequalities (Fowler Davis & Davies, 2025). Cohesive neighbourhoods are safer, cleaner, and more liveable, and their inhabitants have better mental and physical health (Cail et al., 2024). Denney et al. (2017) even found that lower levels of perceived residential neighbourhood social cohesion are associated

with a higher risk for food insecurity. Hence, the study suggests that increasing social cohesion in communities could be a key to food security. Specific social policy goals for the district Amsterdam Centre are to strengthen social cohesion and increase the usage of social welfare services for those in need (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2025a). Could BuurtBuik's community kitchen be a win-win?

According to Amsterdam residents, social food initiatives ensure that food reaches those who need it most, while making Amsterdam a more sustainable, enjoyable and socially connected city to live in (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024a). In line, research suggests that neighbourhood interventions can contribute positively to social cohesion (Young et al., 2024), including social eating initiatives such as community kitchens (Marovelli, 2019; Smith & Harvey, 2021; Heneine, 2024). However, for community kitchens, the deeper understanding behind this is still unexplored. Although there is a large body of literature on social cohesion from various scientific disciplines (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Moustakas, 2023), and research on community kitchens is increasing (Smith & Harvey, 2021), empirical work on the relation between the two remains limited.

Giacoman (2016) explains how the act of eating together, referred to as commensality, can strengthen kin-group cohesion, but that this is not given. Another study argues that social cohesion can only be strengthened if eating together is also a pleasant experience (Mensah & Tuomainen, 2024). Nevertheless, it remains unclear if this also applies to non-kin settings, such as community kitchens. In a community kitchen, people from different backgrounds who do not necessarily know one another come together to share a meal. Could such meals strengthen social cohesion within the community itself, and even strengthen neighbourhood social cohesion?

BuurtBuik operates at twenty locations across Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Leiden, and Weesp. Each community kitchen serves free meals using surplus food from supermarkets, retailers, and the hospitality sector. Volunteers pick up the food from the local suppliers and cook a three-course meal for everyone who wants to join. It is assumed guests are those seeking company, those on a tight budget, or those wanting to meet their neighbours, but for this case study of the BuurtBuik Jordaan, the research may reveal otherwise. At BuurtBuik Jordaan, volunteers cook a three-course meal for 50 to 60 guests at community centre 'Het Klaverhuis' every Saturday afternoon. In 2023, they served more than 4.000 meals to circa 200 regular guests (BuurtBuik, 2023).

Using a mixed-methods design, this research examines how participating in BuurtBuik relates to social cohesion perceptions of guests, both within the community kitchen and in their own neighbourhoods. It specifically investigates the reasons for guests to join BuurtBuik, and how these may relate to their social cohesion perceptions. This will be done by answering the following research question and sub-questions:

How does participation, as a BuurtBuik guest, relate to their perceptions of social cohesion in the community kitchen and wider neighbourhood?

1. How do guests perceive social cohesion within BuurtBuik and their neighbourhood, and how do perceptions compare between these contexts and groups of guests?

2. Why do guests come to BuurtBuik, and how do these reasons relate to their social cohesion perceptions?
3. To what extent is visiting BuurtBuik related to how guests perceive social cohesion in their neighbourhood?

This study is relevant for both science and society. Academically, it aims to provide new empirical evidence on the relationship between community kitchens and social cohesion by combining. Aruqaj's (2023) multi-level perspective and Schiefer & Van Der Noll's (2017) multidimensional framework on social cohesion. The study advances the latter by operationalising its (sub-) dimensions and testing this empirically on the community kitchen and neighbourhood level. Next, building on recommendations by Hipp & Perrin's (2006) study on nested social cohesion, this research investigates whether perceived social cohesion within voluntary organisations can extend to the neighbourhood level as well. Through this, it contributes to research on the potential ripple effect of perceived social cohesion between different geographical levels. Lastly, the research contributes to the growing body of work that view community kitchens as 'more than food aid' (Smith's 2022), applied in a Dutch context.

Societally, the study seeks to understand the potential of community kitchens for strengthening social cohesion. It also aims to increase the recognition of the diverse benefits of a community kitchen for its guests and the appreciation of the hard work of volunteers. Rather than using social cohesion as a catch-all concept, the study acknowledges that the set of its underlying components, in the study referred to as (sub-)dimensions, varies for each individual and context (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Moustakas, 2023). In this way, the study aims to inspire researchers and policymakers to take the underlying dynamics of social cohesion into consideration and use the term with more caution and nuance, not as a buzzword.

The structure of this study is as follows. After this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews the current body of literature on food insecurity, community kitchens, and social cohesion and integrates key concepts into a conceptual framework. This outlines the perspective through which research is addressed and findings are interpreted. Next, Chapter 3 addresses the methodology of this study, which includes a description of the mixed-methods design, data collection methods, data analysis, and research ethics. The results are presented in Chapter 4, and further interpreted in the discussion in Chapter 5. This chapter answers the sub-research questions, reflects on the limitations of this study, discusses implications and recommendations for science and practice, and presents the reflections of the researcher. Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of this research and answers the main research question. Finally, it is important to note that I, the author of this study, was both a researcher and a volunteer at BuurtBuik Jordaan. This dual role gave me an insider perspective into daily life at the community kitchen and helped to build a trusting relationship with guests. While this position gave me unique insights, it also required ongoing reflection on my role and potential biases, which are addressed in the discussion.

2. Literature review

To start, this chapter first reviews the literature on food insecurity and the role of community kitchens. Then, it examines previous studies on social cohesion, highlighting key concepts and theories. Finally, it synthesises these aspects into the conceptual framework that guides this study.

2.1 Food insecurity and the role of community kitchens

Food insecurity is a serious issue in high-income countries (Pollard & Booth, 2019; Long et al., 2020; Morrow et al., 2023; Veldkamp & van der Hoeven, 2024). It is a socially constructed phenomenon, as it does not result from the unavailability of food but from the inequalities in accessing food, caused by socioeconomic inequality and poverty, which is further increased by neoliberal policies (Long et al., 2020). According to Article 20 of the Dutch Constitution, the government is responsible for ensuring that all its citizens have an adequate income to live. However, research by the Nibud Institute shows that the government is failing to meet this obligation (van Gaalen & Wieman, 2024). Rather, food insecurity rates suggest that the current social protection system is inadequate (Pollard & Booth, 2019; Gordon et al., 2023). According to Veldkamp & van der Hoeven (2024), fourteen percent of Dutch residents, nearly 2.5 million people, struggle with too little food, a lack of variety of food, or both. Unfortunately, around 450.000 people of this group do not receive support from food banks because they do not qualify for food aid or feel ashamed to ask for help. This makes them 'invisible' in governmental statistics (Veldkamp & van der Hoeven, 2024). The Dutch Red Cross has called this a "quiet disaster" (Rode Kruis, 2024). In this study, food insecurity is defined as the lack of regular access to nutritionally adequate, as well as socially and culturally appropriate food, in a socially acceptable way (Pollard & Booth, 2019; Long et al., 2020; Smith & Harvey, 2021).

Beyond nutrition, food insecurity can negatively impact mental, social, and physical well-being (Pollard & Booth, 2019; Long et al., 2020; Grimaccia & Naccarato, 2022), even when there are no visible signs of malnutrition (Grimaccia & Naccarato, 2022). It can affect identity, family life, and also lead to social isolation (Purdam et al., 2016), as those experiencing food insecurity are also excluded from participating in many of the social aspects of food, such as eating with others or eating out (Pfeiffer et al., 2015; Smith & Harvey, 2021). Ultimately, the benefits of food security are not only felt by individuals but also by society as a whole: socially, politically, economically, and environmentally (Long et al., 2020; Pollard & Booth, 2019).

Instead of addressing the structural inequalities that cause food insecurity, neoliberal policy responses of high-income countries have mainly focused on 'solutions' such as food aid (Long et al., 2020). This typically includes charitable and/or volunteer-run food banks, meal parcels, and soup kitchens, which can only address immediate needs (Pollard & Booth, 2019). At the same time, receiving food aid can be accompanied by conflicting emotions, such as shame, thankfulness, feeling 'less' of a citizen, and feeling stigmatised (Purdam et al., 2016; Andriessen & Van Der Velde, 2024). In light of these violations of social dignity, many food aid organisations came up with alternative ways to provide for food, such as social supermarkets (Andriessen & Van Der Velde, 2024) and social eating initiatives (Smith & Harvey, 2021).

Social eating initiatives, such as BuurtBuik's community kitchen, are such an example of doing things differently. Rather than simply redistributing surplus food, as often done in food banks,

they transform these 'leftover' surplus ingredients into freshly cooked, high-quality meals. In this way, they 'upcycle' food that which has been criticised for being "leftover food for leftbehind people" (Smith & Harvey, 2021, p.2). These community-led meals are shared in a communal setting, usually for free or for a small contribution (Heneine, 2024), accessible to anyone. This can help lower the dependence on other forms of food aid that may be more stigmatising (Iacovou et al., 2013).

Yet, the impact of community kitchens seems to go beyond just providing meals (Iacovou et al., 2013; Marovelli, 2019; Smith & Harvey, 2021; Luca et al., 2023). Research found that cooking and eating together in community spaces can strengthen social connections and encourage interaction between people (Iacovou et al., 2013). In turn, for some this may reduce loneliness and social isolation (Marovelli, 2019; Luca et al., 2023). In a London community kitchen, users view it as a safe space where social differences are respected and experiences and vulnerabilities can be shared (Marovelli, 2019). In addition, it can empower users through both formal and informal education and skill development on cooking and healthy food (Iacovou et al., 2013).

Communal meals are important for both one's own health and well-being, as well as for a more cohesive community (Smith & Harvey, 2021). Dunbar (2017) explains that particularly commensality, the practice of eating together, has many benefits: "those who eat socially more often feel happier and are more satisfied with life, are more trusting of others, are more engaged with their local communities, and have more friends they can depend on for support" (p. 198). Community kitchens could therefore seem to act as bridges between individuals, communities, and services by "providing the connective tissue in ways which are hard to measure through simple quantitative measures" (Marovelli, 2019, p. 190).

All in all, community kitchens clearly have the potential to strengthen the social relations of their users. However, it remains unknown how guests themselves actually experience social cohesion at the community kitchen. Williams & Hipp (2019) found that third places, which are semi-public places for (shared) social activities such as cafés, libraries, or community centres, can strengthen neighbourhood social cohesion. However, they did not specify which components of social cohesion were strengthened, nor in which type of third places this occurred. The systematic literature review of Qi et al. (2024) indicated that (semi-)public places are important for social cohesion, but again, no research was found on which aspects of social cohesion and whether this was also true for community kitchens or social eating initiatives. It seems that it is only stated that 'community kitchens are good for social cohesion', but how guests experience this and what it actually does to the neighbourhood remains unexplored. Yet, social cohesion is linked to many benefits, and even to lower rates of food insecurity (Denney et al., 2017). And at the same time, societal inequalities do not only cause food insecurity, but also shape how an individual experiences social cohesion (Aruqaj, 2023).

2.2 Social cohesion

What is the glue that holds a society together? This question of social cohesion has concerned numerous influential researchers in the field of sociology (such as Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1986; Lockwood, 1999; Parsons, 2005; Durkheim, 2013), and is seen to be "as old as the discipline [...] itself" (Aruqaj, 2023, p.228). Over the past 25 years, research on social cohesion has expanded

significantly, with scholars from different disciplines researching the concept (Moustakas, 2022). These contributions have widened our understanding of social cohesion, but they also introduced more ambiguity (Moustakas, 2023). Its exact definition remains contested, and there is little agreement on what it entails, but social cohesion is generally regarded as a desirable characteristic of a community (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017).

The concept of social cohesion has also been critiqued for being a 'quasi-concept' (Moustakas, 2022), as in both research and policy, the concept often lacks a clear definition and is used across diverse contexts (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Fonseca et al., 2019; Aruqaj, 2023; Moustakas, 2023). This can lead to vague operationalisations of the concept and subjective interpretations, by both researchers and policymakers (Moustakas, 2023). Therefore, research findings and policy goals that state something 'improves social cohesion' should be approached with caution (Hipp & Perrin, 2006; Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Clarke et al., 2023).

To address the ambiguity of the concept of social cohesion, numerous scholars have attempted to create a shared definition by summarising all literature on the topic (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Fonseca et al., 2019; Aruqaj, 2023; Moustakas, 2023). Despite all these efforts, it remains debated whether the concept should be more broadly or narrowly defined (Moustakas, 2023). Research of Fonseca et al. (2019) advocates for a broader perspective. They define social cohesion as "the ongoing process of developing well-being, sense of belonging, and voluntary social participation of the members of society while developing communities that tolerate and promote a multiplicity of values and cultures, and while granting at the same time equal rights and opportunities in society" (p.241). Critics, however, argue that such broad definitions blur the concept's real meaning, as it also includes causes and consequences of social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Moustakas, 2023).

To clarify this complexity, Schiefer and van der Noll (2017) identified through a literature review, six core dimensions across existing definitions: social relations, attachment/belonging, orientation to common good, shared values, (in)equality, and quality of life. They argue, however, that shared values, inequality, and quality of life should be viewed as causes and consequences, rather than components of social cohesion. Hence, they advocate for a narrower view of social cohesion, consisting of three key elements: social relations, belonging/attachment, and orientation towards the local common good.

Each of these essential elements has its own dimensions: "(1) the quality of social relations (including social networks, trust, acceptance of diversity, and participation), (2) identification with the social entity, and (3) orientation towards the common good (sense of responsibility, solidarity, compliance to social order)" (p.595). The framework in Figure 2.1 illustrates these components of social cohesion.

Figure 2.1.

The social cohesion framework by Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017, p. 593)

Social Cohesion:
- ➤ Characteristic of a social entity
- ➤ Multidimensional
- ➤ Assessment at micro, meso, and macro level

Attachment/Belonging[5]

Social relations

- Social networks[1]
- Participation[2]
- Trust[3]
- Mutual tolerance[4]

Orientation towards the common good

- Feelings of responsibilty for the common good, solidarity[6]
- Acceptance of and compliance to the social order and social rules vs. anomy[7]

[1]Quantity and Quality of social relations and social networks.
[2]Political Participation (e.g., voters turnout) and sociocultural participation (civic engagement).
[3]Horizontal (between individuals), vertical (in institutions).
[4]Intergroup attitudes, social distance.
[5]Self-perception as an integral part of the group, perception of the social group as an important part of one's self/identity.
[6]Act for the needs and benefits of the group, while restraining one's own personal needs and goals.
[7]Acknowledgement of societal institutions and compliance to the 'rules of the game' of living together (as well as the rules for changing the social order) versus deviance and norm violation.

Building on this, social cohesion can be understood as "a descriptive attribute of a collective, indicating the quality of collective togetherness" (p. 592). The word "attribute" suggests that social cohesion is a condition, rather than an ongoing process. This means that there is no absolute or perfect level of social cohesion. As such, it is a gradual phenomenon, with groups demonstrating varying degrees of cohesion (Chan et al., 2006). The collective attitudes and behaviours of individuals reflect overall societal levels of cohesion (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017; Aruqaj, 2023). Schiefer & Van Der Noll's (2017) view social cohesion as a characteristic of a social entity, something that is multidimensional, and can be assessed at the micro (individual perceptions or attitudes), meso (features of groups and communities), and macro level of society (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). The latter is something the literature, finally, agrees upon (Moustakas, 2023).

While the interconnectedness of these levels is widely acknowledged, it is rarely addressed conceptually or empirically (Aruqaj, 2023). Even though Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017) suggested a causal link between equality, cohesion, and quality of life, they never tested this. They simply stated that inequalities shape individuals' perceived situation, and societal cohesion influences

individual well-being. This argument was tested and validated by Aruqaj (2023). This study found that individual circumstances (such as inequalities) can significantly shape how an individual perceives social cohesion. In turn, the study found that the well-being of all individuals of society can be predicted and influenced by societal cohesion. They explained social cohesion through three different levels at which it can be measured and understood.

At the micro level, social cohesion is understood as an individual attitude or perception of how someone feels and thinks about their community. These orientations are not formed in isolation but are shaped by both personal circumstances and broader societal conditions. Therefore, individual social cohesion perceptions can be understood as an outcome of other processes, such as the degree of societal inequality.

The meso level looks at social cohesion within smaller groups or communities. This is the aggregate of micro-level perceptions of social groups (e.g., based on ethnicity, class, or neighbourhood), and seeks to understand if they share perceptions of social cohesion. When there are large differences within or between groups, it can indicate tensions or potential conflicts. Such conflicts could lead to a "bigger 'loss' of social cohesion by society as a whole" (p.232).

When individual attitudes are combined, they create a bigger picture of social cohesion at the macro level. This is where we can talk about a whole society being more cohesive or less cohesive. Strong societal cohesion can be seen as a "social fact," which means that it has the capacity to influence all members of society. At the macro level, social cohesion can be an antecedent, a social force that can predict and shape other social processes and outcomes (Aruqaj, 2023). Figure 2.2 below illustrates these different levels of social cohesion.

Understanding social cohesion through these different levels has its benefits. To start, it shows us a clear directionality for measuring social cohesion, as it moves from individual attitudes (micro) to group differences (meso), and finally to overall aggregated societal cohesion (macro). This helps to explain how social bonds at lower levels may or may not contribute to cohesion at the societal level. In addition, through this directionality, social cohesion can be measured distinctly as both a consequence and a predictor of other factors. Individual social cohesion perceptions (micro-level) can be measured as the consequence of individual circumstances, while societal cohesion (macro-level) can be measured as a predictor of other social processes and outcomes for all members of society (Aruqaj, 2023). This means that social cohesion can be understood as being influenced more directly by individual attitudes but also having its own impact when manifested at the collective level. Lastly, analysing differences in social cohesion at the meso level can reveal hidden conflicts that undermine cohesion, which is an important perspective often missing in other studies (Aruqaj, 2023).

Figure 2.2

The different levels of social cohesion and their directionality. From Aruqaj (2023).

1. **Micro** orientations of SC (as outcome)

2. **'Meso'** orientations of SC (as dissimilarity)

3. **Macro Societal Cohesion** (as product & predictor)
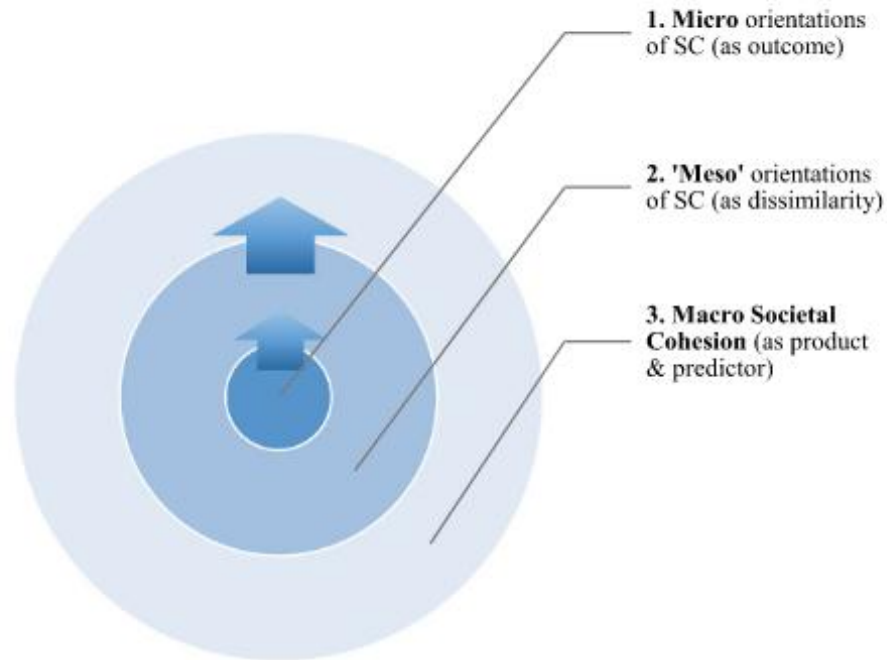
When studied empirically, two types of social cohesion can be measured: objective and perceived. Bollen & Hoyle (1990) refer to objective cohesion as the measurable aspects of a group, such as how often members interact or collaborate. This reflects the group's overall unity. It assumes that social cohesion exists independently of how individuals experience it. Perceived cohesion, on the other hand, is about how each person feels connected to the group, regardless of what's happening inside the group itself (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990). This approach states that people in (objectively speaking) the same environment may experience social cohesion differently from each other.

This distinction between objective and perceived social cohesion aligns with the broader discussion about whether people's perceptions or the actual reality matter more. Objective measures offer more standardised data on concepts such as social cohesion. However, many scholars argue that people's perceptions are just as important as 'objective' measurements. Perceptions shape how individuals experience and respond to the world, even if their this is inaccurate from what is 'objectively' happening (Bruhn, 2009). In line, Langer et al. (2017) argue that social cohesion is primarily shaped by how individuals view others and the state, rather than objective measurements of, e.g. number of interactions or GDP per capita. However, as these perceptions are likely influenced by real-life interactions, there is probably a strong connection between the two (Langer et al., 2017). This means that at the individual level, perceived cohesion represents how much the group matters in a person's life. On a group level, it reflects how individuals contribute to and shape the group as a whole (Bruhn, 2009), aligning with Aruqaj's2023) multi-level perspective on social cohesion.

2.3 Nested social cohesion - does local cohesion scale up?

Research on social cohesion has tried to understand it on different geographical scales (Hipp & Perrin, 2006), such as group cohesion (Bruhn, 2009; Giacoman, 2016), neighbourhood cohesion (Hipp & Perrin, 2006; Denney et al., 2017; Gómez et al., 2018; Méndez et al., 2021; Cail et al., 2024; Young et al., 2024), societal cohesion (Orazani et al., 2023; Qi et al., 2024; Young et al., 2024)), and even between countries (Langer et al., 2017; Aruqaj, 2023)

These different geographical scales should not be confused with Aruqaj's (2023) directional relationship between the micro, meso, and macro levels of social cohesion, where the levels refer to aggregated perceptions of social cohesion of individuals. Scholars recognise that social cohesion at one geographical level does not necessarily mean that it flows into another level (Hipp & Perrin, 2006). Think of it like a Russian doll. An individual can experience and contribute to social cohesion within a smaller group, such as a community kitchen. This smaller group is, in turn, part of a larger social structure, such as a neighbourhood. If a person feels excluded from society, it may influence how welcome they feel in the community kitchen or the other way around. These layers of social cohesion within different geographical scales are referred to as 'nested cohesion' (Gómez et al., 2018).

Forrest & Kearns (2000; 2001) hypothesised a 'crowding out' effect of social cohesion. They argued that a stronger identification with a smaller group can lead individuals to feel less connected to the larger community, and therefore suggest that one's capacity for social cohesion is a finite resource (Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Hipp & Perrin, 2006). In fact, it could be possible that BuurtBuik guests feel more connected to fellow guests than to their non-participating neighbours. This means that BuurtBuik reinforces social cohesion within its subgroup rather than in the neighbourhood. This raises an important question: do local social initiatives lead to isolated islands of social cohesion, or can they lead to a ripple effect that also strengthens broader neighbourhood cohesion?

The crowding-out hypothesis was rejected by an empirical study of Hipp & Perrin (2006). They measured perceived social cohesion simultaneously at two geographical nested levels, the local neighbourhood and broader area. They found no evidence that higher local perceived cohesion reduces perceived cohesion at the larger scale. On the contrary, their findings indicated even a positive correlation, where weak ties contributed to social cohesion for both levels. Strong ties, however, mostly enhanced local cohesion but did not reduce broader cohesion. They recommend examining this potential ripple effect of social cohesion between voluntary organisations and the neighbourhood.

Strong ties and weak ties are key concepts in social network theory (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties are seen as close, deep relationships with, e.g. family members and close friends. Weak ties are the looser connections, such as acquaintances, colleagues, or neighbours, with whom we interact occasionally (Granovetter, 1973; Gómez et al., 2018). Nevertheless, these *weak ties* are considered to be strong because they can act as a bridge towards new (strong) social relations. It is these weak ties, rather than the strong ties, that enhance societal integration (Granovetter, 1973) and foster social cohesion (Hipp & Perrin, 2006; Ramos et al., 2024). Therefore, neighbourhoods are seen as fishing pools for building relationships (Werfhorst, 2019).

Given that BuurtBuik facilitates the opportunity to increase weak ties among neighbours, which may grow into strong ties, an important question arises: Does participation in a community kitchen come with a spillover effect? Can it enhance perceived social cohesion beyond the community kitchen setting?

2.4 Conceptual framework

This section presents the conceptual framework guiding this research. Through the theory and concepts identified in the literature review above, this section explains how these conceptual 'tools' shape how this study understands and examines social cohesion. Therefore, this framework does not just describe social cohesion, but also guides how the data was collected and analysed, and how findings were interpreted.

Social cohesion is widely understood as a concept that can be examined at different geographical scales. These scales can be nested within one another, such as neighbourhoods within communities, communities within cities, and cities within society (Hipp & Perrin, 2006). In this study, two nested scales are considered: the community kitchen level (BuurtBuik), which is nested in the broader neighbourhood level.

Following Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017), social cohesion is viewed as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of three interrelated dimensions (social relations, belonging/attachment, and orientation to the common good), consisting of multiple sub-dimensions. For this study, the framework was slightly adapted to fit the specific contexts. 'Group' hereby refers to the people within the geographic scale of either the community kitchen or the neighbourhood.

- Social relations
    - Social networks: quality of social relations and networks
    - Participation: involvement in activities and contribution to its organisation
    - Trust: horizontal (between individuals) and vertical (in local organisations)
    - Acceptance: attitude towards acceptance and tolerance within the group
- Belonging/attachment
    - Self-perception as an integral part of the group
    - Importance of the group to one's identity
- Orientation to the common good
    - Helpfulness: solidarity and forms of helping each other within the group
    - Respect for rules: compliance with the 'rules of the game' of the group

In addition to being multi-dimensional, social cohesion is also seen as a multi-level construct (Aruqaj, 2023). At the micro-level, social cohesion can be measured as an individual's attitude or perception, shaped by their personal circumstances. At the meso-level, it captures differences in aggregated perceptions of sub-groups within the larger group. At the macro-level, aggregated perceptions become a social fact. They can be treated as the group's and used for comparison with other macro groups, for example, comparison between BuurtBuik groups, neighbourhoods, municipalities, or countries. Importantly, such aggregated measures are not only descriptive but may also act as social forces that shape broader social processes and outcomes for all individuals of the group (Aruqaj, 2023).

This research aims to understand how guests' participation at BuurtBuik relates to their perceptions of social cohesion at the community kitchen scale and neighbourhood scale. It does so by answering three sub-research questions. To start, social cohesion for both geographical levels is examined. This means that individual perceptions of social cohesion of guests are measured twice: at the BuurtBuik level and at the neighbourhood level. At the BuurtBuik level, the aggregations of the individual social cohesion perceptions can be seen as a macro-level measurement of the group's overall social cohesiveness (See Figure 2.3).

At the neighbourhood level, however, the aggregated perceptions of BuurtBuik guests represent a meso-level subgroup of Amsterdam residents (See Figure 2.4). These meso-level perceptions can be compared with the municipality's macro-level BBGA data on neighbourhood social cohesion, which are aggregated perceptions of all Amsterdam residents who participated in their survey. This distinction is important, as BuurtBuik can be seen as a macro-level group in itself; the neighbourhood-level results should be understood as a BuurtBuik sub-group within the macro-level group of Amsterdam residents.

Figure 2.3
Conceptual framework of perceived social cohesion at BuurtBuik.
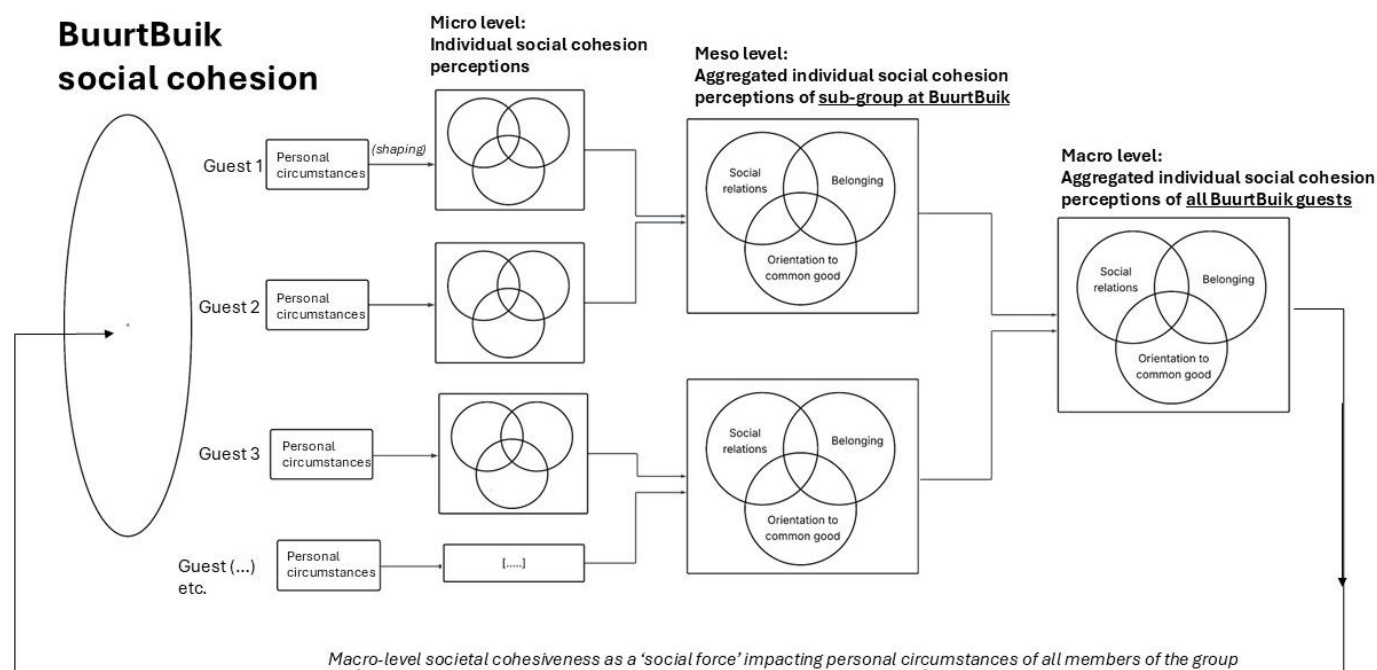
Note. Own work

Figure 2.4

Conceptual framework of perceived social cohesion in the neighbourhood.
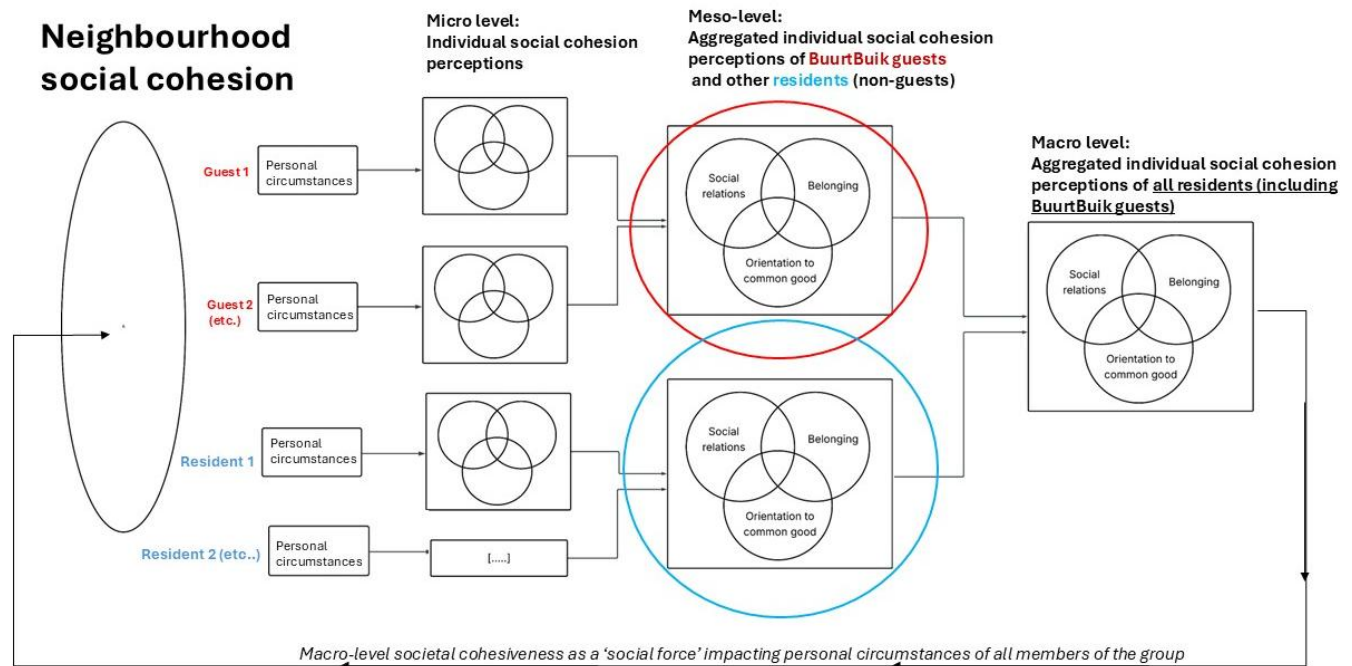
Note. Own work.

Following Aruqaj (2023), individual social cohesion perceptions can be understood as an outcome of personal circumstances. Therefore, comparisons between groups of guests in BuurtBuik will be made to examine which factors may influence social cohesion scores. These factors include demographics such as gender, household composition, travel time, or income, as well as factors on 'BuurtBuik behaviour', including regular attendance, eating company.

One's individual circumstances are also reflected in their reasons for participating in BuurtBuik. Each guest may have different reasons for participating in BuurtBuik, reasons which are grounded in their individual circumstances. For example, those who live alone may appreciate sharing a meal with others more than those who live with others. Therefore, the second sub-question of this study seeks to understand the reasons that drive guests to join BuurtBuik and how these are linked to their social cohesion perceptions.

Some neighbourhood interventions can alter individuals' perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion (Young et al., 2024). Viewing BuurtBuik as a neighbourhood intervention case study, participation may expand networks, build trust, and provide other forms of support (Iacovou et al., 2013; Marovelli, 2019; Smith & Harvey, 2021; Luca et al., 2023). This contributes to the personal circumstances of guests, which in turn influence how guests perceive social cohesion in their neighbourhood. This study does not examine causality. Instead, it asks if guests view the sub-dimensions of neighbourhood social cohesion differently due to joining BuurtBuik.

All in all, the conceptual framework serves as the foundation for answering the overall research question: exploring how participating in BuurtBuik relates to social cohesion both within the community kitchen and in the wider neighbourhood, as experienced by its guests.

To answer the main question, the three sub-questions each build on different aspects of the framework. First, the multi-dimensional and multi-level structure of social cohesion allows for a comparison of guests' perceptions at the BuurtBuik and neighbourhood levels (RQ1). Second, the framework recognises that individual circumstances shape micro-level cohesion (Aruqaj, 2023), which allows for understanding if and how reasons for participation relate to different perceptions of social cohesion (RQ2). Third, by viewing participation as a potential mechanism that can change individual circumstances and thereby potentially influencing individual perceptions of social cohesion in the neighbourhood, the framework makes it possible to ask whether guests report any changes in how they experience social cohesion in their neighbourhood due to joining BuurtBuik (RQ3).

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this mixed-method research. To start, it presents the design of the study, followed by the preliminary research activities. Next, the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are explained, as well as the data analysis methods for both research components. Lastly, the ethical considerations are outlined.

3.1 Research design

This research used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain a better understanding of community kitchen guests' perceptions of social cohesion in both BuurtBuik community kitchen and their own neighbourhoods, their reasons for joining the community kitchen, and the potential relationship between these two aspects.

The research followed a sequential explanatory design, consisting of two distinct phases. In the first phase, quantitative survey data were collected and analysed to identify patterns in social cohesion perceptions, reasons for participating, and demographics. Before the survey was developed, preliminary activities were conducted to ensure the questions were contextually relevant. In the second phase, qualitative data were collected through focus groups. This allowed for the inclusion of the lived experiences of guests, something that could not be fully captured in the survey alone. A benefit of such design is that the quantitative findings can help to inform the qualitative part of the study, making it more focused and relevant (Ivankova et al., 2006). The aim of the focus groups was not to explain specific outcomes of the survey, but to add more context and depth.

When both datasets were collected and analysed, the results were integrated through triangulation in the discussion chapter. Through triangulation, themes can be found where the qualitative and quantitative findings confirm, deepen, or challenge each other. Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods often leads to a better understanding of the research problem compared to using only one method (Almalki, 2016). In addition, it helps improve the validity and credibility of the findings and reduces the limitations of relying on a single method (Almalki, 2016; Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021).

3.2 Preliminary research activities

The design of the survey was mostly shaped by literature review and informal conversations with guests and volunteers. This ensured that the topics addressed in the survey would be theoretically grounded and contextually relevant to the participants. Moreover, my presence as a volunteer allowed for building a relationship with the research participants, which helped in their willingness to participate in the research. I joined the community kitchen as a volunteer two months before conducting the survey. This helped to build a good relationship with both guests and volunteers and provided me early in the research process with insights about their experience. These informal conversations helped to identify key themes for designing the part of the survey that focused on reasons to join the community kitchen. These themes were cross-checked with the annual report of Buurtbuik (2023).

Further desk research consisted of reviewing academic literature on both social cohesion and community food initiatives, including community kitchens. The theory on social cohesion of Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017) served as the basis of the survey, as its dimensions and sub-dimensions were translated into statements to measure each aspect of perceived social cohesion.

3.3 Data collection methods

This sub-chapter presents both the quantitative and qualitative data collection methods of this study. It describes the methods used, where and how the data collection took place, the structure and set-up, data handling, and the research participants.

3.3.1 Quantitative data collection

The target group of the survey were guests of BuurtBuik's community kitchen at community centre 'Het Claverhuis'. The sampling strategy used for the survey was convenience sampling. The survey was distributed on two Saturday afternoons in April, during the weekly BuurtBuik meal. Guests were approached personally, table by table, and asked if they wanted to participate in the study. The aim of the research and the survey itself were briefly explained, and those who wanted to participate filled it in while waiting for the first course of the meal. All participants were informed that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. They could skip any question or stop at any time. By handing in the survey, the participants confirmed that they had read and agreed to this information. The following week, the same process was repeated. Because participants could only fill in the survey once, fewer surveys were collected on the second Saturday due to returning guests.

Individuals under the age of 18 or those who did not have sufficient proficiency in Dutch or English sufficiently, were not eligible to participate. Homeless guests were also excluded, as they could not answer questions on neighbourhood social cohesion. In total, 36 guests filled in the survey. As the total number of guests who regularly visit the community kitchen is estimated to be around 150 individuals (BuurtBuik, 2023), the sample represented around 24% of the total population and was considered appropriate for the scope of this thesis. All survey data were collected on paper, labelled, and entered into SPSS by the researcher. No identifying information was collected to ensure the participants would stay anonymous throughout the process. The SPSS file was stored according to the 2025 data management policy of Wageningen University & Research.

The surveys were designed as an A5 paper booklet titled 'Menu of Today'. It was available in easy-to-read Dutch and English. The participants filled in their surveys individually, while I walked around to help and answer questions. When finished, each survey was collected personally, and the participants were thanked for their help.

Figure 3.1

The booklet surveys of this study, titled "Menu of today: your BuurtBuik experience – tell us what you think!
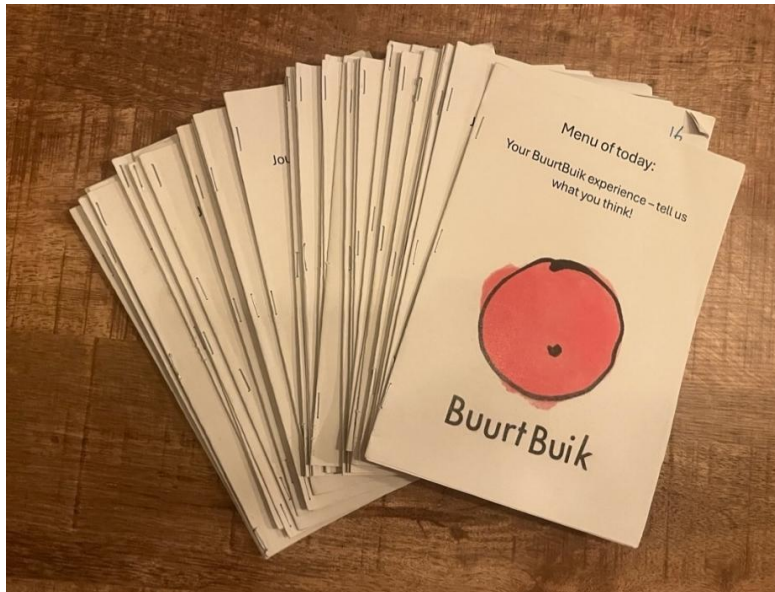
Note. Own work.

The survey aimed to measure four main sets of variables:

1. The participant's (past) behaviour at BuurtBuik
2. The participant's perceived social cohesion of BuurtBuik and their neighbourhood
3. The participant's reasons for joining Buurtbuik
4. The participant's demographics

The structure of the survey followed the format of a menu:

Appetiser - About you and BuurtBuik. The first part of the survey included multiple-choice questions on visiting history, current visiting behaviour at BuurtBuik, and food companionship.

Main course - (social cohesion). The second part focused on perceptions of social cohesion. To avoid confusion, the term "social cohesion" was not used directly in the survey. Instead, the term was broken down into seven categories, based on the different sub-dimensions of the social cohesion theory by Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017). Statements were grounded in the description of each sub-dimension of Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017) and inspired or validated by other studies using surveys to measure social cohesion topics (such as Langer et al., 2017; Gómez et al., 2018; Méndez et al., 2021; Aruqaj, 2023; Cail et al., 2024). Each sub-dimension fitted one A5 page and was measured by three to four Likert statements. These statements could be rated on a scale from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree) for both the community kitchen and one's own neighbourhood.

In addition, the survey included four statements on social cohesion similar to how the Municipality of Amsterdam measures social cohesion in their BBGA survey. At the bottom of each page, participants were asked whether their view on the statements of the respective sub-dimension for their own neighbourhood had worsened, stayed the same, or improved since joining BuurtBuik.

Dessert - reasons for joining BuurtBuik. The third part consisted of seven categories of potential reasons for joining BuurtBuik, identified through informal conversations and desk research. Each reason was measured by two to three Likert statements per category and could be rated on a similar 1-5 scale as the previous section. Additionally, participants were asked to rank these categories in order of importance and were asked whether any additional reasons were missing.

Coffee or tea - About you. The last part of the survey consisted of multiple-choice questions on the demographics of participants. To capture the participants' socioeconomic background, the survey included a subjective income question that asked about how one felt about their household's income. The subjective income question was chosen instead of objective household income to reduce sensitivity and better capture experiences of financial difficulties, rather than precise income. Similarly, participants were asked both in which neighbourhood they lived and how long it took them to travel to BuurtBuik. By measuring travel time rather than distance in kilometres, the survey captured accessibility more realistically, as it accounted for participants' preferred mode of transport. This approach was also more inclusive for those with reduced mobility, health limitations, or other physical challenges. The full survey can be found in Appendix A.

3.3.2 Qualitative data collection

The qualitative data collection aimed to add depth and context to the findings from the quantitative survey. Therefore, personal stories and lived experiences of the guests about the community kitchen and their lives in their neighbourhoods were further explored, something that could not be fully captured in the survey alone. Focus groups were chosen as a qualitative method because group interactions encourage participants to respond and build on each other, which can lead to richer insights than regular interviews (Breen, 2006). This method also suited the informal, communal setting of BuurtBuik, where sharing stories was part of the meal. It was also practical given the limited availability of the participants.

Two focus groups were conducted on two Saturdays in June during the BuurtBuik meal. The main target group were community kitchen guests, selected from the same population as the survey. Before the meal started, guests were approached and asked if they were willing to participate in a focus group during the meal. While individual survey responses could not be linked to specific participants, the results helped to identify demographic patterns. These patterns were taken into account when inviting guests for the focus group. The participants were selected with the help of BuurtBuik organisers, ensuring a mix of socio-economic backgrounds and long-term and short-term guests. Participants were included if they met the same selection criteria as for the survey and if they had attended the community kitchen at least five times, ensuring they had sufficient experience to share their insights on the community kitchen.

The total focus group sample consisted of three women and six men, of whom five were Dutch-speaking and four non-Dutch-speaking. The sample reflected demographic patterns found in the survey, with a diverse range of ages, genders, backgrounds, and lengths of participation. However, nationalities were relatively more diverse in the focus groups, and men were overrepresented compared to the survey. The first focus group consisted of six participants with various nationalities and was conducted in a quiet room separate from other guests in English.

The second focus group consisted of three Dutch participants and was held in a quieter part of a smaller shared room.

Discussions were guided by a semi-structured focus group guide (see Appendix B). Themes included reasons for joining BuurtBuik, the atmosphere in the community kitchen, life in their neighbourhood, social relations in both the community kitchen and their neighbourhood, and the connection between the two. The conversation was flexible and left room for participants to discuss topics that were important for them as well. The researcher facilitated the sessions, asked follow-up questions, and ensured the conversation remained focused on the main themes of the guide. Each focus group took approximately 60-75 minutes.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and that participating was voluntary. In addition, confidentiality among participants was emphasised. Verbal consent was obtained before recording started. With their permission, audio of both sessions was recorded, transcribed, anonymised, and stored safely. The recordings were stored according to the 2025 data management policy of Wageningen University & Research.

3.4 Data analysis methods

This sub-chapter explains how the collected data were analysed. It outlines the statistical techniques used to analyse the survey and the thematic analysis to analyse the focus group data.

3.4.1 Quantitative data analysis

This subchapter outlines the quantitative analysis of the survey data. It first presents the descriptive statistics used to summarise the sample and check the quality of the data. Next, the procedures for subgroup comparisons, analysis of self-reported changes in neighbourhood social cohesion, and of guests' reasons to join (ratings and rankings) are described. The last section outlines the correlation analyses used to explore relationships between reasons to participate and perceived social cohesion. The software used for the data analysis was IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29.0.2.0). Throughout the study, a two-sided $\alpha = 0.05$ was used as the threshold for statistical significance, in line with standard practices of social science research. While this threshold helps to control for false positives (Type I errors), the small sample size reduces statistical power, meaning that some true effects may not be detected (Type II errors) (Field, 2017). Descriptive statistics are therefore particularly valuable in this explorative study, as they summarise the data and may identify potential patterns or trends.

Variable (re)construction

All paper survey responses were labelled and manually entered into SPSS. To help answer the research questions, several new variables were computed. To start, negatively worded Likert-scale statements (items) were reverse-coded. Then, new composite variables were created by calculating the mean of the related Likert items. In line with common practice, composite variables can be computed with missing items, as long as at least half of the variables are included and if a relatively high portion of variables are used for it (Newman, 2014). In this study, composite variables were computed if 75% of the items per construct were answered. This threshold was chosen because each composite variable had relatively few items (2-4).

To start, composite variables were created for each sub-dimension of social cohesion (*social networks, participation, trust, acceptance, helpfulness, and respect for rules*), both for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level. As the dimension *belonging* consisted of only one group of items, no sub-dimension was computed separately.

Next, overall composite variables for each dimension of social cohesion were created. For *social relations*, this was done by averaging all twelve corresponding items from its four sub-dimensions, for *belonging* by averaging its four items, and for *orientation to the common good* by averaging the four items from its two sub-dimensions. This followed the same 75% rule and was done for both the community kitchen level and neighbourhood level.

Then, the *social cohesion* score was computed by averaging the overall composite scores of the three main dimensions of social cohesion, meaning each average dimension score made up $1/3^{rd}$ of the overall score. This was done for both the community kitchen and the neighbourhood level. Additionally, a separate *municipality social cohesion* composite variable was created. This variable was the average score of four specific statements integrated into different sub-dimensions of the survey, which were similar to how the municipality of Amsterdam measures neighbourhood social cohesion in the BBGA survey[1].

The Basisbestand Gebieden Amsterdam (BBGA) is a municipal dataset with more than 800 variables, including demographic, social, and economic characteristics of Amsterdam's neighbourhoods and districts (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2025b). In this study, the BBGA indicator on social cohesion was used for comparison. To align the composite variable with the municipality's 1–10 scale, the responses were rescaled through min-max rescaling. This ensures that values were adjusted in the right proportions. Four new variables were computed through the following formula: $(x-1) / (5-1) \times (10-1) +1$. Then, the average 'municipality' social cohesion score was computed.

Besides the various components of social cohesion, composite variables were created for the different reasons to join the community kitchen: *food quality & nourishment, food waste, financial support, practical support, shared meals & togetherness, and cultural exchange*. Since each reason was measured with only 2-3 items, all items had to be answered, as the number of items did not allow for the 75 percent rule to be applied.

Lastly, categorical variables from the multiple-choice questions on demographics and visiting behaviour at BuurtBuik were recoded into fewer, broader categories of only two groups. Because of the relatively small sample size (N = 33), keeping many small subgroups would have resulted in low cell counts and unreliable comparisons. Therefore, all statistical tests comparing groups

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[1] These were as follows:

- I feel like the people do not really know each other in my neighbourhood (reversed, sub-dimension social networks)
- I think that people interact with each other in a positive way in my neighbourhood (sub-dimension social networks)
- I feel at home here with the people in my neighbourhood (sub-dimension belonging/attachment)
- This place is a 'gezellige' (welcoming) neighbourhood where people help each other out (sub-dimension helpfulness/solidarity)

of BuurtBuik guests continued to use these recoded variables. By combining categories into two broader groups, the analyses became more robust and less affected by small group sizes. For example, income was recoded into 'lower income' (participants who responded that it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to live on current income) and 'higher income' (participants who responded they 'coped' or 'lived comfortably' on current income). Similarly, variables related to Buurtbuik visiting BuurtBuik were also recoded into two groups, for example travel time, number of visits, and eating habits. See Table C2 in Appendix C for more details.

Outlier detection and missing data

Potential outliers were examined using both z-scores and boxplots for all composite variables related to social cohesion and reasons for joining the community kitchen. Z-scores ≤ -3 or ≥ 3 were considered potential extreme outliers (Field, 2017). In addition, boxplots were used to visually check for both mild and extreme outliers. Each case flagged as an outlier was assessed individually. Outliers were retained if they represented plausible values given the study population, meaning no cases were removed.

Missing data were handled using pairwise or listwise deletion, depending on the analysis. Pairwise deletion was used for correlation analyses, while listwise deletion was applied in group comparisons (e.g., Mann–Whitney U and chi-square tests).

Reliability testing

As each computed variable was based on a group of Likert-scale items, their internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Since reliability estimates are influenced by the number of items (typically lower for computed variables with fewer items (Field, 2017), a distinction was made. For computed variables with ≥ 5 items, α ≥ .70 was considered acceptable. For variables with ≤ 4 items, α ≥ .60 was considered acceptable. Variables below this were reviewed. If removing an item increased the reliability of a variable, it was excluded, and the variable was recomputed (Field, 2017).

Descriptive statistics and normality check

After data preparation and reliability testing, descriptive statistics were run to summarise the characteristics of the sample. For categorical variables, frequencies and valid percentages were calculated. For continuous variables (e.g. composite variables), descriptive statistics included calculating the mean, standard deviation, and range.

To assess the normal distribution, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. Acceptable values are a maximum of two times the standard error. However, given the relatively small sample size (N = 33), skewness and kurtosis tests may lack power, which means that they may fail to find non-normal distributions (Field, 2017). Therefore, histograms were used as an extra visual check for normality in distributions.

Perceptions of social cohesion

To explore the differences in social cohesion perceptions of BuurtBuik guests, both within the community kitchen and in their neighbourhood, several non-parametric tests were conducted. Non-parametric tests were used because the data were non-normally distributed. Although non-parametric tests compare differences in distributions rather than means (Field, 2017), means and standard deviations were still reported instead of medians in this study. This is because the variables were limited to a 1-5 scale, meaning that extreme values (as with regular interval data)

were not possible. Moreover, means are a more straightforward and intuitive way for comparing groups (Field, 2017).

To compare the overall differences in perceived social cohesion between the community kitchen and neighbourhood level, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted. This test assessed whether the same participants reported significantly different levels of perceived social cohesion between these two levels.

Next, it was examined whether perceptions of social cohesion differed between groups. The dependent variables were the previously computed social cohesion variables, and the grouping, independent variables were the demographic and BuurtBuik visiting behaviour variables that were recoded into two groups. Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted for variables with two groups, and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for variables with more than two groups. In each case, tests were conducted separately for both the community kitchen and the neighbourhood level. Lastly, Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to compare differences in how various groups of guests valued the three dimensions of social cohesion. Next to statistical analyses, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were reported to provide extra insights into trends in the data.

Changes in perceptions of neighbourhood cohesion

To examine changes in participants' perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion due to joining BuurtBuik, they were asked to indicate for each sub-dimension of social cohesion (2–4 Likert items per sub-dimension) whether their views had changed since they joined BuurtBuik. For each sub-dimension, participants could choose between the answers 'worsened', 'stayed the same', 'improved', or 'I don't know'.

To start, descriptive statistics were calculated for each sub-dimension. This showed the valid percentages of the answers per sub-dimension. To understand the overall change in neighbourhood social cohesion, a new variable was created whereby respondents were divided into two groups. If they chose 'improved' for at least two out of seven sub-dimensions, they were categorised as someone with an improved perception of neighbourhood social cohesion. Those who selected 'improved' for only one or none of the sub-dimensions were categorised as someone with no or limited improvement.

Next, several Chi-Square Tests of Independence were conducted to explore whether these improvements in perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion varied between groups of guests. For comparisons between weekly and non-weekly guests, a Fisher's Exact test was used because one of the categories had an expected cell count below five, which violates the assumptions of a Chi-Square test (Field, 2017).

Reasons to participate in the community kitchen

To explore which reasons for participating in BuurtBuik were most important to guests, two types of survey questions were used. First, respondents rated their agreement with each reason using 2–3 Likert items on a 5-point scale. For each reason, average composite scores were computed. Descriptive statistics were then used to examine the overall pattern of ratings across the different reasons. To test whether some reasons were rated higher (i.e., received greater agreement) than others, a Friedman test was conducted. Because the data were not normally distributed, this non-parametric test served as an alternative to a repeated measures ANOVA for comparing more

than two related variables. Next, group differences were compared for each reason through Mann-Whitney U tests.

Second, in addition to rating the different reasons, respondents were asked to rank the different reasons in order of importance. Due to an accidental error in the design of the survey, the reason *food waste* was missing. The ranking analysis was therefore conducted on the remaining six reasons only. Reverse scoring was used to compare the average importance across the six reasons (ranked 1st = 6 points, ranked 6th = 1 point), with the highest scores indicating greater importance. Due to the small number of complete responses of the ranking analysis (N = 18) and the absence of *food waste*, the results were interpreted with caution and considered only as supporting evidence for the findings of the rating analysis (N=31).

Correlation analyses

To assess the relationships between perceived social cohesion at BuurtBuik, neighbourhood social cohesion, and improvements in neighbourhood cohesion since joining, correlation analyses were conducted. Given the ordinal nature of the Likert-scale items and the small sample size (N = 33), Spearman's rho (ρ) was used as a non-parametric test of association. Correlation tests were conducted between:

- Overall community kitchen social cohesion and overall neighbourhood social cohesion
- Overall community kitchen social cohesion and improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion
- The dimensions of social cohesion at the BuurtBuik and their respective dimensions on the neighbourhood level
- The dimensions of social cohesion at the BuurtBuik and overall improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion

Next, Spearman's rho correlations were also conducted to explore whether guests' reasons for joining BuurtBuik were related to their perceptions of social cohesion. These tests included correlations between each of the seven composite variables of reasons to join BuurtBuik and three social cohesion variables:

- Perception of community kitchen social cohesion
- Perception of neighbourhood social cohesion
- Self-reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion since joining Buurtbuik

The correlations were based on N = 32, using listwise deletion. The strengths of the associations were interpreted as weak (ρ < .30), moderate (ρ = .30–.49), or strong (ρ ≥ .50) (Field, 2017). In addition, descriptive statistics were reported for each variable.

3.4.2 Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using the highly cited six-step approach of Braun & Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis. Thematic analysis aims to identify and interpret patterns in qualitative data. The software ATLAS.ti was used to organise the codes and develop the themes. Codes were generated both inductively through open coding and deductively by using the (sub)dimensions of social cohesion theory of Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017) as codes.

The six-step approach of Braun & Clarke (2006) was applied as follows:

Phase 1 - familiarisation with the data. The focus groups were audio recorded with the consent of the participants, and the first thoughts and observations were directly noted down afterwards by the researcher. Then, audio recordings were transcribed. Transcripts were read several times to become familiar with the content.

Phase 2 - generating initial codes. After the familiarisation phase, inductive coding was applied by closely examining the transcripts and assigning descriptive codes to segments of the text. Codes were not pre-determined and emerged from the data through reading (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the initial round of open coding, a round of deductive coding was applied. Here, codes were pre-determined based on the (sub-)dimensions of Schiefer & Van Der Noll's (2017) theory on social cohesion, allowing for a more theoretical and structural understanding of the data.

Phase 3 - searching for themes. In the next phase, the codes were examined to identify patterns in the data. Related codes were grouped to form potential themes. These themes aimed to capture shared meanings and concepts in the dataset.

Phase 4 - reviewing themes. The themes were then checked to see whether they worked for 1) the coded extracts and 2) the full dataset. After this check, a codebook was created which can be found in Appendix I.

Phase 5 - defining and naming themes. When the final set of themes was established, the specifics of each theme were refined, and clear and concise names were given to each theme.

Phase 6 - producing the report. For each theme, quotes were used for illustration and to give a voice to the lived experiences of the participants in an anonymous way. Quotes of the second focus group, which was in Dutch, were translated into English.

3.5 Ethical considerations

This section discusses the ethical considerations that guided this study, both during the data collection and throughout the rest of the research process. As explained in Chapter 3.3.3, informed consent was obtained during the data collection phase. In addition, participants were informed about the aim of the study, their right to stop at any point, and the measures taken to keep their responses confidential and anonymous. However, besides these formal parts, ethical responsibility was an ongoing process throughout this study.

Focus groups were conducted during shared meals, making the setting informal and intimate. This encouraged openness but also risked that participants would feel pressured to talk about (difficult) personal experiences. Participants came from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and the focus groups touched upon personal topics, beliefs, experiences, and emotions. Therefore, care was taken to create a safe and supportive environment. Participants were reminded that they could choose not to answer any question and stop at any time. Additionally, these sensitive topics required careful consideration of how observations were collected and used. Most important was that participants felt safe sharing their thoughts, so any information that seemed to be too sensitive was excluded from the study if necessary.

The researcher's positionality was also seen as an ethical consideration. As a young, white, middle-class woman, following a higher education and living in Utrecht, my position often differed from that of the participants. It was important to be aware of any differences in language, cultural norms, and lived realities regarding food (in)security and community participation. This required an open-minded and reflexive approach, in which active listening was key. The dual role of being both a researcher and a volunteer made it important to be aware of power dynamics. These were mitigated where possible, for example, by eating meals together during focus groups, limiting note-taking during conversations, and creating space for participants to discuss their own conversation topics during the focus groups.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of this study. It is divided into two sections: the quantitative survey results and the qualitative focus group results. The first outlines patterns of guests' perceptions of social cohesion, their reasons for participating, and self-reported changes in neighbourhood social cohesion. The second provides a more in-depth perspective on how guests experience these topics themselves. Together, the results provide an overview of how participating in BuurtBuik relates to guests' perceptions of social cohesion.

4.1 Quantitative results

This sub-chapter presents the quantitative results from the survey conducted with 33 BuurtBuik guests. First, the descriptive statistics are reported to provide an overview of the sample and summarise the data preparation checks. Second, subgroup analyses are used to examine differences in how social cohesion is perceived among guests. Third, self-reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion due to joining BuurtBuik are investigated. Fourth, guests' reasons for joining BuurtBuik are analysed using both rating and ranking analysis. Finally, correlations are presented to give insight into how motivations for participation relate to perceived social cohesion.

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics

This section starts by summarising the descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the sample. First, it presents the descriptive statistics of the demographic profile and BuurtBuik visiting behaviour patterns of the sample. Then, it presents the descriptives of social cohesion perceptions in the community kitchen and neighbourhood, as well as of the dimensions and sub-dimensions that make up these perceptions. Lastly, it reports the outcomes of data preparation procedures, including the outlier analysis, normal distribution, and reliability analysis.

Descriptive statistics of demographics and BuurtBuik participation

The sample consisted mostly of older participants, with approximately 95% being older than 50 years, and 65% being 65 years or older. Gender distribution was balanced, with an equal split between women and men. Most of the participants were born in the Netherlands (70%), often in Amsterdam. Other countries of birth included Ukraine, Turkey, Japan, Egypt, Saba, and Guyana. Most participants (86%) lived within a 30-minutes travel time of this BuurtBuik location, and almost 50 percent lived within a 15-minute distance. Other neighbourhoods mentioned were Oost, Zuid, Noord, and Nieuw-West. Most have lived in their neighbourhood for more than 11 years (75%), with many having lived there for more than 30 years (25%), and some even their whole life (21%). This indicates that they may have a strong connection to the area.

Around 70% of participants visited the community kitchen weekly. Half were relatively new guests (attending less than a year), while the other half had been visiting for 1-2 years (30%) or even 3-5 years (20%). Participants shared an almost equal split in how often they have visited this community kitchen: 1-20 times, 21-50 times, and 50+ times. Most people only ate at this BuurtBuik location and did not visit other community kitchens (65%), while others visited other locations sometimes or often equally.

Most participants lived alone (80%) and ate alone most of the time (60%). In line with this, 55% of participants reported feeling lonely sometimes, but that eating at BuurtBuik helps them to reduce this loneliness. Almost half of the participants shared that they find it difficult or very difficult to live on their present income, while only 18% indicated that they live comfortably. About 15% did not answer this question, and the remaining participants said they were coping on their present income.   Apart from the income and neighbourhood question, missing responses were minimal for the other categorical variables described above[2]. See Table C1 in Appendix C for more detailed descriptives about the sample, including group sizes. In Table C2 the descriptive statistics can be found about the sample divided into two groups per variable.

Descriptive statistics of social cohesion

The perceived social cohesion score was calculated as the mean of all three dimensions of social cohesion (Table 4.1). On the community kitchen level, participants experienced relatively higher social cohesion levels than on the neighbourhood level. This indicates that guests experience more social cohesion within the community kitchen group compared to their broader neighbourhoods. When measured through the municipality composite variable (consisting of the same five questions as how the municipality of Amsterdam measures neighbourhood social cohesion in their BBGA survey), the neighbourhood social cohesion score (scale 1-5) was higher than this study's composite variable on neighbourhood social cohesion.

Table 4.1

Descriptive statistics of social cohesion scores.

Overall social cohesion score	n	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Social cohesion – CK	33	2.78	4.83	3.73	.51
Social cohesion - NB	33	2.25	4.92	3.53	.64
Social cohesion (municipality items 1-10 score) – NB	33	3.25	10.0	6.71	1.54
Social cohesion (municipality items 1-5 score) - NB	31	2.00	5.00	3.57	.69

Note. CK = community kitchen. NB = neighbourhood. Social cohesion scores were calculated as average composite scores of the social cohesion dimensions of social relations, belonging, and orientation to the common good. The municipality social cohesion scores were calculated as average composite scores of the items through which the municipality of Amsterdam measured social cohesion. The 1-10 score was rescaled to fit the measurement level of the municipality's BBGA dataset.

When examining the dimensions that make up social cohesion (Table 4.2), it was found that at the community kitchen level, *orientation to the common good* was rated highest, followed closely by *social relations*. *Belonging,* however, scored slightly below the overall community kitchen social cohesion score, ranked lowest of the three dimensions. At the neighbourhood level, *belonging* was rated highest, followed by *orientation to the common good*. *Social relations* scored lowest of the three neighbourhood dimensions, though all dimensions were still relatively close to the neighbourhood's overall cohesion score. Comparing the two levels showed that

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[2] Valid percentages were reported for al descriptives except for neighbourhoods and income, given the large number of missing responses.

scores were generally higher at the community kitchen. The most notable differences between the community kitchen and neighbourhood were seen in *orientation to the common good* and *social relations*. *Belonging*, in contrast, differed only slightly. Yet, it stood out because it was valued lowest at the community kitchen and highest at the neighbourhood level.

Table 4.2

Descriptive statistics of social cohesion dimension scores.

Overall dimension score	n	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Social relations – CK	33	2.92	4.75	3.67	.47
Social relations – NB	33	2.50	5.00	3.46	.58
Belonging – CK	33	1.50	5.00	3.65	.74
Belonging – NB	33	1.75	5.00	3.58	.80
Orientation to common good – CK	33	2.75	5.00	3.89	.58
Orientation to common good – NB	33	2.00	5.00	3.57	.76

Note. CK = community kitchen. NB = neighbourhood. Overall dimension scores were calculated as the average of the composite scores of the sub-dimensions of social cohesion. The subdimensions of social relations were social networks, participation, trust, and acceptance. Belonging only had one sub-dimension. Orientation to the common good consisted of helpfulness and respect for rules.

When examining the sub-dimensions of social cohesion (Table 4.3), it was found that at the community kitchen level, *acceptance, trust*, and *respect for rules* were rated far higher than the social cohesion score, with particularly *acceptance* standing out. Social networks and helpfulness were close to the average, while participation was not interpreted because of the low reliability of the variable. At the neighbourhood level, *trust* and *acceptance* were rated highest, while *helpfulness* and *respect for rules* were close to the average. *Social networks* and *participation* were below the average, with participation ranking lowest of all neighbourhood sub-dimensions. Comparing the two levels showed that scores were generally higher at the community kitchen. The most substantial differences between the two levels were seen in *acceptance, respect for rules*, and *social networks*.

Table 4.3

Descriptive statistics of social cohesion sub-dimension scores.

Sub-dimension score	n	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Social networks– CK	33	2.50	5.00	3.74	.67
Social networks – NB	33	1.33	5.00	3.40	.73
participation – CK	33	1.00	4.00	2.85	.77
participation – NB	33	1.00	5.00	2.93	.90
trust – CK	33	3.00	5.00	3.90	.67
trust – NB	33	2.33	5.00	3.62	.75
acceptance – CK	33	3.00	5.00	4.22	.61

acceptance – NB	33	2.50	5.00	3.89	.77
belonging – CK	33	1.50	5.00	3.65	.74
belonging- NB	33	1.75	5.00	3.58	.80
helpfulness – CK	32	2.50	5.00	3.73	.71
helpfulness – NB	32	2.00	5.00	3.56	.75
respect for rules – CK	33	2.00	5.00	4.03	.71
respect for rules - NB	33	2.00	5.00	3.59	.92

Note. CK = community kitchen. NB = neighbourhood. Belonging only had one sub-dimension and can be found in Table 4.2. Participation – CK was not interpreted separately because of the low reliability of the variable (Appendix F).

Outlier analysis and missing data

No answers were removed after the outlier analysis. Z-scores remained within the range (-3 > z-score < 3). The boxplots of all composite variables of social cohesion, overall score of the dimensions of social cohesion, and the sub-dimensions only showed a few mild outliers (See Appendix D, Figures D1-2). For reasons to participate, two extreme outliers were found for the cultural exchange variable (cases 6 and 31 in Appendix D, Figure D3). After inspection, these respondents were kept, as they probably reflect personal motivations.

Missing data were generally low across the survey. Variables on BuurtBuik visiting behaviour, sub-dimensions on social cohesion, and reasons to join were missing about 0-3 responses. More data were missing in variables on changes in neighbourhood social cohesion (3-7 missing) and in demographic variables (3-5 missing). In addition, more data were missing in open-ended questions, such as for ranking reasons for joining (10-14 missing) and other reasons for joining BuurtBuik (22 missing).

Reliability analysis

Internal consistency of computed variables was assessed as described in the methodology section. All variables with five or more items showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha \geq .70$). For the variables with fewer items (≤ 4), values of $\alpha \geq .60$ were considered acceptable. For two variables, alpha was below .60, and the variables were reviewed. Following Field (2017), if alpha increased substantially when an item was removed, then that item was excluded, and the revised variable was used for further analysis. Otherwise, the variable was not used further. See Table F1 in Appendix F for all the reliability coefficients, number of items, and inclusion decisions.

For the computed variable of the score of sub-dimensions *social networks* (community kitchen), the initial Cronbach's alpha was .52. Item 1 (social_networks_1_ck: 'I have meaningful connections with people in the community kitchen') showed a low item correlation to the total. Removing the item increased alpha to .67, justifying the exclusion from the final computed variable.

The subdimension of *participation* (community kitchen) also showed a low Cronbach's alpha (α = .44), but removing any item did not improve reliability. As participation is a key theoretical component of social cohesion theory, its three items were still used in the larger dimension variable of *social relations* (community kitchen). This computed variable still showed strong

internal reliability (α = .74). However, the sub-dimension of *participation* (community kitchen) was not interpreted separately.

Among the computed *reasons to join* variables, *food quality & nourishment* had a reliability (α = .53). Dropping item 2 ('the desserts are a reason for me to return') increased alpha to .76, so this item was excluded. While alpha was considered acceptable (α = .65) for *emotional and social connection*, removing item 1 ('I feel alone sometimes, coming here helps me') increased alpha to .86. Since loneliness was still considered an important item, it was analysed individually.

Normal distribution

The normal distribution of all continuous variables was checked with descriptive statistics (skewness and kurtosis) and visual inspection with histograms. Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable limits for almost all variables (±2 standard errors), suggesting a normal distribution. Only for the dimension score of *belonging*, and for the reasons *food waste* and *cultural exchange*, values were too high, indicating a non-normal distribution of the data. Nevertheless, visual inspection of the histograms showed that all variables were negatively skewed, as most responses were clustered on the right, higher end of the 1-5 Likert-scale. In addition, most did not follow a symmetric bell shape. This indicates that all the variables were non-normally distributed. As a result, non-parametric tests were used for further analysis. See Appendix E for the more detailed SPSS output on these descriptive statistics, including skewness, kurtosis, and histograms for all continuous variables.

4.1.2 Differences in social cohesion perceptions between guests

This section explores how participants perceived social cohesion in the community kitchen and in their own neighbourhood, and whether there were differences between groups. The first section presents the differences in social cohesion between demographic groups, and the second section between different types of BuurtBuik behaviour. Differences were examined using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test, comparing differences across demographics and 'BuurtBuik behaviour' variables. All independent variables were recoded into variables with two groups. The most notable social cohesion scores and differences between groups are presented in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2, and the overview with all descriptive statistics can be found in Table G1 in Appendix G.

To start, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that participants reported significantly higher perceived social cohesion within the community kitchen than in their neighbourhoods, Z = -2.87, p = .004. This suggests that the community kitchen is experienced as a socially more cohesive space than the broader neighbourhood.

Differences between groups - demographics

Between women and men, a Mann-Whitney U test indicated that perceptions of social cohesion in the community kitchen did not significantly differ, U = 82.5, p = .48, nor at the neighbourhood level, U = 83.00, p=.49. Descriptively, women reported higher scores of perceived social cohesion than men, especially at the neighbourhood level.

A Kruskal–Wallis test revealed no significant differences across age groups, either at the community kitchen (*H(3) = 2.14, p = .54*) or neighbourhood level (*H(3) = 2.57, p = .46*). However, descriptively, participants aged 65 and older tended to report higher cohesion than younger groups in the neighbourhood. This was only slightly more in the community kitchen.

For income level, the Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant differences between lower and higher income groups at either the community kitchen (U = 81.50, p = .45) or neighbourhood level (U = 97.00, p = .96). Descriptively, participants from both income groups reported similar levels of social cohesion.

Similarly, no significant differences were found based on country of birth. A Mann-Whitney U test indicated that participants born in the Netherlands and born elsewhere reported comparable levels of social cohesion (community kitchen: U = 53.50, p = .19; neighbourhood: U = 64.50, p = .43). Descriptively, those born outside the Netherlands reported higher social cohesion scores on the community kitchen level, but more similar on the neighbourhood level.

How long one had lived in their neighbourhood, the Mann-Whitney U test did not find any significant differences for social cohesion (community kitchen: U = 70.00, p = .85; neighbourhood: U = 61.00, p = .51). Descriptively, long-term residents showed slightly higher perceived social cohesion scores than short-term residents for both levels.

For travel time to the community kitchen, a variable indicating how close one lives to the community kitchen, no significant differences were found with the Mann-Whitney U test between those who lived within 15 minutes of the community kitchen or those further, (community kitchen: U = 86.00, p = .31; neighbourhood: U = 71.50, p = .10). However, participants who lived closer tended to report higher cohesion levels, especially in the neighbourhood level.

Differences between groups - BuurtBuik behaviour

Visit frequency (weekly vs. less than weekly) showed no significant differences in perceived cohesion (community kitchen: U = 82.00, p = .65; neighbourhood: U = 88.50, p = .87). Descriptive statistics showed that weekly guests reported higher social cohesion scores than non-weekly guests, but differences were minimal for neighbourhood social cohesion.

The Mann-Whitney U test also found no significant differences between the number of visits made to BuurtBuik (1-20 vs 20+ times), for the community kitchen U = 118.00, p = .76, and for the neighbourhood U = 211.50, p = .87. Descriptively, frequent guests reported slightly higher community kitchen social cohesion scores. On the neighbourhood level, the levels were comparable.

When examining how long participants had been visiting BuurtBuik, no significant differences were found, (community kitchen: U = 111.50, p = .38; neighbourhood: U = 131.00, p = .86). However, descriptively, those who had attended for more than a year tended to report far higher cohesion within the community kitchen than those who had visited for less than a year. Similar to the number of visits, scores were comparable for the neighbourhood level.

Eating with the same people versus different people at BuurtBuik showed no significant differences for social cohesion. At the community kitchen level, U = 87.50, p = .21. But at the neighbourhood level, it was nearly significant, U = 76.00, p = .09. Descriptively, participants who have more consistent table partners tended to experience far higher levels of social cohesion, especially in their neighbourhoods.

Finally, eating alone versus eating with others also showed no statistically significant differences (community kitchen: U = 84.00, p = .09; neighbourhood: U = 105.00, p = .36). Still, descriptively, those who usually ate with others (when not at BuurtBuik) experienced far higher levels of cohesion in both the community kitchen and their neighbourhood.

In sum, participants experienced significantly stronger social cohesion in the community kitchen compared to their neighbourhoods. While differences within demographic and behavioural groups were not significant, several descriptive trends suggest that regular guests experience far more social cohesion in the community kitchen than non-regulars, especially those who have been visiting for more than a year. In addition, those who are at BuurtBuik often eat with the same people, and when not at BuurtBuik, eat with others, and perceive far higher social cohesion for both levels. Interestingly, how long one had lived in their neighbourhood did not matter for social cohesion scores, but those living near the community kitchen scored higher for both levels as well as well as those who reached retirement age. Gender did not play as much of a role in the community kitchens, while in the neighbourhood, women experienced far more social cohesion. Lastly, income showed no differences in neighbourhood social cohesion, and only slightly for the community kitchen. The most notable social cohesion scores and differences between groups are presented in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 below. A full overview of all descriptive differences is presented in Table G1 in Appendix G.

Figure 4.1
Most notable descriptive differences between groups in community kitchen social cohesion.
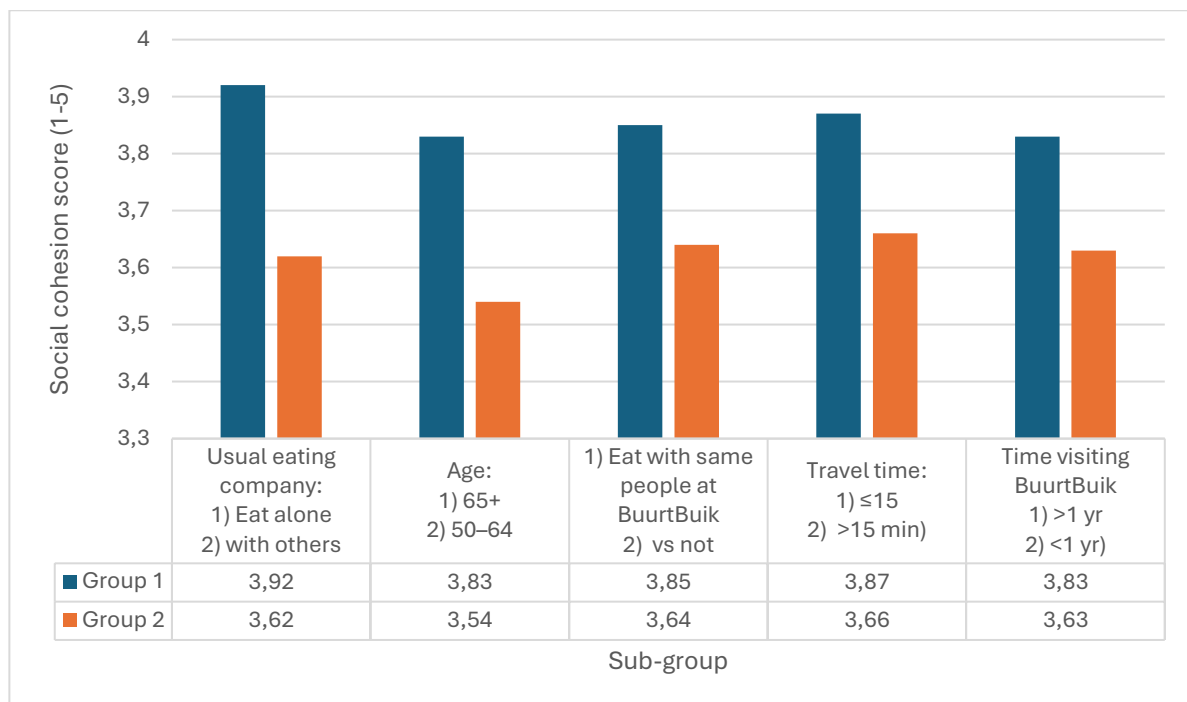
Sub-group	Usual eating company: 1) Eat alone 2) with others	Age: 1) 65+ 2) 50–64	1) Eat with same people at BuurtBuik 2) vs not	Travel time: 1) ≤15 2) >15 min)	Time visiting BuurtBuik 1) >1 yr 2) <1 yr)
Group 1	3,92	3,83	3,85	3,87	3,83
Group 2	3,62	3,54	3,64	3,66	3,63

Note. All descriptives can be found in Table G1 in Appendix G. For comparison, the overall neighbourhood social cohesion score was 3.73

Figure 4.2

Notable descriptive differences between groups in neighbourhood social cohesion.
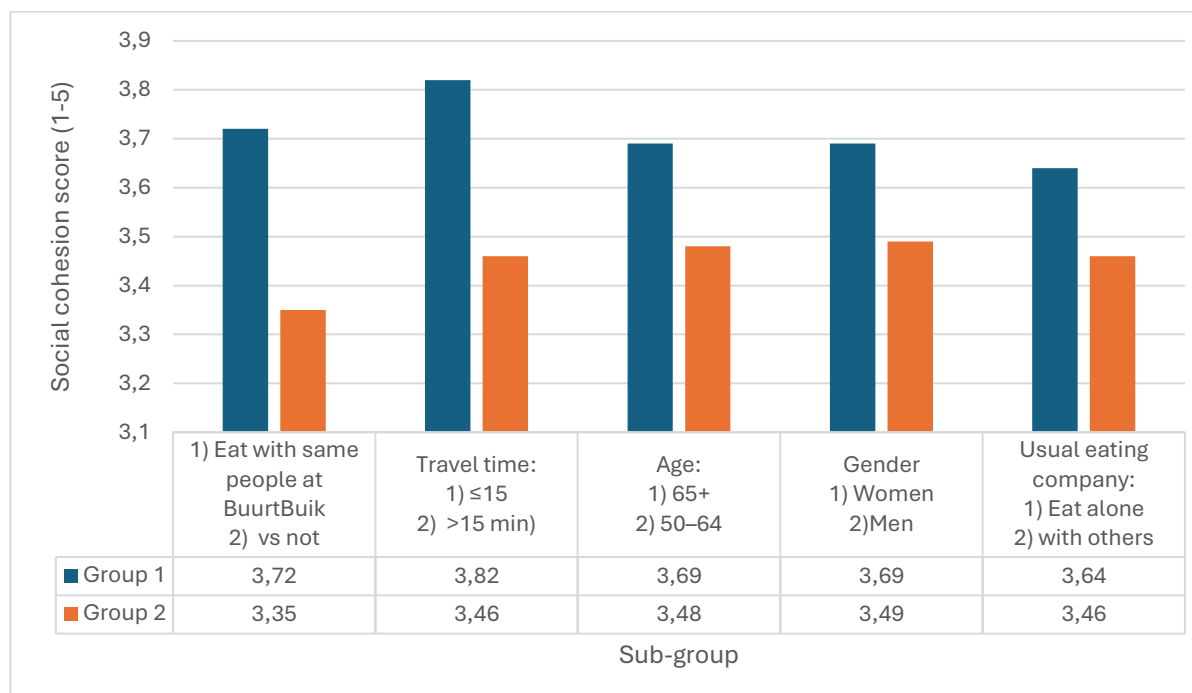
	1) Eat with same people at BuurtBuik 2) vs not	Travel time: 1) ≤15 2) >15 min)	Age: 1) 65+ 2) 50–64	Gender 1) Women 2)Men	Usual eating company: 1) Eat alone 2) with others
Group 1	3,72	3,82	3,69	3,69	3,64
Group 2	3,35	3,46	3,48	3,49	3,46

Sub-group

Note. All descriptives can be found in Table G1 in Appendix G. For comparison, the overall neighbourhood social cohesion score was 3.53

Differences in the dimensions of social cohesion

To examine group differences in how guests valued the different dimensions of social cohesion (belonging, social relations, orientation to the common good), Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted (see Table G2-G3 in Appendix G for detailed statistical results). Significant differences are reported in Table 4.4 below.

Significant differences were found at the community kitchen level. Guests who usually ate with others when not at BuurtBuik reported significantly stronger *social relations, belonging*, and *orientation to the common good* than those who usually ate alone. Retirees reported significantly higher *belonging* and *orientation to the common good* than those who were younger than 65. In addition, guests participating in BuurtBuik for more than a year significantly experienced higher *belonging* than short-term visitors. In addition, non-significant descriptive patterns were found in the community kitchen. Guests living closer to the community centre tended to report far higher *belonging* and *social relations*, while *orientation to the common good* was moderately higher than for those living further away. Guests who usually ate with the same people at BuurtBuik reported stronger *belonging* and *social relations*.

At the neighbourhood level, no significant differences were found. Although descriptive patterns were interesting as well. Retirees and guests who usually ate with others when not at BuurtBuik tended to report higher scores for all sub-dimensions. Other groupings, such as age, duration of visiting, and proximity, showed minor descriptive differences for the dimensions of social cohesion.

Table 4.4

Descriptive and Mann-Whitney U statistics of significant differences in dimensions of social cohesion between groups.

Grouping Variable	Dimension	Mean 1	Mean 2	U	p (2-tailed)
Eating company: 1) Alone 2) Others	Social relations - CK	3.40	4.03	83.5	0.012
	Belonging - CK	3.51	3.88	92.0	0.039
	Orientation to common good - CK	3.44	3.84	88.0	0.031
Age 1) <65 2) >65	Belonging - CK	3.55	3.74	94.5	0.018
	Orientation to common good - CK	3.50	3.71	91.0	0.045
Duration visiting 1) < 1 year 2) >1 yr	Belonging - CK	3.59	3.98	104.0	0.027

Note. U = Mann–Whitney U statistic; p = two-tailed significance. Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine differences between groups. Significant level of p < .05 level. Further details such can be found in Table G2 of Appendix G.

4.1.3 Changes in perceived neighbourhood social cohesion since joining BuurtBuik

This sub-section seeks to understand whether guests felt that their perception of neighbourhood social cohesion had changed due to joining BuurtBuik. To start, both overall self-reported improvements and improvements for each sub-dimension are examined. Then Chi-square tests of independence investigate the differences in overall improvements between groups of BuurtBuik guests.

Out of all participants, 48.5% (n=16) indicated that their perception of social cohesion in their neighbourhoods had improved since joining the BuurtBuik meals, meaning that they had selected 'improved' for at least two sub-dimensions of social cohesion. The remaining 51.5% (n=17) either reported no improvement or only improvement in one sub-dimension.

For each sub-dimension, except *social networks* (21.2%), around ten percent of respondents did not know whether their view on the statements for each sub-dimensions about their neighbourhood had changed since joining BuurtBuik. Only one participant answered one time (for the sub-dimension *respect for rules*) that their view had worsened since joining BuurtBuik. The valid percentages of respondents indicating that their view had improved differed per sub-dimension were as follows: *social networks* (50%), *participation* (43.3%), *trust* (43.3%), *helpfulness* (41.4%), *acceptance* (36.7%), *respect for rules* (33.3%), and *belonging (*31%).

Among women, 45.5% reported improvements in perceived neighbourhood social cohesion, compared to 54.5% of men. However, a Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(3, n = 25) = 3.17, p = .37).

Retirees reported improvements in perceived neighbourhood social cohesion (52%) just as often as non-retirees (50%). A Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(1, n = 31) = .02, p = .90).

Regarding income, of the grouped respondents who are living comfortably or cope on present income (n=14), 57.1% reported improvements in sub-dimensions of neighbourhood social cohesion. For the grouped respondents who find it difficult or very difficult to live on their present income (n=14), 42.9% reported improvements. However, a Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(1, n = 28) = .57, p = .45).

Among respondents living within 15 minutes travel time of the community kitchen (n=13), 69.2% indicated improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion since joining BuurtBuik, while respondents who travel more than 15 minutes only 35.3% reported these improvements. However, a Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(1, N = 30) = 3.39, p = .06).

When looking at household composition, guests living alone (n=24) reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion less often (45.8%) than those living with others (n=6, 66.7%). However, these differences were not statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, *p* = .65). Given the small group, the descriptive statistics should be interpreted with caution.

For guests normally eating alone (n=20), 40% reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, while those eating with others (n=13) reported improvements more often (61.5%). However, a Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(1, n = 31) = .03, p = .87).

For guests who usually eat with the same people at BuurtBuik (n=17), 56% reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, while eating with varying table partners (n=14) reported improvements less often (44%). However, a Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(1, n = 33) = 1.46, p = .23).

For short-term guests (< 1 year, n=16), 43.8% indicated improvements in perceived neighbourhood social cohesion, while long-term guests (>1 year, n = 17) reported improvements slightly more often, namely 52.9%. However, a Chi-square test of independence found that these differences were not statistically significant (χ^2(1, n = 33) = .28, p = .60).

When comparing weekly and non-weekly guests, it was found that of all weekly guests (N=23), 56.5% reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, while for non-weekly guests (N=8), this was only 37.5%. A Fisher's exact test was done because of low expected cell counts. The differences between weekly and non-weekly guests were not statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, *p* = .43).

In sum, 48.5% of participants reported that their perception of social cohesion in their neighbourhoods had improved since joining BuurtBuik. Descriptive differences were seen between sub-groups. For example, a higher proportion of guests living nearby (69.2%) and weekly attendees (56.5%) experienced even more improvements compared to those living further away (35.3%) or attending less often (37.5%). . Interestingly, guests living[3] (66.7%) and eating (60%) with others reported far more improvements than those who lived and ate alone (of whom 40% and 45.8% reported improvements). Lastly, improvements were most often reported in the sub-dimensions of social networks (50%), participation (43.3%), trust (43.3%), and helpfulness

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[3] Given the small group size of those living with others, this should be interpreted with caution

(41.4%). Overall, reports of worsening cohesion were rare, so even if one group indicated fewer improvements than another, they still generally perceived some improvement.

4.1.4 Reasons for joining BuurtBuik

This sub-section explores guests' motivations for visiting the community kitchen. First, average ratings of the seven possible reasons, as identified in the preliminary research activities, are examined to understand how participants value each reason. Next, the ranking exercise the in survey is analysed to identify if asked to choose, which reasons guests find most and least important overall. Together, these analyses provide a clear picture of what drives guests to visit BuurtBuik.

Reasons to join – rating analysis

For each of the seven different reasons for joining the community kitchen, an average score variable was computed based on 2-3 Likert statements that were rated by the respondents. To examine whether respondents rated certain reasons generally higher than others, a Friedman test was conducted. The Friedman test showed no significant differences across the seven different reasons, $\chi^2(6) = 7.65$, p = .27.

Although no significant differences were found, descriptives were revealing (Table 4.5). The motivations that were rated highest were the opportunity to share a meal together with others and the quality of the meals. Both scores also had a relatively small range, indicating that many respondents valued these aspects highly. In contrast, reasons such as *food waste* and *cultural exchange* were rated relatively high but showed a large variation. With a lower average score, financial *support* and *practical support* also showed a large variation. These variations and relatively large standard deviations suggest that respondents had more diverse views on these reasons to join the community kitchen. See Table E4 and Figures E12-E18 in Appendix E for more details on the descriptive statistics and normal distributions of the reasons for guests to join the community kitchen.

Table 4.5

Descriptive statistics of reasons for guests to join the community kitchen.

Reason for joining	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Food quality & nourishment	33	3.00	5.00	3.92	.57
Social & emotional connection	31	2.00	5.00	3.83	.71
Food waste	33	1.00	5.00	3.91	1.14
Financial support	33	1.00	5.00	3.72	.91
Practical support	32	1.00	5.00	3.55	.91
Shared meals & togetherness	32	2.50	5.00	4.00	.73
Cultural exchange	32	1.00	5.00	3.82	.81

Note.

When examining the reasons why people join BuurtBuik, several patterns become visible in how different groups value these motivations. While some aspects were rated fairly the same across groups, others showed stark contrasts depending on participants' personal circumstances. To further explore these differences, the most notable (in)differences, which were either unexpectedly small or large are elaborated upon below. The means can be found in Table 4.6. In addition, Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted for groups that had the greatest differences. Most differences were not statistically significant, only significance is mentioned in the text below. Further details on the descriptives and Mann-Whitney U tests can be found in Table H1-H2 in Appendix H.

Food quality & nourishment was valued most by participants with higher incomes compared to those with lower incomes Participants who reported feeling lonely also gave higher ratings (M = 4.08 vs. 3.68), a difference that was statistically significant (U = 76.500, p = .048). Those living closer to the community kitchen, as well as those who ate with the same people at BuurtBuik, also placed more value on food quality. In contrast, retirees gave slightly lower ratings than younger participants.

Social & emotional connection was particularly valued by participants who felt lonely (M = 4.03 vs. 3.58), a difference that was statistically significant (U = 69.000, p = .045). Ratings were also higher among lower-income participants, those who usually eat with others outside BuurtBuik, and those who sit with the same table partners at BuurtBuik. Older participants also placed somewhat greater value on this aspect compared to younger ones. Differences were small between long- and short-term geusts

Shared meals & togetherness showed some of the clearest contrasts, but none were significantly different. Lonely participants and those with lower incomes valued this aspect much more highly. Higher ratings also came from those who usually eat with others, those who sit with the same people at BuurtBuik, and from older participants compared to younger ones.

Food waste was valued relatively similarly across groups, though participants who reported loneliness and those who ate with the same table partners at BuurtBuik gave somewhat higher ratings.

Practical support revealed differences between income groups: lower-income participants rated it higher (M = 3.50 vs. 3.00), a difference that was statistically significant (U = 33,000, p = .002). Higher ratings were also given by participants living closer to the kitchen and by long-term visitors, while differences between retirees and non-retirees were minimal.

Financial support was valued more by lower-income participants, those who lived nearby, and those who usually eat with others. Age differences were pronounced, with older participants rating this aspect much more highly than younger ones.

Cultural exchange received consistently high ratings across groups, though some differences stood out. Older participants valued it more strongly than younger participants, and higher ratings also came from those who usually eat with others at BuurtBuik and had participated for more than a year. Differences across income and loneliness groups were minimal.

All in all, older participants tended to value social, financial, and cultural aspects of BuurtBuik more than younger ones, but found the quality of food relatively less important. Lower-income

participants placed strong value on *shared meals & togetherness*, *practical support* and *financial support* compared to higher-income participants, while food quality mattered more to higher-income participants. Lonely participants valued almost all aspects more than those who did not feel lonely, particularly for *food quality, social & emotional connection* and *shared meals & togetherness*. Those living nearby valued *food quality, practical support,* and *financial support* more than those living further away. And those who usually eat with others outside of BuurtBuik and with consistent table partners at BuurtBuik rated almost all reasons higher, particularly *social & emotional connection, shared meals & togetherness,* and *cultural exchange.*

Table 4.6
Mean ratings of reasons for joining BuurtBuik between participant groups.

Reason for Joining	Income (Low / High)	Loneliness (Yes / No)	Age (65+ / <65)	Travel Time (≤15 / >15 min)	Eating with same people at BuurtBuik (yes / no)	Usual eating company (together / alone)	Duration visiting (<1 year / > 1year
Food quality & nourishment	3.78 / 4.10	4.08 / 3.68 **	3.88 / 4.05	4.08 / 3.85	4.09 / 3.79	–	-
Social & emotional connection	3.96 / 3.76	4.03 / 3.58 **	3.93 / 3.75	-	3.97 / 3.69	4.00 / 3.75	3.81 / 3.87
Shared meals & togetherness	4.29 / 3.79	4.22 / 3.69	4.10 / 3.85	-	4.12 / 3.85	4.25 / 3.85	-
Food waste	-	4.14 / 3.82	-	-	4.03 / 3.68	-	-
Practical support	3.50 / 3.00 **	-	-	3.81 / 3.29	-	-	3.47 / 3.63
Financial support	3.76 / 3.40	-	3.89 / 3.30	3.87 / 3.61	-	3.87 / 3.62	-
Cultural exchange	3.78 / 3.64	3.87 / 3.78	4.00 / 3.43	-	-	4.08 / 3.67	3.69 / 3.96

Note. Significant differences (p < .05) are marked with **. Blank cells indicate that data is not discussed in the text but available in Appendix H.

Reasons to join – ranking analysis

In addition to rating how much respondents agreed with the various statements for the reasons for joining the community kitchen, they were also asked to rank six of these reasons in order of importance. Due to missing responses, valid percentages are based on only 19-23 respondents per rank. The reason *shared meals & togetherness* was most frequently ranked as the number one reason to join, followed by *food quality & nourishment* (26.1%). Other reasons, such as *cultural exchange* and *practical support*, *financial support,* and *social connection*, were less often chosen as most important (Figure 4.3). The reasons most frequently ranked as least important were *financial support, cultural exchange,* and *practical support*. For only a few participants, *shared meals & togetherness* and *food quality & nourishment* were least important, while none ranked *social & emotional connection* as least important (Figure 4.4)

Figure 4.3
Valid percentages of reasons to join the community kitchen ranked as most important.
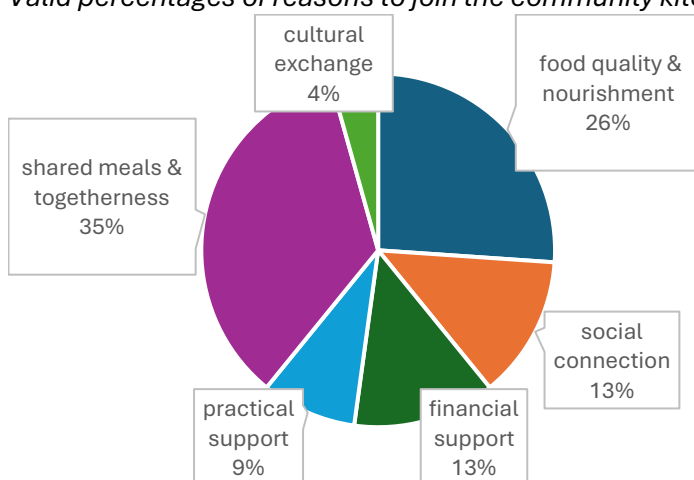
Note. N = 23. Food waste was missing due to an error in the survey design.

Figure 4.4
Valid percentages of reason to join the community kitchen ranked as the least important.
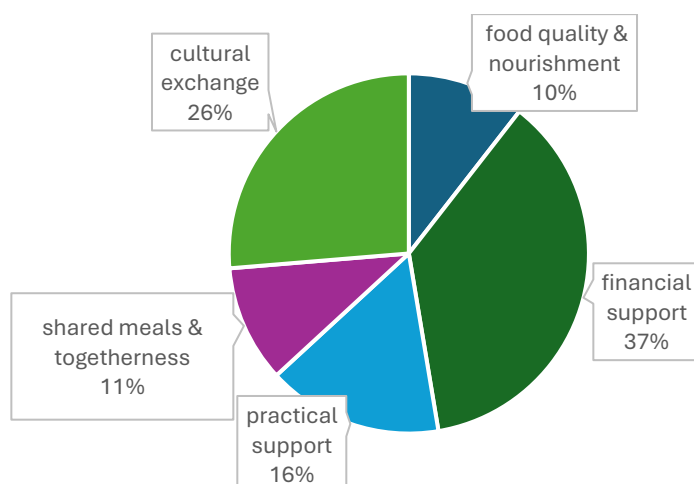
Note. N = 19. Food waste was missing due to an error in the survey design. Social connection was not ranked lowest.

To get a better sense of which reasons to join the respondents found most important, a score variable was created for each reason (ranked 1st = 6 points, ranked 6th = 1 point). Table 4.7 shows the descriptives of this ranking analysis. The analysis showed that *shared meals & togetherness*, and social connection had the highest average scores, indicating that these were the top reasons for respondents to join the community kitchen. *Food quality & nourishment* also scored relatively high. In contrast, *practical support*, *financial support*, and *cultural exchange* received lower scores overall, indicating that they were generally viewed as the least important reasons for visiting the community kitchen. The descriptive findings of the ranking analysis are qualitatively similar to the rating analysis. On the contrary, cultural exchange was ranked relatively low, while this was valued relatively highly when asked to rate.

These findings were based on the 18 respondents who completed all the ranking questions. In addition, due to a mistake in the design of the survey, one reason (*food waste*) was unintentionally left out of the ranking question. Therefore, the ranking analysis above only includes six out of seven reasons and should be interpreted with caution.

Table 4.7

Descriptive statistics of ranking reasons for guests to join the community kitchen.

Reason for joining	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Food quality & nourishment	18	1.00	6.00	3.83	1.65
Social & emotional connection	18	2.00	6.00	4.17	1.10
Financial support	18	1.00	6.00	2.94	2.04
Practical support	18	1.00	6.00	3.11	1.53
Shared meals & togetherness	18	1.00	6.00	4.22	1.90
Cultural exchange	18	1.00	6.00	2.72	1.49

Note.

4.1.5 Correlation analyses

Correlation tests were conducted to explore how different aspects of social cohesion and participation in BuurtBuik are related. Two sets of analyses were conducted. First, associations between social cohesion at BuurtBuik, the wider neighbourhood, and improvements were tested. Second, correlation tests were conducted between guests' reasons for joining the community kitchen and their (improvements in) social cohesion perceptions.

Correlations between social cohesion at BuurtBuik, neighbourhood social cohesion, and improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion

To examine whether local social cohesion at BuurtBuik is associated with neighbourhood-level social cohesion and its perceived improvements, Spearman's rho correlation analyses were conducted (N = 33). A strong positive relationship was found between perceived social cohesion within the community kitchen and perceived neighbourhood social cohesion (ρ = .67, p < .001). A moderate positive relationship was observed between community kitchen cohesion and reported improvements in neighbourhood cohesion since joining (ρ = .48, p = .005).

At the level of specific dimensions of social cohesion, *community kitchen social relations* were strongly correlated with *neighbourhood social relations* (ρ = .73, p < .001) and with overall improvements in neighbourhood cohesion (ρ = .52, p = .002). For *belonging*, a strong positive relationship was also found between the community kitchen and neighbourhood scores (ρ = .61, p < .001), alongside a moderate positive correlation with improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion (ρ = .41, p = .02). Finally, *orientation to the common good* at the community kitchen showed a strong positive relationship with the same dimension at neighbourhood level (ρ = .57, p < .001), and a weaker but still significant association with reported improvements in neighbourhood cohesion (ρ = .34, p = .05).

These results point to a clear relation between social cohesion experienced within BuurtBuik and cohesion experienced in the wider neighbourhood. Guests who experienced higher social cohesion in the community kitchen also tend to report higher levels of neighbourhood cohesion. This same strong relationship was found for all dimensions of social cohesion; for example, valuing *social relations* in the community kitchen highly was also strongly associated with valuing this highly in the neighbourhood. Moreover, guests who experienced greater cohesion in BuurtBuik were also more likely to indicate that their perception of neighbourhood cohesion had improved since joining, particularly those valuing *social relations* at BuurtBuik highly.

Correlations between social cohesion perceptions, improvements, and reasons to join

To gain a better understanding of the relationships between respondents' different scores for reasons for joining the community kitchen and their perceived social cohesion scores, Spearman's rho correlation analyses were conducted (N = 32), which are presented in Table 4.6.

Community kitchen social cohesion was most strongly associated with reasons related to f*ood quality & nourishment, social & emotional connection, shared meals & togetherness,* and *cultural exchange*. Moderate associations were found for financial and practical support, while food waste showed little or no relationship.

Neighbourhood social cohesion showed strong associations with *shared meals & togetherness* and *social & emotional connection*, while a moderate association with *food quality*, *cultural exchange*, and *food waste*. Associations were weak or non-significant for financial and practical support.

Improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion were most strongly linked to valuing *shared meals & togetherness* and moderately associated with *food quality & nourishment*. Other reasons, including *social & emotional connection, food waste, financial support, practical support,* and *cultural exchange*, were weakly or non-significantly related to self-reported improvements.

Overall, the analysis revealed that certain reasons for joining the community kitchen were more often associated with higher perceptions of social cohesion. Particularly, those who tended to value *shared meals & togetherness* and *social & emotional connection* more highly, also more often experienced higher community kitchen and neighbourhood social cohesion, whereby those valuing *shared meals & togetherness* highly also tended to report more improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion due to joining BuurtBuik. Besides these two reasons, those who tended to value food quality & nourishment and *cultural exchange* were also more likely to experience more community kitchen social cohesion. In contrast, *financial support*, *practical*

support, and *food waste* showed fewer associations with social cohesion perceptions. These findings suggest that reasons that are more functional or ideological are less associated with social cohesion perceptions compared to the more social and relational motivations.

Table 4.6

Spearman's rho correlations between reasons for joining BuurtBuik and social cohesion in the community kitchen and neighbourhood social cohesion, and improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion.

Reason for joining	SC CK	p-value	SC NB	P-value	Improvements NB SC	p-value
Food quality & nourishment	Strong (ρ = .59)	< .001	Moderate (ρ = .47)	.006	Moderate (ρ = .35)	.046
Social & emotional connection	Strong (ρ = .55)	.001	Strong (ρ = .51)	.004	Weak (ρ = .21)	.26
Food waste	Weak (ρ = .14)	.45	Moderate (ρ = .39)	.03	Weak (ρ = .18)	.33
Financial support	Moderate (ρ = .35)	.047	Weak (ρ = .19)	.29	Weak (ρ = −.05)	.80
Practical support	Moderate (ρ = .44)	.01	Weak (ρ = .14)	.45	Weak (ρ = .22)	.23
Shared meals & togetherness	Strong (ρ = .50)	.005	Strong (ρ = .58)	< .001	Strong (ρ = .53)	.002
Cultural exchange	Strong (ρ = .56)	< .001	Moderate (ρ = .45)	.01	Weak (ρ = .11)	.54

Note. SC CK = Social cohesion in the community kitchen; SC NB = Social cohesion in the neighbourhood; Improvements NB SC = self-reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion since joining BuurtBuik. Strength of correlations are described as weak, moderate, or strong, with Spearman's rho (ρ) reported in brackets. If p-values < .05 the correlation is considered significant.

4.2 Qualitative results

The qualitative findings provide a deeper understanding of how guests experience BuurtBuik and the role it plays in their lives and perceptions of social cohesion. Using insights from two focus groups, this section highlights guests' reasons for joining BuurtBuik, their experiences of the atmosphere, and the kind of social connections they have with other guests. It also explores how guests experience life in their neighbourhoods, and how BuurtBuik may impact this.

4.2.1 Reasons for joining - commensality, social connection, convenience, and reducing food waste

Participants from both focus groups were introduced to BuurtBuik by friends, family, acquaintances, or organisations that help newcomers in Amsterdam. All participants highlighted social motivations for joining the meals. For example, one participant stated, *"We wanted to meet new people, and eat together with others."* (FG1, S5). Another noted, *"The first goal is to meet new friends here, then to eat delicious food." (FG1, S6)*. Some participants explained that

they wanted to meet new people because they were new in Amsterdam, but another participant also mentioned that their circle of acquaintances had grown smaller due to friends moving away or passing away.

In addition, various socio-cultural reasons were also mentioned as a reason for joining. From meeting 'real' Dutch people and learning more about language and culture, to meeting people from other countries, and their own countries, to share stories. One participant was recommended by a friend to visit this specific BuurtBuik location because of its international character.

The type of food served also played a role for some participants, one saying, *"I heard this BuurtBuik location served meat, other locations don't always do that." (FG1, S3).* Meanwhile, a vegetarian participant said, "*I also visit other locations, vegetarian food is often better there. This location serves both, that's nice for those eating meat. You should respect everyone's wishes." (FG2, S2).*

Other motivations that were mentioned were the practicality of not having to cook yourself: *"I don't like cooking, it is nice to have food here, and I can take it home. My dog likes the food as well."* (FG1, S4). Another participant added: "*It is great to have a chat with others, and I don't have to do the dishes!" (FG2, S2).* While none of the participants said to experience financial difficulties, the benefits of saving money on food were mentioned: *"While I don't do it for financial reasons, I have to say my pension is not that big. Groceries have become more expensive, with BuurtBuik you can spend less." (FG2, S2).*

A strong motivation, especially in the second group, was preventing food waste. "*This is my main reason for coming, [...] throwing away food is a shame, and this is also a great way to meet people."* (FG2, S2). Another participant added: *"We get large portions, which I take home to eat at another moment. It feels good not to have wasted food."* (FG2, S1). This was illustrated in behaviour as well, leftovers were shared among each other and taken home in containers. Personal history with BuurtBuik shaped motivations, too. A former volunteer, current guest explained: *"When I worked as a BuurtBuik volunteer, it opened my eyes to how much food is being wasted and how important it is for people to have these moments of social contact.",* and she added*: "This was a different BuurtBuik location from the one I worked, but I felt welcome right away. I enjoy it here, but I'm glad I don't have to volunteer anymore." (FG2, S1).*

4.2.2 Atmosphere at BuurtBuik - warm, pleasant and 'gezellig'

The atmosphere at BuurtBuik was widely described as 'gezellig', pleasant, warm, and friendly. One participant said, "*It's like having a very big international family dinner."* (FG1, S5). In contrast, it was mentioned that some other community kitchens that participants had visited had a more tense and aggressive atmosphere. Many emphasised the value of sharing food with others, and how social interaction enriches the meal itself:

"The food is delicious because of the company. The taste of the food is also based on who you share it with. We like eating together, so this is one of the reasons why food is delicious. It is a pleasure, because it is a good atmosphere, good people, and a good chef. And very positive service. The food tastes better because we eat together." – FG1, S6.

The enthusiasm of the volunteers was seen as a key aspect of making the community kitchen a positive environment. They welcomed everyone, explained to newcomers how BuurtBuik

worked, and made people feel comfortable. One participant summarised their BuurtBuik experience as follows: *"When I come home, I had a nice meal, good company, nice atmosphere. And do not forget the volunteers, they are very friendly, enthusiastic, young. I am very grateful for their service."* (FG1, S2)

The meals were about more than just eating. Humour and casual conversations were also important for the friendly environment. During the focus groups, side-conversation topics were music, funny jokes, pet names, and culture, while personal stories led to laughter among participants. *"When I leave BuurtBuik, I have a full stomach and a full heart."* (FG1, S2).

However, occasional moments of disruption were noted as well. One participant mentioned the inappropriate behaviour of a guest, which required an intervention by volunteers. In addition, it was mentioned that the communal area downstairs can be very busy and overcrowded, impacting the experience. A participant explained, *"The atmosphere is usually very good, but it differs per time. Here [first floor], there is more space. Downstairs, it is often difficult to sit; sometimes, you almost have to stand. It is amazing to see that many people join the meals, but sometimes it is too crowded."* (FG2, S1). Also, the rooms can become very warm when it's sunny outside. Nonetheless, participants said that volunteers did their best to make it as safe and comfortable as possible.

4.2.3 Social connections at BuurtBuik - familiar faces, cultural exchange, friendships, and helpfulness

Participants described BuurtBuik as an accessible opportunity to meet new people and expand their social circle. All participants agreed that BuurtBuik is perfect for having a chat and eating together. *"Oftentimes you see the same people here, so you also often eat with the same people. I enjoy seeing acquaintances."* (FG2, S1). Another participant agreed: *"I got to know to know many people here. It changes sometimes, but you see a lot of familiar faces."* (FG2, S2)

Cultural connections were also a returning theme in the focus groups. One participant shared, *"I used to live in Indonesia, I miss it sometimes, and it's great to talk to others here who are Indonesian or have an affinity with the country."* (FG2, S2). Another participant described how he, as a former banker, discussed the cultural work differences with another banker who has worked in New York. Exchanging stories about everyone's home countries and cultures was valued a lot. Another participant mentioned that he enjoyed speaking his native language, Arabic, with others here at the community kitchen and that through BuurtBuik they became friends. Together, they went to museums, the zoo, visited concerts at Paradiso and went dancing at Leidseplein. *"And it's all possible because of Stadspas (City Pass)!"* (FG1, S1).

Many participants mentioned how they made new friendships at BuurtBuik. Two participants of the other focus group also met at BuurtBuik and became friends. They always sit together at BuurtBuik, but they don't meet each other outside the community kitchen. In contrast, another participant mentioned, *"I see a few people outside BuurtBuik. […] We just chill together and talk."* (FG1, S3). Other participants noted that they became familiar with fellow guests, but their relationships did not evolve into deeper friendships outside of BuurtBuik.

During the second focus group, another table was celebrating the birthday of a guest. Her BuurtBuik friends surprised her with flowers and gifts, and volunteers served a birthday cake with candles. Other guests and volunteers sang her a birthday song. These (spontaneous) gestures

were seen often, for example, as one participant of the focus group always gifts books to other guests. When another participant described receiving the book, she said it really made her day. Acts of mutual help, such as ensuring everyone at the table had soup, helping pick up dropped items, refilling each other's water glasses, sharing leftovers, and giving away containers for leftovers, were observed often.

When asked about how people help each other in this community, and whether there was a moment that stood out for them, participants found it difficult to answer. They named practical forms such as passing the salt. Nonetheless, one participant explained, "*Just by coming here, we help each other. We laugh together, share stories. That's help too.*" (FG1, S2). Participants from both groups enthusiastically recommend BuurtBuik to others: *"Just come! It is really nice,"* and *"You will find friends even if you don't speak the same language."* Practical reminders such as *"Don't forget your bag!"* showed the dual benefits of socialising while receiving and sharing food.

4.2.4 Experience of the neighbourhood - different for everyone

When asked about the atmosphere in their neighbourhoods, the views between participants differed tremendously. One participant, living in the Jordaan neighbourhood for more than 30 years, described his neighbourhood [Amsterdam centre] as overcrowded, with too many tourists. However, over time, cleanliness improved. He explained, "*We need them [tourists], but it's been too much. Too crowded.*" In addition, he described his relationship with neighbours as distant: *"The neighbours are not warm. I don't know their names or what they do."* (FG1, S2). In contrast, another participant described his street as quiet and comfortable, but contact between neighbours was limited.

According to another participant, contact between neighbours was also something that had changed over time. In the past, he used to have good contact with his neighbours. When a new neighbour moved in a few months ago, he tried to welcome her with flowers, but every time he was at her door, she was never at home. A few participants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic was an important factor that weakened neighbourhood contacts. In addition, neighbours passed away or moved away, while new neighbours made limited contact.

Nevertheless, another participant explained that limited neighbourhood contact was also partly an individual choice: "*It is also your own responsibility whether you meet people or not. You need to go out and talk to others yourself.*" She shared positive experiences of living in a courtyard in Overtoom, "*I live near Vondelpark, there are many activities, especially in summer. I meet neighbours there, contact is great.*" (FG2, S1). Another participant shared that she met her neighbours for the first time when they proudly showed their newborn baby, after which they had a nice conversation.

4.2.5 BuurtBuik's impact on life in the neighbourhood - more familiarity but no direct changes

For participants living close to the community kitchen, it feels as if it is part of their neighbourhood. Participants living further away felt no direct neighbourhood connection, but the area still felt familiar. Still, for most participants joining the community kitchen did not affect how they viewed their neighbourhood. Someone explained, *"Of course, if one of your neighbours is here, then it's different. But it's more about the community here."* Another participant agrees, *"It*

does not change the contact you have with your neighbours. But it's the people here you take 'home'." (FG1, S1).

Participants generally saw BuurtBuik as a separate social space that complements life but does not change neighbourhood dynamics. One participant summarised this by saying, *"I see it more as an addition to my everyday life."* (FG2, S1). A participant living close to the community kitchen appreciated the municipality for organising more events for neighbours to meet each other. *"A place like BuurtBuik can help in this."*. However, they said that they had never seen anyone from BuurtBuik in his own neighbourhood, *"It's simply too big."* (FG1, S2).

In contrast, another participant living close to the community kitchen described how Buurtbuik positively impacts his neighbourhood life: *"I feel more social and look more positively at people in the neighbourhood. I like recognising people in the tram you normally wouldn't know."* (FG2, S2). For them, social cohesion was defined not by geographical location, but by recognising and repeatedly seeing familiar faces, even without deeper relationships. Another participant agrees: *"Indeed, to me it is about the connection between people within a group. You don't have to know each other well, but it's about the atmosphere."* (FG2, S1).

When this participant compared social interactions to neighbourhood interactions, they saw BuurtBuik more as a place where people specifically come to eat and share a meal. Neighbourhood interactions, on the other hand, were more limited to short conversations on the street or longer conversations during neighbourhood events. Several participants noted that during BuurtBuik meals, guests recommended each other to visit certain events, for example, the celebrations of 'Amsterdam 750 jaar'. They visited events all over the city, not limited to neighbourhood boundaries. *"I only go if the events are interesting to me, it does not necessarily have to be close."* (FG2, S1). Another participant said: "We go to places that people recommend to us. Not always in our own neighbourhood, but in Amsterdam. We find Amsterdam a small city compared to home!" (FG1, S6). Without BuurtBuik, guests indicated their social circle would decrease, but they said that they would join other activities, perhaps to meet new people instead. *"I would eat more at home, have fewer social contacts. I would probably visit other community kitchens more."* (FG2, S2).

5. Discussion

This chapter builds further on the findings presented in Chapter 4 and places them in a broader context. First, the sub-questions are addressed, interpreting and triangulation the results and connecting them to the literature. Next, the limitations of the study are discussed, followed by the implications and recommendations for both research and practice. Lastly, I reflect on the insights gained from my dual role as both researcher and volunteer at BuurtBuik.

5.1 Social cohesion perceptions of guests

The first sub-research question addressed in this discussion focuses on guests' perceptions of social cohesion, namely: How do guests perceive social cohesion within BuurtBuik and their neighbourhood, and how do perceptions compare between these contexts and groups of guests? To answer this question, social cohesion is examined through the framework of Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017). According to their theory, social cohesion consists of three interrelated dimensions: social relations, attachment/belonging, and orientation to the common good. These dimensions were used to understand how BuurtBuik guests perceive social cohesion in two nested contexts: the community kitchen and their broader neighbourhoods.

5.1.1 Social cohesion at BuurtBuik

At the macro-level, BuurtBuik can be characterised as a socially cohesive environment (M = 3.73). Unpacking social cohesion through its three dimensions, *orientation to the common good* (M = 3.89) was rated far higher than *social relations* (M = 3.67) and *belonging* (M = 3.65), which scored almost similarly.

Untangling these dimensions further through their respective sub-dimensions showed that the nature of social cohesion is even more uneven. The most highly valued aspects of the community kitchen were *acceptance* (M = 4.22) and *respect for rules* (4.03), both far above the average social cohesion score. This showed that BuurtBuik is experienced as both welcoming and harmonious. Combined with insights of the focus groups, it suggests that BuurtBuik was seen as a safe, inclusive space where differences seem to coexist without much tension. High *trust* (M = 3.90) further reinforced this climate, as guests generally experienced BuurtBuik as a comfortable environment where people work in the best interest of the community.

These topics were also mentioned in focus groups. Participants added that volunteers did a great job in maintaining this safe atmosphere and intervened if necessary. Interestingly, the sub-dimension of *social networks* (M = 3.74) was not higher than the overall social cohesion score, while focus groups highlighted the importance of BuurtBuik as a means to expand one's social network. Some made friendships and saw each other outside BuurtBuik, others simply appreciated recognising familiar faces. Still, all focus group participants underlined the importance of positive social interactions with other guests, and enjoyed expanding their social circle with both weak and strong ties.

In contrast, *belonging* was rated somewhat weaker. In line with this finding, focus group participants described the meals as a meaningful moment in their week, but separate from their personal identity and daily life. This suggests that feelings of belonging or attachment were more temporary, situational and relational (feeling like you belong with a group of people because of

sharing the same activities), than feeling like you belong or identify with a specific community because of a deeper intrinsic feeling of connection based on e.g. history.

A striking outlier was *participation* (M = 2.85), which scored notably lower than other sub-dimensions. While the measure itself had limited reliability, it still hints at an important point: the distinct roles of guests and volunteers. Guests emphasised how much they appreciated the hard work of the volunteers, and how their kindness and smiles contributed positively to the overall experience. While guests acknowledged that they contribute in their own way to BuurtBuik, for example by being present and helping each other (also reflected in the survey as *helpfulness* was valued highly), there was still a clear difference in being a guest and being a volunteer. Volunteers did not join the meals but facilitated them, eating quickly during their shift in the kitchen space away from the guests. Some guests also volunteered, but most really came for the food.

The lower participation score of guests may be explained by these distinct roles. While volunteers facilitate the meals, guests 'only' contribute by being present. It is a form of participation that still supports social cohesion, but something that one may not be recognised by a guest as being an 'active' participant or contributor to BuurtBuik when comparing themselves to volunteers. While this is not a bad thing in itself, it does show how there are different formats of community kitchens. BuurtBuik differs from other community kitchens described in research, where both groups cook and eat together, and skill development plays a more central role (Iacovou et al., 2013; Marovelli, 2019).

At the meso-level, no significant differences were found when comparing aggregated individual social cohesion perceptions of different groups of guests. However, descriptively, perceived social cohesion at BuurtBuik strongly differed across demographics and different social practices during the meals. Guests who had consistent table partners at BuurtBuik experienced far more social cohesion than those who did not, suggesting that stable and repeated encounters are key for experiencing social cohesion. Focus group participants echoed this, describing that they valued how regular guests gradually turned from strangers into familiar faces, and from familiar faces into acquaintances they enjoy sharing food and life stories with. They may even turn into friends with whom they e.g. visit the zoo together. Still, the strength of the social connection itself did not seem to matter that much. It was rather expanding one's network of weak ties that was valued at BuurtBuik, and it was seen as a nice addition if someone became a strong tie as well. This aligns with previous research on the importance of weak ties for strengthening social cohesion (Hipp & Perrin, 2006; Ramos et al., 2024).

Time and proximity also mattered for social cohesion. Guests who have been at BuurtBuik for more than a year, or who lived nearby, perceived higher social cohesion. They particularly valued the dimensions *belonging* and *social relations* more. Focus groups confirmed this, as participants noted that since they visited BuurtBuik for a longer time, they automatically felt a connection with other regular guests, pointing to the development of weak ties. In addition, a survey participant mentioned that, as they lived nearby, they did not see any reason not to come. This suggests a logical, cumulative effect: living nearby lowers barriers for regular participation, regular participation increases recognition and the development of weak ties, strengthening experiences of social cohesion. I observed the development of these social ties between regular guests through their everyday acts of kindness, such as remembering birthdays, exchanging small gifts goods ("'I'll give you a book next week, I think you'll like it."), or simply checking in on

each other. While not everyone was always there each week, 'groups' of regular guests could easily be distinguished.

Demographic patterns were subtler. Older guests (65+) experienced stronger social cohesion, especially regarding *belonging* and *orientation to the common good*. This may reflect both more free time to invest in community activities and, as noted in focus groups, as you become older, your world grows smaller. This suggests that (neighbourhood) activities such as BuurtBuik may play a more important role in one's life as they age, which may impact how they experience the social atmosphere. Unexpectedly, guests who usually eat alone (when not at BuurtBuik) experienced far lower social cohesion at BuurtBuik than those who had regular food companionship. It was expected that, as these guests may live a more isolated life, the community kitchen may play a more important role in their social (food) lives, which would translate into higher perceived social cohesion. However, this was not the case. Björnwall et al. (2023) found that people attach different meanings to eating alone. For those who are used to eating with others, food has a strong social function. This group generally views eating alone more negatively, associates it with the potential loss of their loved ones. On the other hand, for those who have been eating alone daily for a long time, food was found to have a more practical function rather than a symbolic or social meaning (Björnwall et al., 2023). From this perspective, this group may view the social aspects of eating together at BuurtBuik differently than other guests and thus impact the relations they build at BuurtBuik. This could therefore also explain their lower value of social cohesion at BuurtBuik, as they find the social side of food less important in general.

Another interesting finding is that differences in social cohesion perceptions were minimal between income groups. Research found that in "pay-what-you-can" community cafés, the absence of visible payment differences helped to create a welcoming atmosphere and reduce social isolation and stigma for those experiencing food insecurity. In addition, having to pay for food in community cafés was found to be a barrier to social interaction (Borchers & Mills, 2025). Since nobody pays for their food at BuurtBuik, this barrier may be limited. In addition, as everyone is served from the same menu and sits together at the same table, economic differences are less visible. This suggests that BuurtBuik can be seen as an inclusive and welcoming space, which strengthens social cohesion across different socioeconomic backgrounds. This could also explain why *acceptance* scored so high in the survey. Linking back to Aruqaj (2023), the relative absence of such differences in social cohesion perceptions between socioeconomic groups could suggest that there are no 'hidden tensions' between them that could potentially lower social cohesion.

5.1.2 Social cohesion in the broader neighbourhood

BuurtBuik guests experienced lower neighbourhood social cohesion than inside the community kitchen, with an average mean of 3.53/5. When measured through the same five statements as the BBGA survey, BuurtBuik guests had an average score of 3.57/5. This suggests that while the method used in this study provides a more detailed picture the aspects that make up social cohesion, the overall average score of both methods is roughly the same.

When zooming in on the different dimensions, neighbourhood social cohesion appeared relatively flat, as most dimension scores clustered around the mean neighbourhood social cohesion score. *Belonging* stood out slightly above the mean (M = 3.58), while the dimension of

social relations was slightly weaker (M = 3.46). Many guests were born and raised in Amsterdam or specifically moved here from abroad. In focus groups, I noticed that guests spoke with pride about 'their' neighbourhood. They viewed it as part of who they are as a person, regardless of the type of relationship they had with neighbours. This suggests that neighbourhood belonging may be more place-based and locational, rather than relational.

A closer look at the sub-dimensions showed that *acceptance* again scored highest, indicating that guests feel that everyone is welcomed and accepted in their neighbourhoods. *Trust, helpfulness*, and *respect for rules* scored around the average, while *social networks* was weaker, and *participation* scored lowest of all. In other words, guests may feel accepted in their neighbourhoods, but this does not automatically translate into active neighbourhood participation or strong networks. Focus groups did not discuss acceptance, but did highlight that the type of neighbourly social connection differed a lot between participants. Some did not even recognise their neighbours in the street, while others caught up with their neighbours in the shared garden.

Differences between groups of guests highlight again the role of proximity. Guests who live closer to the community kitchen not only feel more social cohesion in the kitchen itself but also report much stronger social cohesion in the neighbourhood. They scored far higher for all dimensions, but they particularly experienced *belonging* significantly more. Age also played a role in these differences. Retirees experienced more neighbourhood social cohesion, particularly for *belonging* and *orientation to the common good*. Focus group participants explained that the neighbourhood became more important was they were older: smaller social circles and reduced mobility made it more important to have acquaintances nearby. As neighbourhood social cohesion is particularly important for well-being (Aliakbarzadeh Arani, 2024; Cramm et al., 2013) and companionship for older adults (Bromell & Cagney, 2014), the older guests at BuurtBuik may benefit from this relatively much.

In contrast, BuurtBuik guests who typically eat alone outside the kitchen experienced far lower neighbourhood social cohesion, especially for *social relations*. While not everyone who eats alone is lonely or isolated, as explained above, it does point to a broader pattern in society. Lower companionship (Bromell & Cagney, 2014) and social participation such as visiting family or friends (Latham & Clarke, 2018), is associated with lower perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion, especially for older adults.

Women experienced higher social cohesion than men, which could be explained as women are generally more active in neighbourhood life (Bruhn, 2009; Qi et al., 2024). For different lengths of neighbourhood residency, social cohesion perceptions did not differ either. This was notable, as it was found to affect the sense of neighbourhood belonging (Barsties et al., 2025). Another notable descriptive finding was that there were few differences between income levels, while research found inequalities shape social cohesion perceptions (Aruqaj, 2023). Still, income does not say anything about the type of neighbourhood where one lives. Income can change due to unforeseen circumstances, or one can live in a social housing residency in the most expensive neighbourhood of Amsterdam. Living in more affluent or 'respectable' neighbourhoods was found to be associated with higher perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion (Méndez et al., 2021), nuancing this finding.

The strongest difference was found for those who eat with consistent table partners at BuurtBuik. This group reported much higher neighbourhood social cohesion than those without steady eating company. While this does not prove that social ties at BuurtBuik spill over directly into neighbourhood life, it does suggest that being embedded in stable community relationships may be related to how guests experience their broader community. At the same time, all components of length of participation (frequency, number, duration) did not matter much for neighbourhood social cohesion. Those who show up more often at BuurtBuik did not have higher neighbourhood social cohesion perceptions. Instead, it may be one's social capital that may be related to neighbourhood social cohesion. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5.3.2.

The aggregated neighbourhood social cohesion perceptions of BuurtBuik guests cannot say something on the macro-level on the social cohesiveness of their neighbourhoods, but they do allow for meso-level comparison with all Amsterdam residents. According to Amsterdam's BBGA data (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2023), social cohesiveness of Amsterdam's neighbourhoods was 5.9/10 in 2023, a number that has been relatively stable over time. In contrast, BuurtBuik guests rated their neighbourhoods 6.71/10 when asked the same five questions in this study. This indicates that BuurtBuik guests perceive substantially more social cohesion in their neighbourhoods than the average Amsterdam resident. While it is beyond the scope of this study to explain this difference, two tentative explanations can be given. First, BuurtBuik guests already chose to be active in community life as they joined BuurtBuik, which means they are already active visitors of a community centre. Therefore, they may in general have a different view on neighbourhood life than those who do not actively participate in such settings. Second, in this study social cohesion was higher for older adults, and since the most BuurtBuik guests are of a relatively older age, this demographic factor may partly explain BuurtBuik's higher scores.

5.1.3 Comparison between community kitchen and neighbourhood perceptions

Overall, social cohesion was experienced significantly more strongly in the community kitchen than in the neighbourhood, aligning with earlier research which found that perceived social cohesion was stronger for smaller groups than larger geographical levels (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Hipp & Perrin, 2006). Yet, the aspects making up social cohesion differed.

Unpacking the dimensions showed that at BuurtBuik, *orientation to the common good* and *social relations* were the strongest dimensions, while belonging was relatively weaker. In the neighbourhood, this pattern was reversed: *belonging* was strongest and *social relations* was the weakest. Interestingly, *belonging* scored almost similarly at the absolute level in both settings, but focus groups revealed that its meaning may differ.

Following Allen et al. (2021), the meaning of belonging has different layers and aspects. They explain it can be a 'subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experience.' (p.87). At BuurtBuik, guests experienced *belonging* and *attachment* to the practices of sharing a meal, especially when it was with guests they recognised and felt familiar with. They described BuurtBuik as a pleasant addition to their week, but not something that defined their identity. This suggests that at the community kitchen level, belonging is more linked to feelings of connection with the individual and collective experience (eating at BuurtBuik) and the social group (ties with other guests). In contrast, neighbourhood belonging seemed to be more identity-based and tied to the connection of the physical location.

Guests were proud to live in their neighbourhood and saw it as something that defined them as a person, even if neighbourly ties were weak. This reflects a locational belonging, connected to physical space and personal identity rather than a connection to individual or collective experience, or social groups.

The difference in how the dimension of *social relations* was valued was partially explained in the focus group, where a participant noted that the intent of the social interaction differed. At BuurtBuik, interaction was more purposeful as most guests specifically come to share a meal and have a conversation with others. In the neighbourhood, however, ties were more casual and limited to greetings or short conversations on the street. This aligns with research of Baldán et al. (2025), with the humbling title 'I Don't Intend to Make Friends Among My Neighbours', who found that participants were not interested in developing strong ties with neighbours, but rather preferred impersonal and polite relationships with neighbours. It followed with the general modern tendency to see "a 'good' neighbour as someone who is 'friendly, but not a friend'. (p.3)", although these expectations can differ between groups (Baldán et al., 2025).

5.2 Reasons to join BuurtBuik and social cohesion perceptions

This section discusses the different reasons for guests to join BuurtBuik, followed by how these reasons relate to how guests perceive social cohesion. It answers the sub-question: Why do guests come to BuurtBuik, and how do these reasons relate to their social cohesion perceptions?

5.2.1 Reasons to join BuurtBuik – culinary conviviality is "more than food"

What brings guests to BuurtBuik is more than just food; it is a combination of relational, emotional, and sometimes practical needs. Still, a strong pattern was seen, namely that the shared experience of enjoying a tasty meal together stands at the heart of why most people attend. Guests described BuurtBuik as 'gezellig', safe, warm, and pleasant, but it was the act of eating together, also known as commensality (Giacoman, 2016), that was valued the most.

Survey ratings and rankings confirmed this line of thought. The three most valued reasons for joining the community kitchen all had a more relational and social nature. These reasons were 1) *shared meals & togetherness*, 2) *social & emotional connection*, and 3) *food quality & nourishment*. These reasons were also brought up by guests themselves during the focus groups. While *food quality & nourishment* might initially seem a more practical or tangible reason, guests often described it in more relational terms. One participant explained, *"The food is delicious because of the company. The taste of the food is also based on whom you share it with."* (FG1, S6). This reflects how the taste of food is intertwined with social and relational motivations, showing that the enjoyment of food is inseparable from the social setting in which it is eaten.

Quantitative data further nuanced this, and showed that both food quality, social connection, and commensality were valued more highly by those with consistent table partners at BuurtBuik. This suggests that this enjoyment is also linked to the people with whom you share your meal. Counterintuitively, those who usually eat alone when not at BuurtBuik valued commensality at BuurtBuik less than those who typically eat with others. It was expected that since this group eats less often meals in a family-style setting, they would appreciate this moment in the week more. However, it does confirm earlier suggestions in Chapter 5.1.1, which ought to explain why those who eat alone on a daily basis may experience lower social cohesion and social relations at BuurtBuik: it was proposed that for this group, food may play less of a symbolic or emotional role

in their lives (Björnwall et al., 2023). Given that this group values commensality less, this further confirms this hypothesis. Yet, emotional *& social connection* was found to be just as important for both groups. This indicates that seeking social connection is not exclusive to those who may be more isolated but is valued across both groups. Many guests described that they saw BuurtBuik as a great opportunity to talk with others, share what happened to them that week, and make new friends. One guest even joked they hoped to find a partner through BuurtBuik.

While *cultural exchange* was rated relatively high in the survey, it was ranked lowest when guests were asked to prioritise reasons for joining. In focus groups, it was not mentioned explicitly, but rather came up naturally during the meal. I observed guests gifting each other books, talking about cultural events, engaging in conversations about music, language, and sharing life experiences of growing up in different countries and cultures.

These findings indicate that guests join BuurtBuik for more than just eating food with others, but that many guests collectively value the amicable and sociable aspects of sharing food. Building on Phull et al. (2015), this points to a distinction between conviviality and commensality. Commensality is the act of eating together. However, this is not always an amicable and convivial social experience (Phull et al., 2015; Giacoman, 2016; Mensah & Tuomainen, 2024). What, then, makes commensality at BuurtBuik a pleasant and convivial experience? According to Morrow et al. (2023), "conviviality doesn't just 'happen' when people eat together" (p.183), but directly depends on the people with whom you eat together. Commensality can only become pleasurable when the group collectively follows the social "rules" that make interaction enjoyable (Phull et al., 2015; Morrow et al., 2023). In this view, culinary conviviality (the enjoyment of sharing a meal) is understood as the result of various social, emotional, and cultural practices that take place around the dining table (Morrow et al., 2023).

At BuurtBuik, I observed that when these "invisible rules" were upheld, commensality turned into culinary conviviality. This was an actively built social achievement of the group, rather than an inevitable outcome of eating together. However, if these rules were not followed or were interpreted differently, I saw tensions emerging, such as irritation over jumping queues, being overwhelmed by noise, or being frustrated with impolite behaviour. Differences in personality, background, culture, or expectations are part of this ongoing process of culinary conviviality. As Morrow et al. (2023) explain: "culinary conviviality may not always be (equally) pleasurable and can come with conflict and tension in the negotiation of differences and power inequalities." (p. 183). The survey results showed that guests rated sub-dimensions *acceptance*, *trust*, and *respect for rules* very highly. This indicates that BuurtBuik generally provides the right social conditions needed for guests to experience culinary conviviality, although maintaining this requires ongoing effort on the part of both guests and volunteers.

While social reasons were prevalent, practical motivations were also present. Guests appreciated not having to cook for themselves, being able to take extra portions home, and stretching their weekly budget. Many guests brought containers for leftovers, and most brought a bag that would be filled with the remaining food donations of the day, such as bread, fresh produce, and ready-to-eat meals. Practical and financial reasons were appreciated more by lower-income guests and by retirees. Focus groups confirmed this, and a participant noted that his AOW pension (National Old Age Pensions Act) was tight, and BuurtBuik helped to stretch their budget. According to Goderis & Muns (2025), Dutch retirees are particularly financially

vulnerable compared to the rest of the population, as they have lost their income from work, have declining health, and increasing costs of medical care.

Yet, this group appreciated the commensality aspect even more. Given that it is more difficult for people with a lower income to eat meals outside the home or in the company of others (Pfeiffer et al., 2015), BuurtBuik seems to address this important social need as well. Notably, both retirees and those on a lower income valued *food quality & nourishment* less than those on a higher income and non-retirees. At first glance, this could suggest that taste and quality of the meals simply play a smaller role in their decision to attend: food is food, its quality is less important. However, it could also imply that they genuinely appreciate the taste and quality of the food itself less than their counterparts. For higher-income participants who do not experience food insecurity, eating surplus food seems to be more linked to pro-environmental intentions (Sestino et al., 2023). In contrast, for those experiencing food insecurity and/or actually needing food aid, eating 'wasted' food may have very different, potentially negative connotations, and can be linked to critiques such as eating 'leftover food for left-behind people' (Smith, 2022) that may evoke feelings of being a second-class citizen (Andriessen & Van Der Velde, 2024). This suggests that the social meanings of using surplus food and the potential varying experiences of dignity and pride of those consuming it require closer examination.

Still, the act of receiving was embedded in a shared experience. BuurtBuik differs from the traditional food aid model as it prioritises eating together. Taking extra food home is a second option, not the starting point. Everyone eats together at the same table, no matter one's (socioeconomic)background. This shifts the role of guests from being a passive recipient of (regular) food aid to being an active contributor to a community event, reducing stigma and feelings of shame, gratitude, or anger that often accompany receiving food aid (Horst et al., 2014; Purdam et al., 2016). This active role was captured by one participant, *"Just by coming here, we help each other. We laugh together, share stories. That's help too."* – (FG1, S3). Like a potluck without the guests, everyone contributes in their own way to the BuurtBuik experience. This links again to the proactivity that is required to turn a regular meal into an actual convivial experience, as culinary conviviality requires a collective effort.

Taken together, these findings support Smith's (2022) argument that community kitchens are about "more than food". BuurtBuik addresses not only a nutritional need but also a deeper relational hunger for social connection and culinary conviviality. With more than half of the survey respondents reporting that they feel lonely sometimes and noting that visiting BuurtBuik helps, the community kitchen becomes a subtle but powerful social intervention in urban areas that challenges traditional views on food aid.

5.1.2 Relation to social cohesion – social motivations predict social outcomes

The social and relational motivations are not only reasons for guests to join BuurtBuik, they also shape how guests interact with each other and how they perceive the community kitchen itself. Quantitative results showed that those who valued *shared meals & togetherness, social & emotional connection,* and *cultural exchange* more highly, also significantly reported stronger perceptions of social cohesion at BuurtBuik. This supports the idea that relational motivations tend to lead to relational outcomes, meaning that those who are open to connection are more likely to experience it. This aligns with the research of both Mensah & Tuomainen (2024) and

Giacoman (2016), who found that pleasant experiences of commensality strengthen cohesion in smaller groups of people. This suggests that culinary conviviality may play a key role here. At the same time, it may also be a two-way relationship. Repeated pleasant experiences of social cohesion at BuurtBuik can also reinforce the value guests place on these social and relational reasons for joining.

Interestingly, also the seemingly more instrumental motivation of *food quality & nourishment* was significantly more associated with higher social cohesion perceptions. Guests often mentioned that the food was a reason to return, and that they appreciated the variety of the meals and the luxurious desserts. This suggests that good food can encourage regular participation, which increases exposure to the social setting, and in turn may strengthen relationships with other regular guests. As one focus group participant put it: "*The food tastes better because we eat it together.*"

The taste of "good" food goes beyond just food and flavour preferences. As Qvortrup & Wistoft (2022) explain, taste is the product of three interlinked dimensions: sensing food (physiological system), translation of sensory impulses into experiencing taste (mental system), and the taste experience which links it to e.g. memories and emotions, as this past taste experience was shared with others (social system). From this perspective, the taste of a food is not only shaped by what is on the plate, but it is also shaped by one's sensory, cultural, emotional, and relational associations (Qvortrup & Wistoft, 2022). The family-style setting of social eating initiatives can evoke memories and feelings of care or belonging (Phillips & Willatt, 2020; Smith & Harvey, 2021). Therefore, tasting of food may indirectly reinforce sub-dimensions of social cohesion such as *trust, acceptance*, and *belonging*. Descriptively, both long- and short-term guests valued food quality highly, suggesting that the consistent quality of tasty food may be key for encouraging guests to return and become part of the culinary convivial experience that strengthens their social cohesion perception at BuurtBuik.

In contrast, reasons such as *financial support* and *practical support* showed little association with social cohesion, and *food waste* not at all. This suggests that while individual, instrumental and moral motivations can bring people in, they do not necessarily bind the group together. The food waste finding is particularly interesting. While influential authors have emphasised that shared norms and values are key to social cohesion (Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Chan et al., 2006), the BuurtBuik data suggest that social cohesion does not necessarily require agreement on broader moral values such as food waste. Guests viewed its importance differently, and in focus groups, some described it as their main reason for joining, while others never mentioned it at all. Perhaps declaring a concern about food waste may also be a strategy for those who are driven by financial concerns to join BuurtBuik, but do not feel comfortable sharing this in a focus group. At the same time, the meaning of food waste can carry different connotations, as explained earlier.

Following Schiefer & Van Der Noll's (2017) view, it is rather the acceptance of these differing values, not their homogeneity, that strengthens social cohesion. This still fits earlier suggestions about the 'invisible social rules' that build culinary conviviality at BuurtBuik. Guests can still follow these situational agreements, regardless of their views on moral values such as food waste. Social cohesion is not strengthened by everyone sharing this value, but from accepting

the presence of the plurality of these meanings while still respecting the shared 'rules of the game'.

In sum, the reasons guests come to BuurtBuik are various, ranging from more practical reasons to moral reasons. Yet for most, the main reason is simple: pleasant human interaction over tasty food. This is not only why guests attend, but also what allows them to experience BuurtBuik as a cohesive community. The findings show that those who value meal sharing, connection, good food, and cultural exchange highly also experience social cohesion at BuurtBuik more strongly. This suggests that social and relational intent translates into social outcomes. In contrast, more tangible or moral reasons, such as financial support or food waste, do not necessarily have the same group-binding effect. BuurtBuik is about more than food. It addresses both relational as well as nutritional hunger, whereby guests actively contribute to culinary conviviality.

5.3 Relation between visiting BuurtBuik and neighbourhood social cohesion

This section explores whether and how guests themselves see a connection between participating in BuurtBuik and (changes in) neighbourhood social cohesion. This matters because neighbourhood social cohesion is often seen as a broader societal benefit of local initiatives (Young et al., 2024). Yet, it remains unclear whether such effects are also experienced by users of community kitchens. The sub-question guiding this section is the following: To what extent is visiting BuurtBuik related to how guests perceive social cohesion in their neighbourhood?

5.3.1 Improvements in perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion

Quantitative findings indicated that participating in BuurtBuik led to improvements in individual perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion for nearly half of the guests. Most improvements were noted in *social networks, participation, trust*, and *helpfulness*. This indicates that participating in BuurtBuik most strongly improves perceptions of *social relations* in the neighbourhood.

Focus group participants noted that a place such as BuurtBuik is 'good' for the neighbourhood, especially to meet each other, pointing to improvements in *social networks* and the role of proximity. Some mentioned they joined more (neighbourhood) events with other BuurtBuik guests, which can be linked to improvements in *participation*. Others described changes in how they experienced their neighbourhood through recognising other guests in public spaces, pointing again to *social relations*. One older guest also said, "I feel more social, and look more positively at people in the neighbourhood" (FG2, S2), which can be linked to *trust*, *acceptance,* and *social relations*. However, other focus group participants also contested the relation of BuurtBuik with their neighbourhood. Some explained that they value BuurtBuik as a social place in itself, but it did not necessarily change how they view their neighbours and the neighbourhood itself. As one participant said: "Unless your neighbours are also BuurtBuik guests, it doesn't change the relation you have with your neighbourhood." (S2, FG2).

This difference may be partly explained by the way the two research methods approached the question. In the survey, improvements in perceived neighbourhood social cohesion were measured by asking if there were changes in how guests viewed the statements. On the contrary, in focus groups, participants reflected on changes in how they viewed their neighbourhood due

to BuurtBuik in a more open-ended way. Perhaps the more detailed breakdown in the survey may have made it easier for participants to recognise any subtle changes.

Survey data further showed that these improvements were not experienced equally. Guests living close to the community centre (69% vs. 35% living further) and guests (56% vs. 36% non-weekly) were more likely to report improvements. This suggests that BuurtBuik may have more impact locally, and/or when visiting regularly. More vulnerable groups, such as those who usually ate alone (40% vs 61.5% with others) and those with a lower income (43% vs 57% higher income), reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion less often. While for those who usually eat alone (who may live more isolated lives), this likely reflects their lower perception of social cohesion in general. These patterns are more counterintuitive for those facing financial difficulties. Despite experiencing stronger community kitchen social cohesion and similar levels of neighbourhood social cohesion, they report fewer improvements than those with a higher income. This descriptive difference could not be explained.

This suggests that the potential increase of benefits related to higher neighbourhood social cohesion perceptions, such as the associations with higher rates of food security (Denney et al., 2017), better health (Cail et al., 2024; Latkin et al., 2017), and better well-being (Cramm et al., 2013; Bromell & Cagney, 2014; Aliakbarzadeh Arani, 2024), are also unlikely to be distributed equally between BuurtBuik guests. Nevertheless, improvements, even if slightly more limited, still represent a positive outcome, particularly for groups that either face barriers to social participation or generally participate less in social life. At the same time, not all vulnerable groups followed this trend. Retirees generally experienced far stronger community kitchen and neighbourhood social cohesion, and about half of them also reported improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion.

Motivations also appeared to play a role. ̶G̶uests who valued *shared meals & togetherness* and *social & emotional connection* highly as a reason for joining also experienced significantly more social cohesion in their neighbourhoods. This does not necessarily mean that BuurtBuik caused these perceptions to change. Rather, it suggests that those who value the social and relational aspects of the community kitchen may view their neighbourhood through more of a social cohesion 'lens'.When asked specifically about improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, only guests who valued *shared meals & togetherness* highly as a reason for joining were significantly more likely to report improvements. While such correlation does not imply a causal relationship (Field, 2017), it does suggest that those valuing culinary conviviality also are more likely to have improvements in individual perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion.

Aruqaj's (2023) multilevel perspective on social cohesion reminds us that individual social cohesion perceptions are shaped by one's individual circumstances. From this viewpoint, the improvements in neighbourhood cohesion reported by BuurtBuik guests due to joining BuurtBuik could be viewed as caused by changes in their personal circumstances (because of joining BuurtBuik). The patterns described in the sections above suggest that such changes are more likely for guests who visit weekly, live nearby, or value culinary conviviality highly. This suggests that regular contact and intentions of culinary conviviality may lead to changes in personal circumstances and therefore improve social cohesion.

On the meso-level, the comparison of subgroups within BuurtBuik shows that some groups, such as more vulnerable groups, report fewer improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion.

Following Aruqaj (2023), this does not necessarily have to be a problem, but it does indicate that there may be hidden tensions between groups. It points to the possibility of uneven experiences between groups at BuurtBuik's, which may lead to unequal outcomes, particularly if the improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion remain prevalent for certain groups.

On the macro level, societal (neighbourhood) social cohesion can be seen as the aggregate of all individuals. As improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion are only experienced by around half of the BuurtBuik guests, these improvements are noted by a relatively small group compared to the macro-level of all Amsterdam's residents. Therefore, BuurtBuik's effect on the overall characteristic of social cohesiveness of Amsterdam's neighbourhoods is probably marginal, given its limited reach. Yet, BuurtBuik Jordaan is probably not the only neighbourhood intervention that may affect individual circumstances, and therefore perceptions of social cohesion. Rather, all these improvements combined can contribute to macro-level change, whereby each micro-level improvement is meaningful in its own way. The social cohesion score of the whole of Amsterdam has been stable for the past four years (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2025b). Therefore, every improvement in perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion due to an intervention such as BuurtBuik should be celebrated.

Taken together, these findings indicate that BuurtBuik's influence on neighbourhood social cohesion is conditional. It depends on structural and demographic factors (proximity, frequency of participation, income) as well as individual orientations (especially the extent to which guests value commensality) that may affect one's personal circumstances. This helps explain why, even though strong community kitchen social cohesion is positively associated with improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, these improvements are not automatically the same for all.

The findings partly align with theories of 'nested social cohesion' (Hipp & Perrin, 2006). Local social cohesion at BuurtBuik is positively associated with perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion, as well as improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion. This suggests that local social cohesion at BuurtBuik can scale up, although this is not the case for all guests and depends on individual circumstances. This outcome also rejects Forrest & Kearns's 2001) 'crowding out' effect, as social cohesion is not a finite resource. Instead, the findings support Hipp & (2006) observation that weak ties formed in smaller groups may spill over into larger contexts. Thus, BuurtBuik does not create an isolated island of social cohesion among BuurtBuik guests, but also allows for strengthening perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion and therefore spillover to its broader surroundings.

This seems to be in line with Fong et al.'s (2021) research on well-functioning third places. Through the case of a bridge club in their study, they found that such spaces can improve one's relationships with both residents and non-residents and strengthen one's connection with the neighbourhood. They argued that such spaces can create a ripple effect where the feeling of being part of a community developed within the third place, which could then extend into the wider neighbourhood. This aligns with Hipp & (2006) findings on nested social cohesion. Yet, this thesis adds an important nuance to Fong et al.'s (2021) observations. At BuurtBuik, improvements in feeling being part of the neighbourhood (comparable to the dimension *belonging*) were reported less often, while improvements in relationships with residents and non-residents (comparable to dimension *social relations*) were reported most often. Perhaps there was less improvement in 'necessary' in the dimension *belonging* because the baseline was

already relatively high for neighbourhood social cohesion. In addition, *belonging* in the neighbourhood was found to be more tied to locational *belonging* (see Chapter 5.1.2, 5.1.3). Therefore, unless you live nearby, BuurtBuik may be less likely to influence this feeling of belonging. In contrast, changes in perspectives on *social relations* may be less tied to a specific location and more to being in contact with people in general, which may explain why BuurtBuik affects *social* relations more.

5.3.2 Improvements in perceived social cohesion or individual social capital?

These differences in improvements between dimensions of social cohesion, particularly for *social relations*, reveal a key conceptual question of whether these changes represent improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion or rather in individual-level social capital. Following Aruqaj (2023), aggregating individual social cohesion perceptions at the community kitchen made sense here, as guests referred to the same social setting. Therefore, these aggregations can be understood as a group characteristic of BuurtBuik. If measured over time, changes in the social cohesiveness of this group could be further examined (Aruqaj, 2023). However, when asked about neighbourhood social cohesion, each participant referred to their own neighbourhood. Thus, while perspectives can be aggregated, it does not necessarily say something about the cohesiveness of their neighbourhoods.

Given that the improvements were most prevalent for the dimension of *social relations*, perhaps the improvements in one's perception of neighbourhood social cohesion can better be understood as an increase in individual social capital. These are the social resources that guests gain through participating in BuurtBuik, something they can take with them into their everyday lives outside BuurtBuik and may affect their personal circumstances. This can influence how they view social cohesion in their neighbourhood, but it does not mean that the neighbourhood itself has become more cohesive.

This difference reflects the distinction Carrasco & Bilal (2016) made between social cohesion and social capital, where they draw on Fromm's (1976) concepts of 'having' and 'being'. Social capital is something that individuals can 'have'; it can be possessed, increased, and used. In contrast, social cohesion is a form of "being" that is vested in a group or community (Carrasco & Bilal, 2016), and can be seen as a group characteristic that can increase or diminish over time (Schiefer & Van Der Noll, 2017). This suggests that social cohesion cannot be owned by an individual, but it can be experienced or perceived.

From this perspective, BuurtBuik itself can be seen as a socially cohesive space (being), while guests' improvements in perceived neighbourhood social cohesion can be seen as an improvement in their social capital (having). This aligns with Kurtenbach (2024), who argued that local social service organisations can play a key role in shaping how residents perceive social cohesion as they offer a space that can strengthen social capital. For BuurtBuik, these improvements were more likely for regular guests living close to the community centre and those who valued *shared food & togetherness* highly. While this does not necessarily indicate that the neighbourhoods close to BuurtBuik themselves have become more cohesive, these gains may provide guests with more social capital to shape how they experience social cohesion in their neighbourhoods.

In sum, visiting BuurtBuik is related to how guests perceive neighbourhood social cohesion, but not as directly as assumed. Quantitative data indicate that due to joining BuurtBuik, nearly half of the guests report improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, especially for those living nearby, attending weekly, and valuing commensality. It also indicated that more vulnerable groups, except retirees, experience fewer improvements. Qualitative data, however, indicate that this relation is more subtle and indirect. Essentially, BuurtBuik can be understood as a socially cohesive space that strengthens social capital for some of its guests. This increase in social capital may (but does not always) influence how they view and act within their neighbourhoods. This can improve their perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion. Yet, it should be noted that BuurtBuik *being* socially cohesive does not alter neighbourhoods to *being* more socially cohesive, though for some guests it does increase them *having* more social capital, which can create openings for experiencing more neighbourhood social cohesion. To increase social cohesiveness of Amsterdam neighbourhoods, other neighbourhood interventions should strengthen individual-level social capital and/or positively impact personal circumstances as well. This may improve individual perceptions of social cohesion of other neighbours as well, and when aggregated, can improve macro-level social cohesiveness of Amsterdam neighbourhoods. Then, it becomes a 'social force' that can contribute to positive change for all its residents (Aruqaj, 2023).

5.4 Limitations

This section discusses the limitations of this study and proposes several suggestions for future research. Some limitations may have impacted the conclusion more than others.

Sample size

The small survey sample (N = 33) reduced statistical power and therefore lowered the confidence that quantitative relationships could be generalised. While regression analysis could have provided more predictive insights into the relationships between participants' reasons for joining the community kitchen and their perceived social cohesion scores, the key assumptions for regression could not be met. This was likely due to the small sample size and the non-normal distribution of variables, which would have made the regression analysis unreliable (Field, 2017). Therefore, Spearman's rho correlations were used to assess the strength and direction of associations. In addition, due to the small sample size, descriptive patterns could not be interpreted for some group differences, as sub-groups would be too small. Future research could collect a larger sample and, if the assumptions are met, conduct regression analysis to explore the potentially causal relationships between demographics, BuurtBuik behaviour, motivations, and social cohesion outcomes.

Similarly, because of time constraints, only two focus groups were conducted. This limited the diversity of perspectives and representativeness of the research participants. While the insights of the nine participants were valuable, those were the perspectives of people who were already likely to be more socially oriented, leaving out the perspectives of shyer guests. In focus groups, some guests were shyer or less talkative, but they did explain their thoughts when they were addressed specifically. In addition, homeless guests were not included in the study as they could not refer to their own neighbourhood. These exclusions mattered for the outcomes, as both groups may perceive social cohesion differently, but their individual perceptions are still part of

the aggregated whole on the macro-level. Therefore, it impacts the generalisability of the qualitative findings and should be taken into account by the reader. To address all this, future research could do more rounds of data collection and conduct individual interviews to ensure a comfortable and safe environment for e.g. more introverted guests.

Further limiting the broader generalisability of this study is that the sample only consisted of guests of BuurtBuik Jordaan, so findings cannot be assumed to apply in other contexts. While a single-site case study, such as this study's BuurtBuik Jordaan, can provide valuable and context-rich findings, the scope is limited on purpose. To assess external validity, future research could replicate this design across multiple case studies to determine which effects are context-specific and which can be generalised over community kitchens as a whole.

Cross-sectional design

Conducting a study at a single point in time means it is impossible to determine whether BuurtBuik changes perceptions of social cohesion or simply attracts people who are already more inclined towards social connection. This limitation is important, but it has only a moderate impact on the conclusions since the focus of this study was mostly on perceptions and relations rather than causality. For future research, a longitudinal research design would help to better understand changes in perceptions over time.

Measurement decisions and accuracy

Certain measurement choices in the research design influenced both the results and their interpretation. To start, two demographic variables were included to capture cultural differences between community kitchen guests: country of birth and preferred language at BuurtBuik. However, due to the small survey sample, the sub-groups were too small to be used for analysis, even though the overall BuurtBuik population is culturally more diverse than the sample was. Other possible indicators of cultural background, (second-)nationality, birth country of parents, or religion, were not measured. Yet, cultural backgrounds often shape norms and values around eating together, particularly what makes it a convivial experience (Phull et al., 2015; Jayasinghe et al., 2025), and neighbourly relations (Andersen et al., 2025), all of which could have affected the findings. In focus groups, however, participants with diverse cultural backgrounds were overrepresented compared to the BuurtBuik population. And while the focus groups provided qualitative depth to the study, they could not identify patterns. Future research should take the importance of cultural backgrounds into account. A possible research direction could be to further investigate how these 'invisible' rules of culinary conviviality may differ across diverse cultural backgrounds and what this means for community kitchens. In addition, it could further investigate how this may affect the cultural appropriateness of food, an important factor in food aid and food security.

Next, the self-reported perceptions were prone to social desirability bias, which may have led to participants answering questions that they believe are socially acceptable (Latkin et al., 2017). Retrospective questions about changes in guests' perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion were prone to recall bias as memory limitations and reinterpretations could have led to inaccuracies (Blome & Augustin, 2015). In addition, participants may assign different meanings to the scale points of the Likert items. A possible direction for future research instead of only measuring social cohesion as an attitudinal indicator (through perceptions), could be assessing it as a structural indicator (by e.g. measuring the network ties) as well. It should be

noted, however, that structural measures often require extensive data collection and are more time-consuming (Hipp & Perrin, 2006).

Another measurement challenge in this research was the operationalisation of social cohesion. While Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017) argued that their framework on social cohesion can be used on different levels, it remains untested in the literature whether the actual operationalisation and comparison between levels is possible. Therefore, it may have been possible that a certain item of a sub-dimension of social cohesion may not have resonated with a participant, while if posed differently, it may have changed how they rated the respective item.

Lastly, the interview guide of focus groups did not strictly align with the social cohesion framework. Therefore, triangulation between methods was difficult. Certain sub-dimensions, such as *trust* and *acceptance*, were vulnerable topics to discuss in a group setting. Future research could focus on validating scales for measuring social cohesion first. These improved surveys could then be combined with qualitative methods that allow for sensitive topics, such as individual interviews.

Positionality of the researcher

My dual role as volunteer and researcher created both risks and benefits. Being part of BuurtBuik improved trust and willingness to participate in the study of the guests. However, my presence may have also impacted the openness of the guests and increased social desirability bias. Being part of BuurtBuik also provided me with a better understanding of BuurtBuik, which helped me to contextualise the findings. However, this may have also affected my neutrality in its interpretation. My positionality as a young, white, highly educated woman, from outside Amsterdam who has never been food insecure, may have further influenced interpretations of this study.

These limitations do not weaken the validity of findings, but they should be considered by the reader. Positionality is something that is always present in qualitative research and requires transparency from the researcher. Future research could use participatory action research, an approach that underlines the importance of experiential knowledge of the group or community being studied, where they work together with the researcher as equal partners in shaping and interpreting the research (Cornish et al., 2023). This could reduce researcher bias, enhance the capacity building of community members, and improve the inclusion of lived experiences in the study (MacDonald, 2012). However, it should be noted that such an approach would require a totally different research design, compared to e.g. surveys, as for validity purposes, it becomes difficult if participants are both co-creators and respondents at the same time.

5.5 Implications and recommendations

The findings of this study have several implications for theory, science, and practice. By placing the findings in a broader perspective, the following section dives into the study's relevance for the scientific debate, the BuurtBuik community kitchen, and the municipality of Amsterdam. It also provides recommendations for both science and practice.

5.5.1 Theoretical and scientific implications and recommendations

This study contributes to the academic debate on (perceived) social cohesion, community kitchens, food aid, and their link with the neighbourhood. First, it expands the limited body of literature on community kitchens in relation to social cohesion. Social cohesion has been studied on different levels by various research domains and perspectives (Moustakas, 2022), including the neighbourhood level (Kurtenbach, 2024). It is often said that opportunities for social contact in public or third places can contribute positively to social cohesion (Fong et al., 2021; Orazani et al., 2023; Qi et al., 2024; Williams & Hipp, 2019), including shared community meals such as those offered in the community kitchen (Dunbar, 2017; Smith & Harvey, 2021; Smith, 2022; Heneine, 2024). However, a more detailed examination of how participating in community kitchens relates to guests' perceptions of social cohesion was still lacking. This study addressed that gap and highlighted the difference between relational social cohesion (within BuurtBuik) and locational social cohesion (within the neighbourhood). This showed that the same concept can take different forms in different scales or social settings. Instead of treating social cohesion as a single characteristic of a group, the study unpacked the concept by untangling it through its (sub)-dimensions.

Second, the study adds to the academic debate on food insecurity and food aid (Purdam et al., 2016; Andriessen & Van Der Velde, 2024). It examined the various reasons for guests to join BuurtBuik and showed that BuurtBuik is about 'more than just food aid'. Social and relational motivations prevailed over the practical and financial ones, and redistributing food through commensality seemed to strengthen dignity, conviviality, and social contact. This supports the shift in the debate on the role of food aid users, from being passive recipients to being active contributors to shared experiences. Future research should examine why lower-income groups in community kitchens value *food quality & nourishment* less than higher-income groups, particularly in relation to potentially differing norms and values around using surplus or 'rescued' food. In addition, it should also explore how and which aspects of community kitchens protect or threaten the social dignity of its guests by empirically testing the work of Andriessen & Van Der (2024).

Third, by adapting and applying Schiefer & Van Der Noll's (2017) framework at two different geographical scales, the study served as a novel example of how to operationalise this highly cited theory of a hard to define concept in practice. This application not only provided empirical evidence to the research topic itself but also pointed to new methodological directions for researchers who want to deepen their understanding of social cohesion on smaller scales, such as community kitchens or neighbourhoods. The findings further nuanced the framework. For example, the dimension of *belonging* turned out to be more situational in the community kitchen (feeling part of the community kitchen because you share the same activity), while more place-based or locational in the neighbourhood (feeling part of the neighbourhood because you share the same space). This suggests that the dimensions themselves are multifaceted and can vary per context, which should be explicitly taken into account in future research.

Fourth, the study combined this theory of Schiefer & van der Noll (2017) with the multi-level perspective theory of Aruqaj (2023). The two were found to be complementary and applicable across various geographical scales. Aruqaj's (2023) approach highlighted how individual perceptions of social cohesion, through Schiefer & Van Der Noll's (2017) dimensions, can be

understood as the consequence of personal circumstances, and be interpreted on the micro-, meso-, and macro-level. Together, these theories offered a nuanced understanding of how individual experiences (such as participating at BuurtBuik) may affect personal circumstances, which shape micro-level social cohesion perceptions that aggregate into meso- and macro-level social cohesion. Future research should build on this combined framework to study interventions that may influence social cohesion at multiple geographical scales and levels.

Fifth, the study contributes to the academic debate on social cohesion versus social capital (Carrasco & Bilal, 2016). The findings suggest that by aggregating guests' social cohesion perceptions, BuurtBuik itself can be characterised as being socially cohesive. However, it does not influence the social cohesiveness of the (surrounding) neighbourhoods. Instead, participating in BuurtBuik may strengthen social capital of guests, which in turn can influence how they perceive their neighbourhood. This distinction clarifies the often conflated conceptual boundaries between the two terms and should be taken into account in future research. Future studies should also examine the specific mechanism through which participation at BuurtBuik relates to improvements, and whether the strength of these effects differs between guests.

Finally, the results contribute to the literature on culinary conviviality in social eating initiatives (Morrow et al., 2023) and the role commensality can play in strengthening social cohesion of non-kin groups (Giacoman, 2016). It showed that not only social and relational intent to visit BuurtBuik, but also the taste of food, is inherently linked to social cohesion. The findings implied that food tastes better when eaten in an atmosphere of culinary conviviality, and this experience in turn contributed to social cohesion. Future research should explore the 'invisible' rules of culinary conviviality that strengthen social cohesion, with a particular focus on how these rules may be experienced differently by various cultural groups. While the role of volunteers was out of the scope of this study, this should definitely be considered when following this research direction, as volunteers play a key role in maintaining these rules.

5.5.2 Practical implications and recommendations

For the municipality of Amsterdam, BuurtBuik and similar initiatives can be seen as meaningful local interventions that contribute to more policy goals than they may have anticipated. In their current policy, the municipality of Amsterdam primarily sees community kitchens as a means for citizens to access healthy and inexpensive food and to reduce the waste of edible food from local businesses (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024a). According to this 2024 Food Monitor, Amsterdam residents mainly cite affordability, healthy food, sustainability, and reducing food waste as their main reasons for visiting social food initiatives, while social and relational aspects are less important (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2024a). Therefore, this study adds an important nuance. For the community kitchen of BuurtBuik Jordaan, the social and relational aspects are the most important reasons for making use of this social food initiative. They do more than just provide calories and reduce food waste. Its success lies in the informal and pleasant atmosphere where the culinary conviviality plays the main role, and the relief of food insecurity seems to be a secondary benefit. BuurtBuik reduces stigma around food aid and creates a welcoming 'third place' for people with different backgrounds to come together. Guests are not passive recipients of food aid but active contributors to the shared social experience. In this way, BuurtBuik addresses both physical and social hunger.

The study also showed that BuurtBuik guests experience relatively high levels of social cohesion, especially within the initiative itself. Almost half of the participants indicated that their perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion had improved since joining BuurtBuik, particularly for guests living nearby. This implies that the impact of BuurtBuik is strongest at the local level. Another notable finding is that BuurtBuik guests experience far more neighbourhood social cohesion compared to the average Amsterdam resident. While a deeper comparison between community kitchen users and non-users was beyond the scope of this study, the results suggest that residents who participate in local (neighbourhood/community) initiatives may generally experience stronger neighbourhood social cohesion than those whose lives are less involved with their community. While other factors, such as age, may also play a role, this preliminary finding is consistent with both intuition and research (Orazani et al., 2023). Therefore, this finding could be a promising starting point for city-wide investigations into the relation between community participation and neighbourhood social cohesion, as well as be an additional reason to encourage Amsterdam residents to participate in local initiatives in general.

The study found that measuring social cohesion through the sub-dimensions of Schiefer & Van Der Noll (2017) led to a similar average neighbourhood social cohesion score for BuurtBuik guests as when BuurtBuik guests' perceptions were measured through the five BBGA survey questions currently used by the municipality. Although this study's survey was more time-intensive, it offered an important added value: this way of measuring revealed the layers behind the actual social cohesion scores, providing deeper insights into which aspects of social cohesion prevailed. This approach makes the rather abstract policy goal of 'improving social cohesion in the district Amsterdam Centre' (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2025a) much more tangible. By breaking down the concept into its (sub-)dimensions, municipalities can better identify which aspects of social cohesion are strong, which need attention, and where they can tailor policy interventions to have the most impact.

Nevertheless, municipal expectations on community kitchens as improving perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion should remain realistic. The main value of BuurtBuik outside its own walls lies in strengthening the social capital of guests, which may indirectly shape how they perceive social cohesion in their neighbourhoods. Yet, this effect was not experienced equally, as more vulnerable groups (who could potentially benefit the most) reported improvements less often. Community kitchens can only provide temporary relief for those experiencing food insecurity, and they can only partially reduce food waste, but they are not designed to solve such structural problems. Both neighbourhood fragmentation and differences in social cohesion perceptions are rooted in societal inequalities and poverty, same goes for food insecurity. Expecting community kitchens to resolve such systemic inequalities is neither realistic nor appropriate. Municipalities should recognise community kitchens as a complementary, valuable piece of a bigger puzzle that strengthens social connections, reduces waste, and provides 'band-aid' relief to food insecurity. Another successful example of such intervention, its importance also underlined by participants, is the Amsterdam stadspas. However, the focus should lie on prioritising policies that address the issues that cause these structural inequalities, and not placing the responsibility on the shoulders of voluntary organisations.

While working on addressing the root causes of inequalities, municipalities should acknowledge the important (ideally temporary) role community kitchens play. However, sustaining and strengthening the positive impacts of BuurtBuik requires continuity. Regular participation is

linked to stronger perceptions and more improvements in social cohesion. Guests return because of the tasty meals and pleasant atmosphere. To maintain regular participation, resources are needed for rent, equipment, extra food, volunteer training, and activities. Therefore, the municipality of Amsterdam can play a crucial role by providing structural funding. The reporting requirements for such funding should be straightforward and concise, in line with BuurtBuik's informal, volunteer-led organisation. In addition, the municipality can take the weight off the shoulders of community kitchens by facilitating collaborations between community kitchens, food aid initiatives, welfare organisations, and health services to ensure that community kitchen organisers can better help and redirect vulnerable guests who need extra attention. To fully understand the added value of initiatives such as BuurtBuik, municipalities should move beyond the narrow measurements such as 'kilograms of food saved' or 'numbers of meals served', and also take into account the less tangible, but equally important, 'softer' social benefits of community kitchens. Although from a policy point of view, food waste reduction may be an important driver to fund such an initiative, the benefits generated for end-users are of a very different nature.

Based on this research, several recommendations can be made for municipalities:

- Acknowledge the dual role of community kitchens. Treat them not only as food access and food waste initiatives, but also as important third places that strengthen social capital and social cohesion perceptions of their users.
- Ensure financial continuity without heavy reporting requirements.
- Support community kitchens by facilitating collaboration with social welfare organisations
- Include the social dimension in monitoring and evaluation of community kitchens.
- Promote dignity in food aid by learning from BuurtBuik's stigma-reducing approach. This ensures that food aid is not only about redistribution but also about a respectful, pleasant experience
- Recognise food insecurity, food waste, and social fragmentation as structural policy issues caused by inequalities and avoid over-reliance on voluntary organisations by tackling these root causes.

For community kitchen organisers, the findings of this study pointed to several implications. To start, the findings show that social cohesion does not just 'happen' automatically. They depend on how the initiative is organised and facilitated, and how guests interact with each other. BuurtBuik Jordaan shows that the balance between food provision and social interaction is crucial. While free, tasty meals may attract guests, it is the culinary conviviality during these meals that seems to make them return. Therefore, creating a safe atmosphere where the 'invisible' rules of culinary conviviality are maintained is just as important as the operational logistics of cooking tasty meals.

Yet, the findings also suggest that not all guests experience the social atmosphere of BuurtBuik the same. Guests living more isolated lives tend to experience less social cohesion, and other groups of more vulnerable guests tend to report fewer improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion. This suggests that the community kitchen may unconsciously reinforce existing differences or inequalities. Therefore, extra attention should be taken to actively check in with more vulnerable individuals to ensure that they feel included in the community kitchen as well.

While not everyone may be interested in its social aspects, everyone should have an equal opportunity to access BuurtBuik's social benefits.

Next, as BuurtBuik takes place in a community centre 'Het Claverhuis', a meeting point for residents of the neighbourhood (Dock, 2025), one may view BuurtBuik as a neighbourhood intervention. However, the study showed it attracts guests from all over the city. In this sense, 'community' in community kitchens seems to transcend neighbourhood boundaries. At the same time, proximity still mattered. Still, guests living nearby experienced higher social cohesion in both the community kitchen as well as their neighbourhoods and reported improvements more often. Additionally, guests noted that initiatives such as BuurtBuik are good for neighbourly relations. This implies that community kitchens have the most social impact on local residents.

Besides proximity, repetition was also found to be key. Regular attendance, especially when guests have consistent table partners, enables weak ties to form and strengthen over time, which can strengthen perceptions of social cohesion. At the same time, organisers should be mindful of the risk of clique formation, which could decrease overall social cohesion if they don't connect with others. All in all, this means that the role of volunteers goes beyond just the logistics. They set the tone, maintain rules, and thereby actively shape culinary conviviality. This means their training is key to strengthening social outcomes.

Finally, the quality and taste of food itself seem to be related to social cohesion. Guests described the meals as "tasting better when shared together", showing that food is not only seen as nourishment but also as relational glue, and the reason was associated with higher social cohesion perceptions. At the same time, the study also implies that it is important to uphold the quality of the food in order to ensure a dignified experience of food aid, especially for those who may struggle with food insecurity.

Based on the implications of this study, several recommendations can be made for community kitchen organisations:

- Train volunteers to recognise and maintain the 'invisible' rules for culinary conviviality
- Check in regularly with more vulnerable guests to ensure they feel included
- Increase the connection with the local neighbourhood, e.g by hosting outdoor meals and collaborating with local housing corporations or neighbourhood organisations, to maximise social impact on the local neighbourhood
- Encourage regular attendance of guests while preventing cliques, for example by varying table setups

5.6 Reflections from my own researcher-volunteer position

I experienced BuurtBuik not only as a researcher, but also directly as a volunteer. This position gave me a different perspective on community kitchens in practice. The reflections below are not findings from quantitative or qualitative methods, but personal insights and recommendations from my role as a volunteer that complement Chapter 5.5 above.

Small, details shape the atmosphere at BuurtBuik. For example, the way guests are welcomed can really set the tone for the rest of the meal. But also the table-setting (including leaving enough space between tables to move comfortably, tablecloths, or table decorations), and the background music at the right volume all mattered. Most importantly, serving food while making

genuine contact and taking time for conversations made guests feel seen and contributed to a pleasant experience. These aspects may seem trivial, but to me they allow for guests to experience dignity, safety, to be seen, and included.

At the same time, I became aware of how much effort lies behind this pleasant experience. Volunteers worked constantly behind the scenes to ensure a smooth flow: picking up food, cooking, setting up tables, serving food, cleaning, mediating tensions, and offering a listening ear. Social cohesion and culinary conviviality do not emerge spontaneously but are an outcome of intentional and structured collaboration. Yet, culinary conviviality was also fragile. Sometimes there were moments where guests broke or had different views on these 'invisible' social rules of eating together. For example by being rude, dominating the conversation, jumping queues, or having strong verbal disagreements with each other. It showed how quickly the atmosphere could be disrupted and the importance of trained volunteers who dare to step in and mediate such tensions if necessary.

The physical setup also played a role. Some Saturdays, BuurtBuik takes place on the ground floor of the community kitchen, other days on the first floor. Also, the set-up of tables differed often, which may have prevented regular guests from claiming their 'own' spots. This may have also made it easier for newcomers to integrate into existing 'cliques' of regular guests. These small interventions may seem simple, but can be important for a more inclusive environment.

Another interesting aspect was the relation between guests and volunteers. Although BuurtBuik brings people together from very diverse social and cultural backgrounds, a noticeable divide was seen. Volunteers are typically young and from higher socio-economic backgrounds, while most guests are older adults and have a more vulnerable background. While for both groups, expanding their social network or finding friends is an important motivator, this often remains within their own bubbles. Based on my own experience of joining the meals, I would recommend volunteers to also sit down and share a meal with the guests, if possible, within their shift. This resonates with Phillips & Willatt (2020), who emphasised that eating together can decrease the divide between guests and volunteers and lower hierarchy.

Based on my personal experiences, several other recommendations for BuurtBuik organisers follow as well. First, try to bring more peace and structure while serving the food. The coordinator of the day establishes roles and responsibilities for the volunteers. Serving food table per table, even when offering different meal options, could enhance the guests' experience. Being able to eat your meal at the same time as your table partners resembles the family mealtime and creates a shared moment, rather than a fragmented eating experience. Second, the coordinator role could be shared by two volunteers: one for operations and one for the atmosphere. The social coordinator can fully focus on safeguarding conviviality, take extra time to talk with guests, and notice or help more vulnerable guests. Finally, vulnerable guests and guests often sitting alone may need extra attention. Volunteers can support them e.g. through buddy systems, by joining their table and gently including them in conversations or checking whether they need help from other welfare organisations, always respecting their boundaries and comfort.

Taken together, through these reflections, I want to emphasise that these typical micro-practices and interactions at BuurtBuik are not just operational aspects. They are key components to strengthen social cohesion and culinary conviviality at BuurtBuik, one meal at a time. The photos below (Figure 5.1-5.20) will take you through an ordinary (Satur)day at BuurtBuik.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how participation in BuurtBuik meals is related to guests' perceptions of social cohesion within the community kitchen and the wider neighbourhood. The concept of social cohesion was operationalised by combining Schiefer & Van Der Noll's highly-cited multi-dimensional and Aruqaj's (2023) multi-level perspective on social cohesion into a coherent conceptual framework. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey methods with qualitative focus groups, this research showed that BuurtBuik can be considered a socially cohesive 'third place' for its guests. Unpacking the concept of social cohesion showed that within BuurtBuik, guests particularly valued acceptance, trust, and respect for the rules.

While reasons for participating in BuurtBuik were various, social and relational motivations were more strongly linked to social cohesion. Guests who came searching for companionship, emotional connection, and/or the enjoyment of sharing tasty food experienced higher levels of social cohesion. This pointed to the central role of culinary conviviality: the pleasant act of eating together, whereby the taste and quality of the food was found to be intertwined with the social experience. In addition, factors such as regular attendance, living nearby, and eating with similar table partners were also related to stronger social cohesion perceptions in the community kitchen. At the same time, the findings also showed that those who are not used to food companionship, as they mostly eat alone, value these commensal and social aspects of the community kitchen less, also reflected in their lower social cohesion perceptions.

Neighbourhood social cohesion perceptions of guests were lower than in the community kitchen. And whereas situational belonging and relational social cohesion seemed to prevail in the community kitchen, in the neighbourhood, it seemed to be more of a locational belonging for guests' neighbourhoods. The study showed that participating in BuurtBuik improved the perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion for half of the guests. Most notably, these improvements occurred in social aspects of neighbourhood social cohesion, such as social networks and participation, aspects that were generally valued relatively low in neighbourhood life. It indicated that participating in BuurtBuik primarily leads to stronger social capital, which changes the personal circumstances of guests, and in turn may improve their perceptions of neighbourhood social cohesion. Again, effects were stronger for participation factors such as proximity, regular attendance, and consistent table partners. However, the findings also showed that these improvements were experienced unevenly, as more vulnerable guests, such as those finding it more difficult to live on their present income and those who may be more isolated as they mostly eat alone, reported fewer improvements.

Taken together, by examining the deeper layers that make up social cohesion and relating this to participating in BuurtBuik, this study showed that BuurtBuik is about 'more than food'. It is a place where culinary conviviality (the pleasant act of sharing food with others) builds strong relational social cohesion. Those visiting with this social intent in mind are also more likely to experience social outcomes and take their growth of social capital with them into their everyday neighbourhood lives, where it can strengthen relational aspects of neighbourhood social cohesion that are structurally undervalued. This effect is particularly stronger for local, regular guests who found food companionship at BuurtBuik. At the same time, attention is needed to

ensure that more vulnerable individuals are not left behind in this process and have an equal opportunity to experience these social benefits.

For policy and practice, the results suggest that BuurtBuik should not be seen as a structural solution to the paradox of food waste and abundance in times of food insecurity, but rather as a temporary band-aid that also functions as important social infrastructure in urban areas. In the meantime, the root cause of both food insecurity and societal fragmentation should be addressed structurally: inequalities and poverty. For community kitchen organisers, maintaining culinary conviviality was found to be crucial for strong social outcomes. However, extra attention should be paid to more vulnerable guests to ensure that this can be experienced equally.

The study's value lies in its originality, including the mixed-method design, the empirical operationalisation of a highly cited framework for a concept that is difficult to define, and the dual role of being both a researcher and volunteer at BuurtBuik, which added opportunities for personal observation and helped with interpretation. Through this approach, the study was able to explore new ways to understand the role of BuurtBuik's community kitchen in the lives of its guests, as well as contribution to social cohesion. To build further on this study, future research could conduct a longitudinal study with multiple case studies to examine the extent to which participation in BuurtBuik can cause improvements in neighbourhood social cohesion, and how sub-group and neighbourhood characteristics may shape these outcomes. Social network analysis would be valuable to explore how the weak ties formed during meals develop, and how the number and strength of these ties may relate to individual social cohesion perceptions. Qualitative research on culinary conviviality could uncover the 'invisible' rules that make the shared meals at BuurtBuik a convivial experience that strengthens social cohesion, as well as how the interpretation of these rules may vary between cultural groups. Finally, not directly linked to social cohesion but equally important, is for future research to investigate the different meanings guests attach to using surplus food in the meals, particularly whether this violates the social dignity of those visiting BuurtBuik for food insecurity reasons.

All in all, participation in BuurtBuik can contribute to social cohesion through the every-(Satur)day ritual of eating together in an atmosphere of acceptance, trust, and respect for rules of culinary conviviality. It is a place where strangers may discover they are neighbours, Neighbours who may become acquaintances, and acquaintances who may become friends. These experiences can strengthen perceptions of social cohesion in the neighbourhood. In this way, participating in BuurtBuik is about more than just food: guests leave with both a full stomach and a fuller heart.

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Appendix A – survey

Menu of today:

Your BuurtBuik experience – tell us what you think!
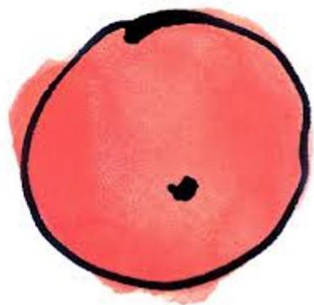
BuurtBuik

Welcome to the survey!

Thank you for taking the time to help BuurtBuik out. This is a project on the role of BuurtBuik in social cohesion. Your responses will help us better understand how community kitchens contribute to your community. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Before we begin, please note the following:

- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- Your responses are anonymous and confidential.
- You may skip any question or stop the survey at any time.

By completing this survey, you confirm that you have read this information and agree to participate.

THANK YOU!

Appetizer: About you and BuurtBuik

Please tick the box for the answer that suits you the most.

1. How often do you visit this BuurtBuik location?

☐ Weekly ☐ A few times per month ☐ Once per month ☐ Less than once per month ☐ This is my first time

2. How long have you been attending this BuurtBuik location?

☐ Less than 1 month ☐ 1-3 months ☐ 4-12 months ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-5 years

3. How often have you attended a meal at this BuurtBuik location?

☐ 1-5 times ☐ 6-20 times ☐ 21-50 times ☐ 50+ times

4. Do you eat with the same people at BuurtBuik every time?

☐ Yes, always ☐ ☐ Most of the time ☐ No, I switch often

5. Which language do you prefer to speak at BuurtBuik?

☐ Dutch ☐ English ☐ Other...

6. Do you eat at other BuurtBuik locations too?

☐ Yes ☐ sometimes ☐ no

7. How do you normally eat when you are not at BuurtBuik?

☐ Alone ☐ with partner ☐ with family ☐ with friends ☐ in another community kitchen

☐ other,..

....

Main Course: Social networks

Please tick the box on how much you agree with the following statements. Do this for both this BuurtBuik community kitchen and your neighbourhood.

1. "I have meaningful connections with people in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

2. "I feel like the people don't know each other well in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

3. "I think that people interact with each other in a positive way in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

4. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about your neighbourhood changed?

Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	I don't know

Participation

5. "I often go to activities in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

6. "I have helped out or volunteered during an event in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

7. "I try to be involved when decisions are made that affect life in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

8. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about participation in your neighbourhood changed?

Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	Not applicable

Trust

9. "I trust the people in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

10. "Sometimes I feel uncomfortable in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

11. "I think local organisations work in the best interest of the community in [...]

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen" (e.g. board	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood" (e.g. municipality	1	2	3	4	5

12. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about trust in your neighbourhood changed?

Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	Not applicable

Acceptance

13. "I feel that [...] welcomes people from all backgrounds and lifestyles."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

14. "I feel accepted in [...], no matter my personal situation or background."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

15. "I do not enjoy interacting with people in [...], they are so different from me."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

16. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about acceptance in your neighbourhood changed?

Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	Not applicable

Belonging

17. "I feel at home here with the people in [...]."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

18. "I see [...] as an important part of my life."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

19. "The people I meet in [...] make me feel part of something bigger."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

20. "If I moved away, I would miss the [...]"

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

21. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about belonging in your neighbourhood changed?

worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	Not applicable

Helpfulness

22. "This place is a 'gezellige' (welcoming) [...] where people help each other out."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

23. "I don't feel like there is anyone in [...] who I can go to and ask for help."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

24. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about helpfulness in your neighbourhood changed?

Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	Not applicable

You're Almost There!

Respect for rules

25. "Most people respect the (public) space and community rules here in the [...]."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

26. "People here in the [...] work together to keep the community safe and welcoming."

	strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
... this community kitchen"	1	2	3	4	5
... my neighbourhood"	1	2	3	4	5

27. Since joining BuurtBuik, how has your view on the statements on this page about respect for rules in your neighbourhood changed?

Worsened	Stayed the same	Improved	Not applicable

Dessert: reasons for joining BuurtBuik

In this section, I would like you to understand your reasons for joining BuurtBuik. Please rate each statement.

Food quality and nourishment

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"The meals are delicious, and I love trying new dishes."	1	2	3	4	5
"The deserts are a reason for me to return."	1	2	3	4	5
"The food is healthy and good for me."	1	2	3	4	5

Emotional and social connection

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"I feel lonely sometimes, coming here makes me feel part of something bigger."	1	2	3	4	5
"Seeing familiar faces and chatting with people lifts my spirits."	1	2	3	4	5
" I've made friends just by sitting at the same table."	1	2	3	4	5

Food waste

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"I come to BuurtBuik because I care about reducing food waste and supporting sustainability."	1	2	3	4	5
"This initiative makes me more aware of how much food is wasted every day, I feel like we can make a difference."	1	2	3	4	5

Financial support

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"This service helps me stretch my budget when things are tight."	1	2	3	4	5
"I cannot afford to eat out anymore, so this makes a difference."	1	2	3	4	5
"Groceries have become expensive, now I can get something extra for free	1	2	3	4	5

Practical support

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"With my health issues, I struggle to cook, and these meals make it easier."	1	2	3	4	5
"The portions are generous, I don't have to worry about cooking when I receive the meals."	1	2	3	4	5

Shared meals and togetherness

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"I used to eat alone, but now I have people to share a meal with."	1	2	3	4	5
"It reminds me of how meals used to be, people gathered around, talking and eating."	1	2	3	4	5

Cultural exchange

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
"I enjoy meeting people from different cultures."	1	2	3	4	5
"It's nice to speak my own language with others here sometimes."	1	2	3	4	5
"I feel connected when I meet others who share a similar background."	1	2	3	4	5

30. Can you rank your reasons for joining? Write the letter

A) Food quality and nourishment, B) social connection, C) financial support, D) practical support, E) shared meals and togetherness F) cultural exchange

1.   ....   (most important)
2.   ...
3.   ...
4.   .....
5.   ....
6.   ...   (least important)

31. Do you have any other reasons for joining BuurtBuik that weren't mentioned here?

....

....

....

Coffee or tea: About you!

1. **What is your age?**

   ☐ Under 30   ☐ 31-49   ☐ 50-64   ☐ 65+

2. **What is your gender?**

   ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say ☐ Other
   ....

3. **Which country were you born?**

....

4. **What is your household composition?**

   ☐ Live alone ☐ Live with partner ☐ Live with family-members ☐ Shared housing ☐ Other

   5. **In which neighbourhood of Amsterdam do you live?**

   ....   ☐ Not in Amsterdam

6. **How long have you lived in this neighbourhood?**

   ☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-20 years ☐ 21-30 years ☐ 30+ years ☐ Entire life

7. **How do you feel about your household's income nowadays?**
   ☐ living comfortably on present income
   ☐ coping on present income
   ☐ difficult on present income
   ☐ very difficult on present income
   ☐ prefer not to say

8. **How long do you travel to BuurtBuik?**

   ☐ 0-5 minutes
   ☐ 6 - 10 minutes
   ☐ 11 – 15 minutes
   ☐ 16 – 30 minutes
   ☐ 31 – 60 minutes
   ☐ 60+ minutes

44. Anything else you'd like to share about your experience at BuurtBuik?

The end! Thank you for participating. We appreciate your time and effort in completing this survey. Your insights are invaluable in understanding the impact of BuurtBuik on community life.

If you have any questions about this research or would like to receive a summary of the results, please feel free to contact me at
lena.gerstmans@wur.nl

Appendix B - focus group guide

1. Welcome and warming-up

- Welcome participants. Explain the purpose: to hear their stories about coming to BuurtBuik and how it affects their lives and life in the neighbourhood.

- Reminder: no right or wrong answers, and everything shared will stay confidential.

- Warm-up: What's one word you'd use to describe BuurtBuik?

2. Motivations for joining for the first time

- How did you first hear about BuurtBuik?
  → *What were you looking for that time?*

- What made you decide to come the first time? Can you tell us about that moment?
  →*How did you feel the first time?*

3. Experiences at the BuurtBuik (social cohesion ck)

- What is it like here during a meal? Can you describe the atmosphere?
  →*What makes it feel welcoming or not?*
  →*Was there ever a time it felt different (more or less welcoming)?*

- Have you gotten to know people here? Can you share a moment when you felt connected with someone?
  à Did you keep in touch outside BuurtBuik?

- How do people help each other here? Can you tell me about a time you saw or experienced yourself that someone was helping you?
  → *What did that mean to you? How did it make you feel?*

4. Reflection on changes in personal life

- Has coming here changed you or your life in any way? Can you share a big or small change?
  → *How did you feel before you started coming, and how do you feel now?*

- When you leave after a meal here, is there something you take with you?
  → *A feeling, thought, or experience?*

5. Neighbourhood life

- How would you describe your neighbourhood and the relationships between people who live there?
  → *Are there activities or traditions you do together?*

- Has coming to BuurtBuik changed how look at your neighbourhood or your neighbours? Do you have an example?
  → *Have you met neighbours here you wouldn't have met otherwise?*

- Have you joined any other activities in your neighbourhood since coming to BuurtBuik?
  → Why or why not?

6. Closing

- Imagine BuurtBuik would close, how would your life be different?

- What would you say to someone thinking about coming here for the first time?

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences here or in your neighbourhood?

- Give chocolate gift

Appendix C – Demographics

Table C1

Overview of descriptive statistics of respondents including all groups

Categories	N	% of total	% (valid)
Age			
Under 30	1	3.0	3.2
31–49	1	3.0	3.2
50–64	8	24.2	25.8
65+	21	63.6	67.7
Total valid	31	93.9	100
Missing	2	6.1	-
Gender			
Woman	14	42.4	45.2
Man	14	42.4	45.2
Non-binary	2	6.1	6.5
Other	1	3.0	3.2
Total valid	31	93.9	100
Missing	2	6.1	-
Household composition			
Live alone	24	72.7	80.0
Live with partner	4	12.1	13.3
Shared housing	1	3.0	3.3
Other	1	3.0	3.3
Total valid	30	90.9	100
Missing	3	9.1	-
Years in neighbourhood			
< 1 year	3	9.1	10.7
1–5 years	2	6.1	7.1
6–10 years	2	6.1	7.1
11–20 years	3	9.1	10.7
21–30 years	5	15.2	17.9
30+ years	7	21.2	25.0
Entire life	6	18.2	21.4
Total valid	28	84.8	100

Missing	5	15.2	-
Household income perception			
Living comfortably	6	18.2	20.7
Coping	8	24.2	27.6
Difficult	12	36.4	41.4
Very difficult	2	6.1	6.9
(Other)	1	3.0	3.4
Total valid	29	87.9	100
Missing	4	12.1	-
Travel time to BuurtBuik			
0–5 min	2	6.1	6.7
6–10 min	6	18.2	20.0
11–15 min	5	15.2	16.7
16–30 min	13	39.4	43.3
31–60 min	3	9.1	10.0
60+ min	1	3.0	3.3
Total valid	30	90.9	100
Missing	3	9.1	-
Visit frequency			
Weekly	23	69.7	69.7
Few times/month	7	21.2	21.2
< 1/month	1	3.0	3.0
First time	2	6.1	6.1
Total valid	33	100	100
Time attending			
< 1 month	3	9.1	9.1
1–3 months	5	15.2	15.2
4–12 months	8	24.2	24.2
1–2 years	10	30.3	30.3
3–5 years	7	21.2	21.2
Total valid	33	100	100
Meals attended			
1–5 times	5	15.2	15.2
6–20 times	7	21.2	21.2

21–50 times	10	30.3	30.3
50+ times	11	33.3	33.3
Total valid	33	100	100
Eat with same people at BuurtBuik			
Yes, always	7	21.2	22.6
Most of the time	10	30.3	32.3
Switch often	14	42.4	45.2
Total valid	31	93.9	100
Missing	2	6.1	-
Preferred language at BuurtBuik			
Dutch	27	81.8	81.8
English	2	6.1	6.1
Other	4	12.1	12.1
Total valid	33	100	100
Visit other BuurtBuik locations			
Yes	5	15.2	15.6
Sometimes	6	18.2	18.8
No	21	63.6	65.6
Total valid	32	97.0	100
Missing	1	3.0	-
District			
Centre	10	30/3	45.5
West	5	15.2	22.7
Oost	2	6.1	9.1
Zuid	2	6.1	9.1
Noord	2	6.1	9.1
Nieuw-West	1	6.1	9.1
Total valid	22	3	4.6
Missing	11	33.3	-

Table C2

Overview of descriptive statistics of respondents including all groups

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Frequency of visits				
Weekly	23	69.7	74.2	74.2
Not weekly	8	24.2	25.8	100.0
Total valid	31	93.9	100.0	
Two groups (length membership)				
< 1 year	16	48.5	48.5	48.5
≥ 1 year	17	51.5	51.5	100.0
Total valid	33	100.0	100.0	
Income situation				
High income	14	42.4	50.0	50.0
Low income	14	42.4	50.0	100.0
Total valid	28	84.8	100.0	
Travel time				
0–15 minutes	13	39.4	43.3	43.3
15+ minutes	17	51.5	56.7	100.0
Total valid	30	90.9	100.0	
Years lived in area				
0–10 years	7	21.2	25.0	25.0
10+ years	21	63.6	75.0	100.0
Total valid	28	84.8	100.0	
Country of birth				
Netherlands	23	69.7	76.7	76.7
Outside Netherlands	7	21.2	23.3	100.0
Total valid	30	90.9	100.0	
Visit count				
1–20 times	12	36.4	36.4	36.4
20+ times	21	63.6	63.6	100.0
Total valid	33	100.0	100.0	
Eating company				
Alone	20	60.6	60.6	60.6
Not alone	13	39.4	39.4	100.0
Total valid	33	100.0	100.0	
Loneliness				
Not lonely (1–3)	14	42.4	43.8	43.8
Lonely (4–5)	18	54.5	56.3	100.0
Total valid	32	97.0	100.0	
Eat with same people at BuurtBuik				
Often/Always same people	17	51.5	54.8	54.8
Switches often	14	42.4	45.2	100.0
Total valid	31	93.9	100.0	
Household status				
Live alone	24	72.7	80.0	80.0
Live with others	6	18.2	20.0	100.0
Total valid	30	90.9	100.0	

Age group

< 65	10	30.3	32.3	32.3
≥ 65	21	63.6	67.7	100.0
Total valid	31	93.9	100.0	

Appendix D – Outlier analysis

Figure D1
Boxplot with composite variables of social cohesion dimensions for outlier analysis
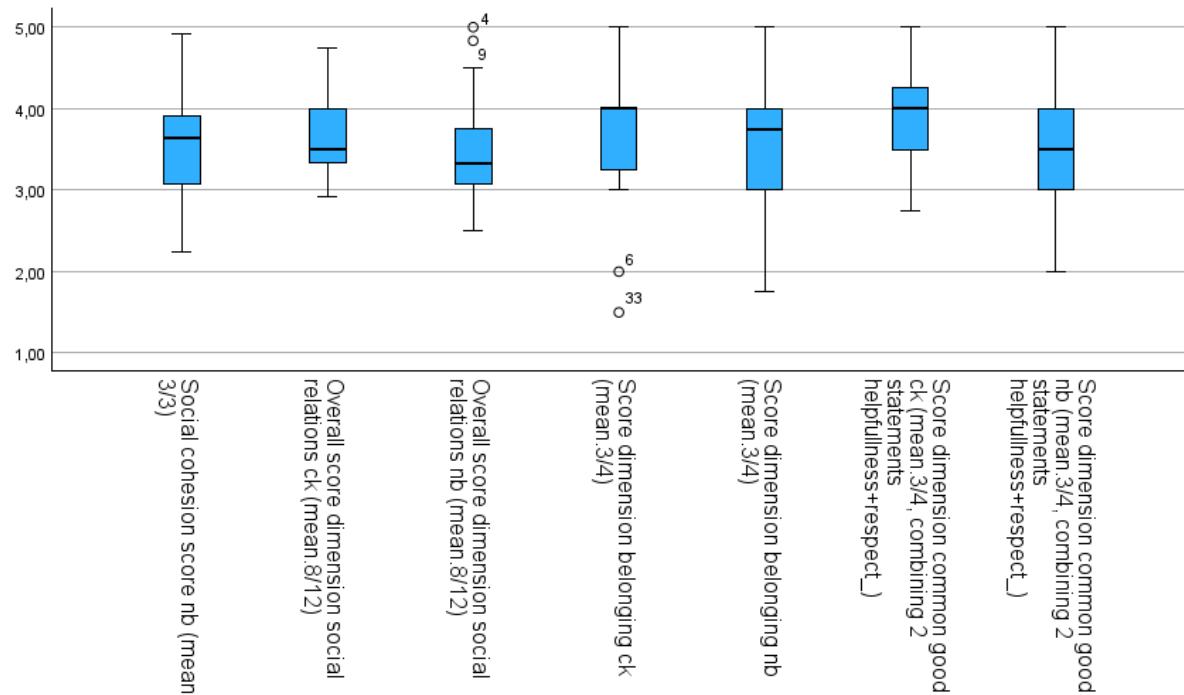

Figure D2
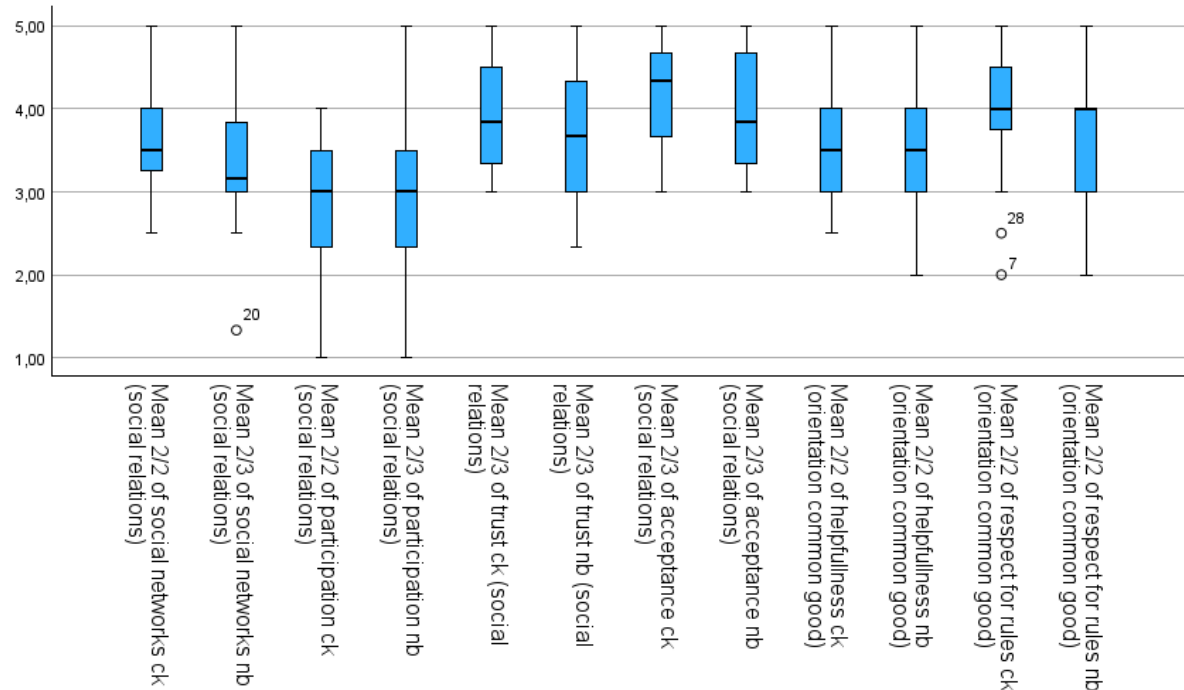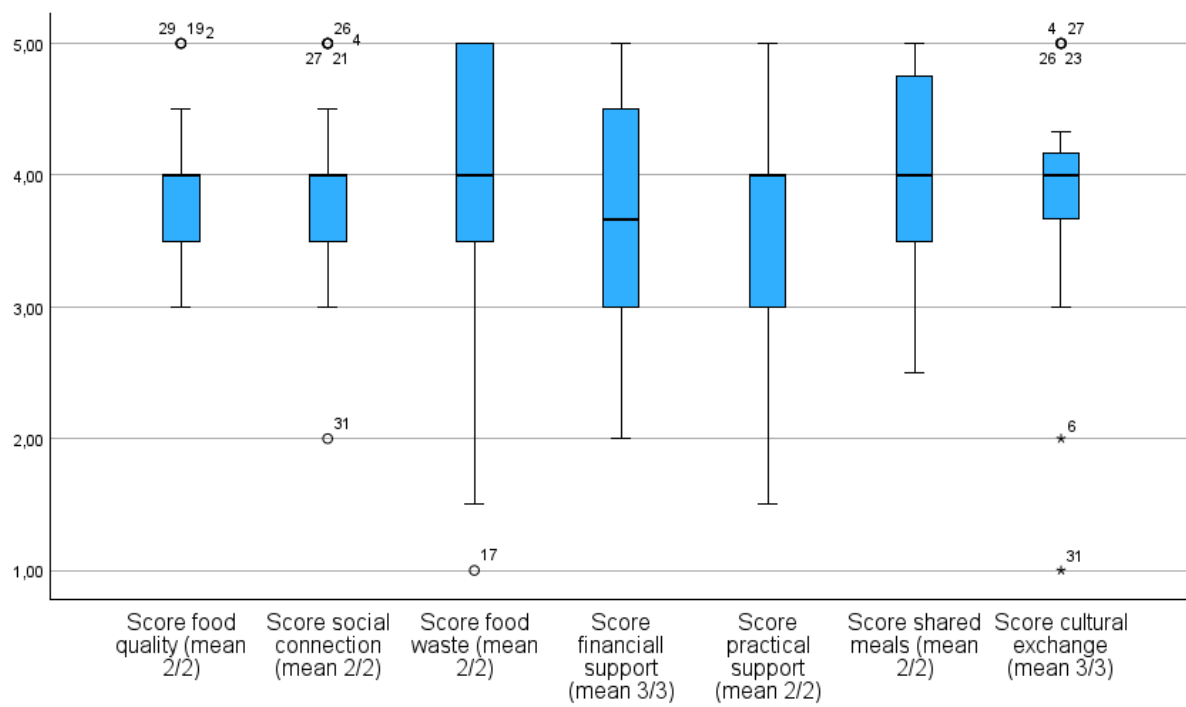*Boxplot with composite variables of social cohesion sub-dimensions for outlier analysis*

Figure D3
Boxplot with composite variables of reasons to join BuurtBuik for outlier analysis

Appendix E – Normal distribution

Table E1

Descriptive statistics including Skewness and Kurtosis values for all sub-dimensions on social cohesion

Descriptive Statistics

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Kurtosis Std. Error
Mean 2/2 of social networks ck (social relations)	33	2,50	5,00	3,7424	,67455	,481	,409	-,468	,798
Mean 2/3 of social networks nb (social relations)	33	1,33	5,00	3,3990	,73118	-,025	,409	1,000	,798
Mean 2/3 of participation nb (social relations)	33	1,00	5,00	2,9293	,90430	-,051	,409	,449	,798
Mean 2/3 of trust ck (social relations)	33	3,00	5,00	3,8990	,67436	,273	,409	-1,224	,798
Mean 2/3 of trust nb (social relations)	33	2,33	5,00	3,6162	,75517	,234	,409	-,727	,798
Mean 2/3 of acceptance ck (social relations)	33	3,00	5,00	4,2172	,60737	-,503	,409	-,838	,798
Mean 2/3 of acceptance nb (social relations)	33	2,50	5,00	3,8889	,76565	,023	,409	-1,424	,798
Mean 2/2 of helpfullness ck (orientation common good)	32	2,50	5,00	3,7344	,70693	,396	,414	-,759	,809
Mean 2/2 of helpfullness nb (orientation common good)	32	2,00	5,00	3,5625	,74865	,634	,414	-,069	,809
Mean 2/2 of respect for rules ck (orientation common good)	33	2,00	5,00	4,0303	,71741	-,653	,409	1,025	,798
Mean 2/2 of respect for rules nb (orientation common good)	33	2,00	5,00	3,5909	,92242	-,061	,409	-,918	,798
Score dimension belonging ck (mean.3/4)	33	1,50	5,00	3,6515	,73670	-,820	,409	1,407	,798
Score dimension belonging nb (mean.3/4)	33	1,75	5,00	3,5758	,79913	-,177	,409	,064	,798
Valid N (listwise)	32								

Figure E1

Normal distributions of sub-dimension social networks for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.
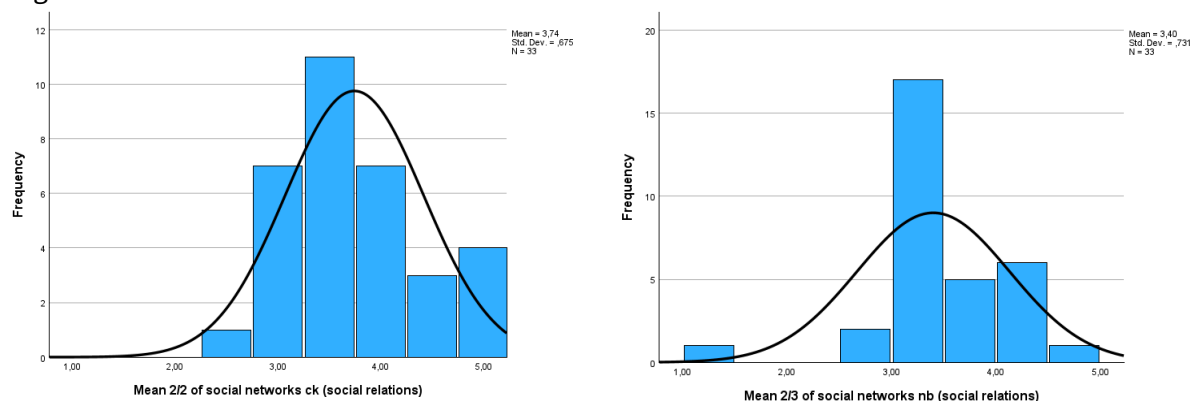
Figure E2

Normal distributions of sub-dimension participation for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.

Figure E3

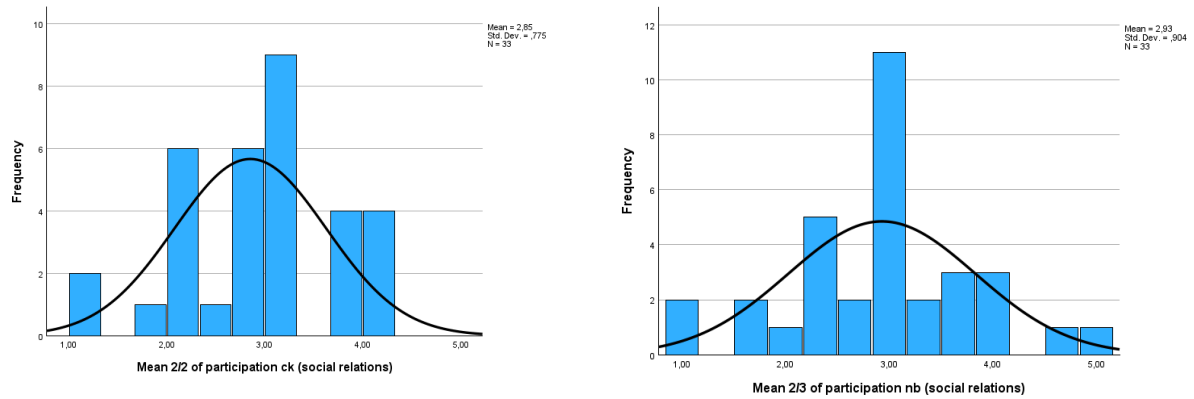*Normal distributions of sub-dimension trust for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.*

Figure E4

Normal distributions of sub-dimension acceptance for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.

Figure E5
Normal distributions of sub-dimension helpfulness for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.

Figure E6
Normal distributions of sub-dimension respect for rules for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.
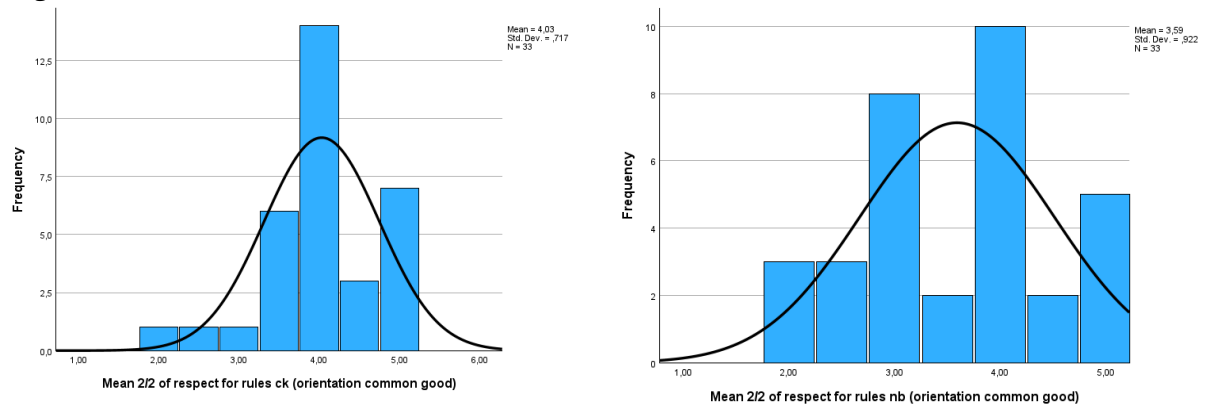
Table E2
Descriptive statistics including Skewness and Kurtosis values for all dimensions on social cohesion

Descriptive Statistics

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Kurtosis Std. Error
Overall score dimension social relations ck (mean. 8/12)	33	2,92	4,75	3,6749	,46663	,667	,409	-,565	,798
Overall score dimension social relations nb (mean. 8/12)	33	2,50	5,00	3,4587	,58348	,900	,409	,899	,798
Score dimension belonging ck (mean.3/4)	33	1,50	5,00	3,6515	,73670	-,820	,409	1,407	,798
Score dimension belonging nb (mean.3/4)	33	1,75	5,00	3,5758	,79913	-,177	,409	,064	,798
Score dimension common good ck (mean.3/4, combining 2 statements helpfullness+respect_)	33	2,75	5,00	3,8838	,58405	,413	,409	-,223	,798
Score dimension common good nb (mean.3/4, combining 2 statements helpfullness+respect_)	33	2,00	5,00	3,5657	,76142	,245	,409	-,549	,798
Valid N (listwise)	33								

Normal distributions of dimension social relations for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.
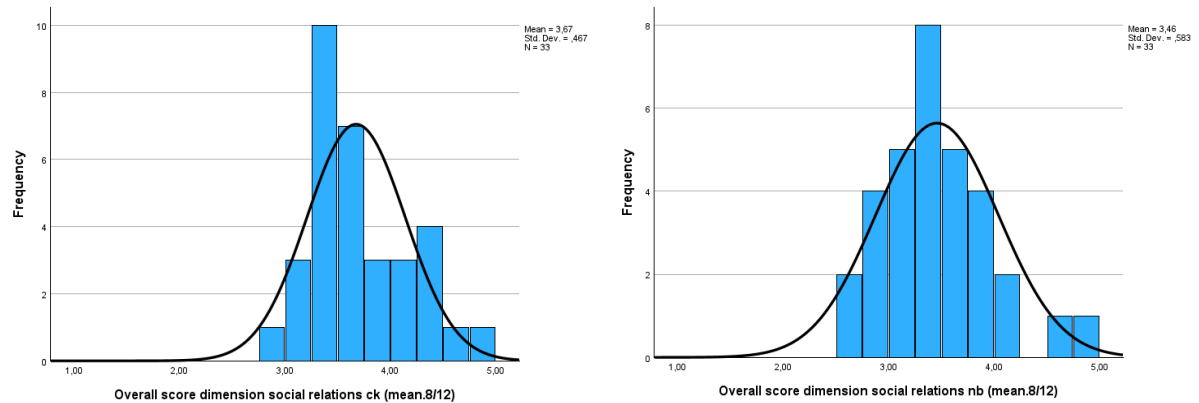
Figure E8

Normal distributions of dimension belonging for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.
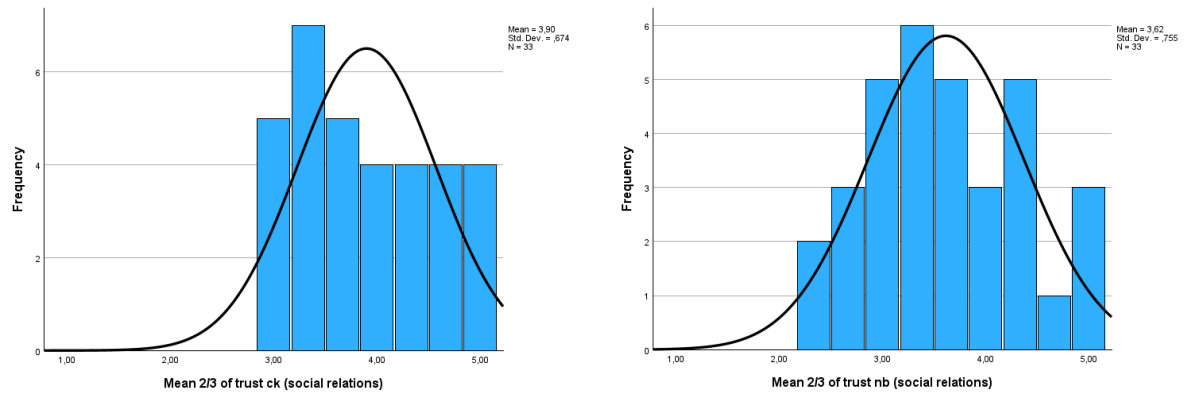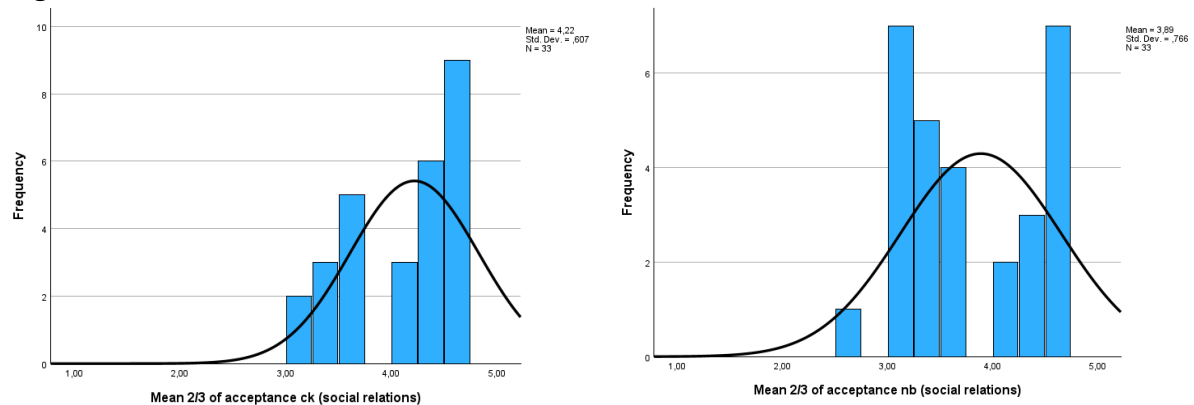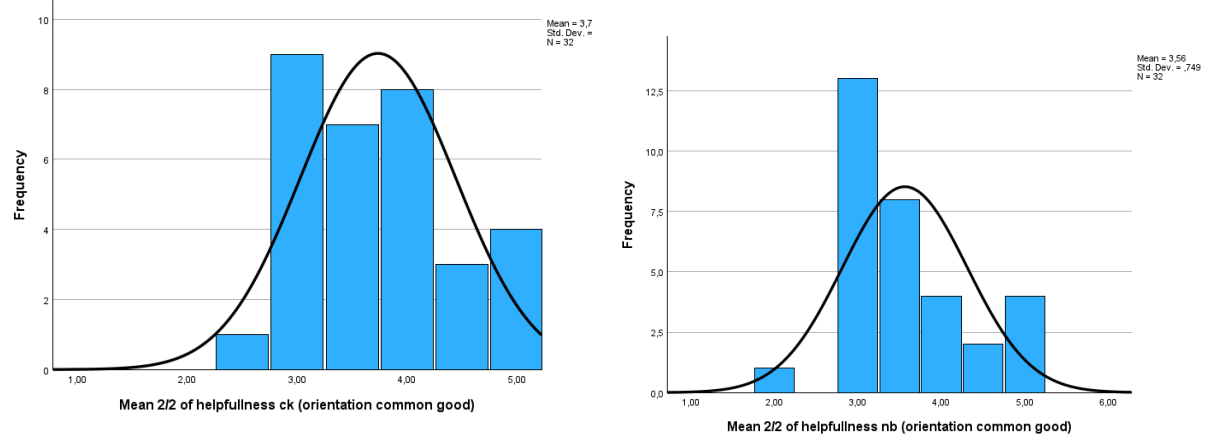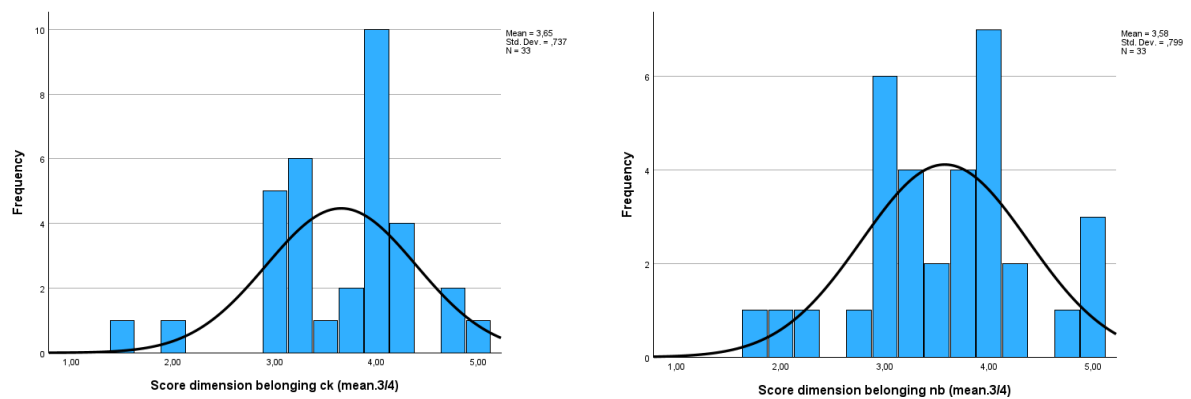

Figure E9

Normal distributions of dimension orientation to common good for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.
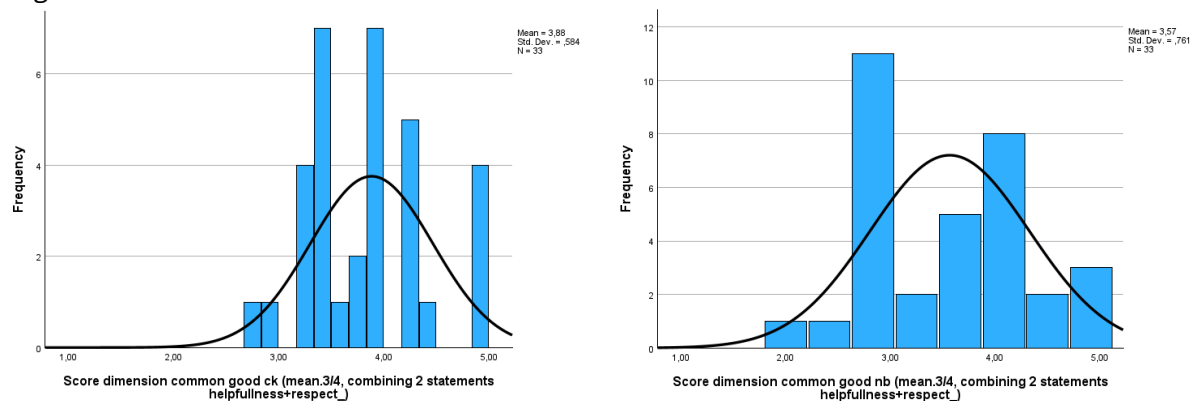
Table E3

Descriptive statistics including Skewness and Kurtosis values for all social cohesion scores

Descriptive Statistics

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Kurtosis Std. Error
Social cohesion score ck (mean 3/3)	33	2,78	4,83	3,7368	,51118	,258	,409	-,187	,798
Social cohesion score nb (mean 3/3)	33	2,25	4,92	3,5334	,64324	,145	,409	-,149	,798
Social cohesion score nb according to municipality questions (Mean 4/4: rev_networks2, networks3, belonging1, helpfulness1)	33	3,00	5,00	3,8258	,53211	,343	,409	-,380	,798
Social cohesion score nb according to municipality q (Mean 4/4: rev_networks2, networks3, belonging1, helpfulness1)	31	2,00	5,00	3,5726	,69280	,220	,421	,080	,821
Valid N (listwise)	31								

Figure E10

Normal distributions of social cohesion scores of the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.
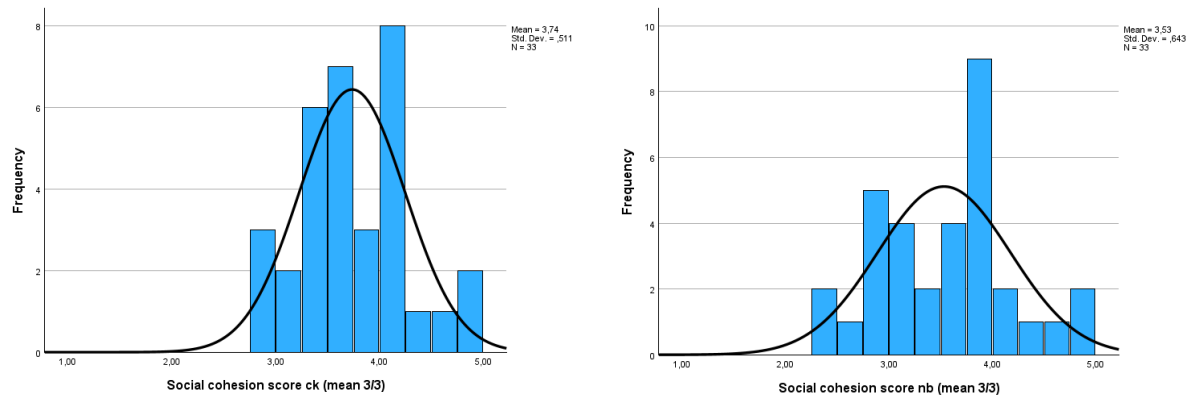
Figure E11

*Normal distributions of social cohesion scores of the community kitchen and neighbourhood level according to municipality composite variable.*
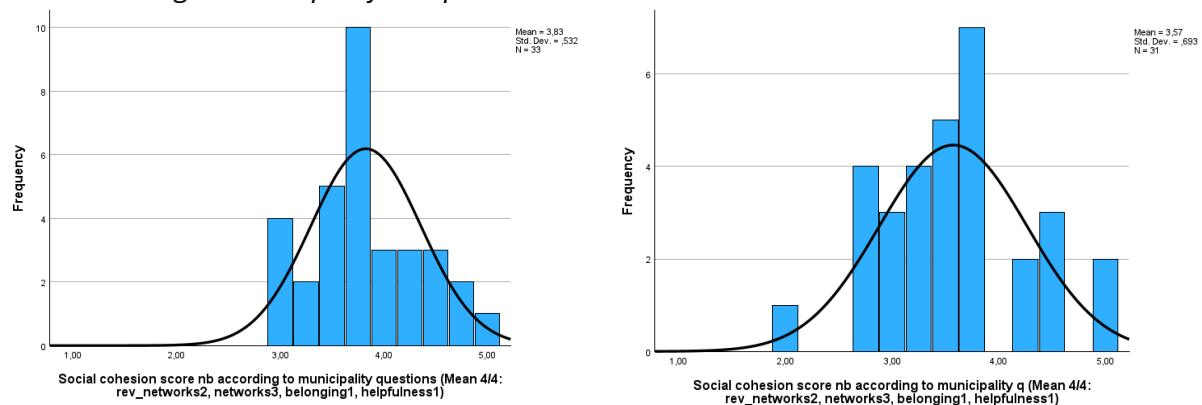
Table E4

Descriptive statistics including Skewness and Kurtosis values for all reasons to join

Descriptive Statistics

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Kurtosis Std. Error
Score food quality (mean 2/2)	33	3,00	5,00	3,9242	,57447	,051	,409	-,392	,798
Score social connection (mean 2/2)	31	2,00	5,00	3,8387	,71165	-,125	,421	,372	,821
Score food waste (mean 2/2)	33	1,00	5,00	3,9091	1,14192	-1,287	,409	1,125	,798
Score financiall support (mean 3/3)	33	1,00	5,00	3,7172	,91333	-,644	,409	1,115	,798
Score practical support (mean 2/2)	32	1,00	5,00	3,5469	,91015	-,832	,414	1,166	,809
Score shared meals (mean 2/2)	32	2,50	5,00	4,0000	,72956	-,066	,414	-,774	,809
Score cultural exchange (mean 3/3)	32	1,00	5,00	3,8229	,81203	-1,473	,414	4,215	,809
Valid N (listwise)	31								

Figure E12

Normal distributions of score food quality & nourishment
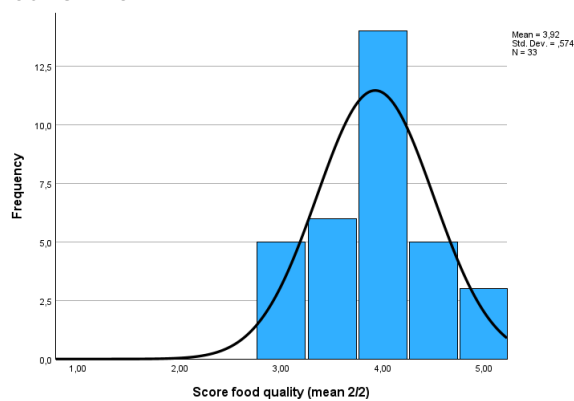
Figure E13

Normal distributions of score social & emotional connection
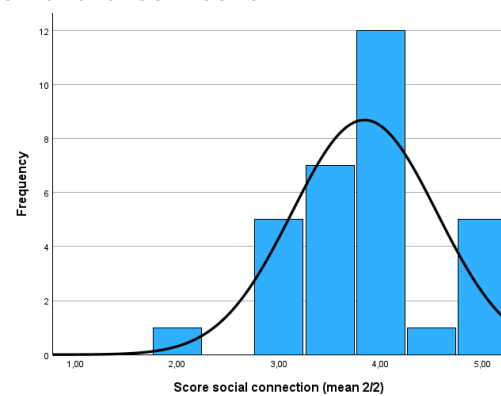
Figure E14

Normal distributions of score food waste
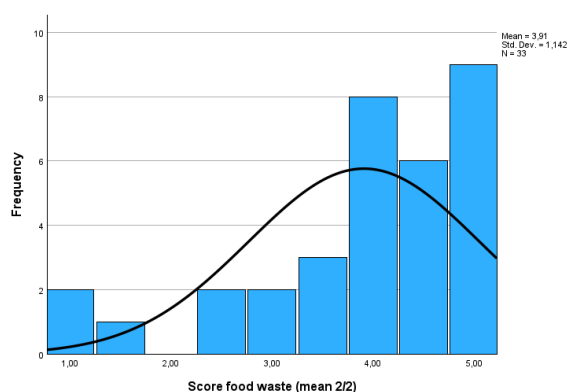
Figure E15

Normal distributions of score financial support
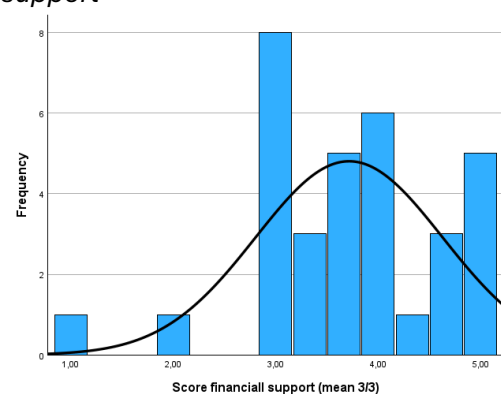
Figure E16

Normal distributions of score practical support

Mean = 3,55
Std. Dev. = ,91
N = 32
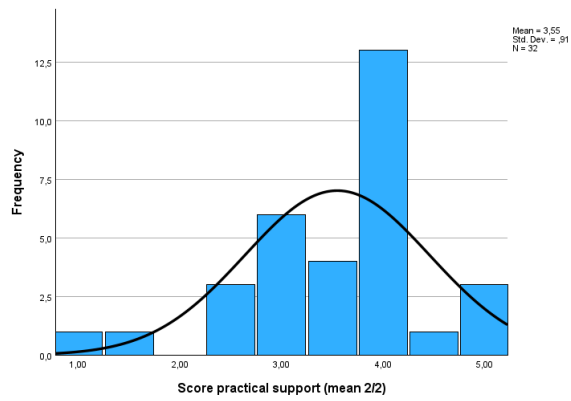
Figure E17

Normal distributions of score shared meals & togetherness
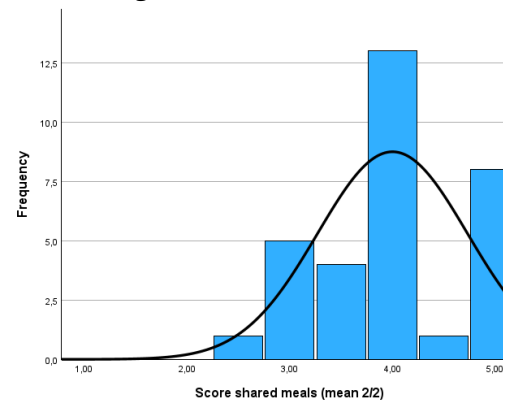
Figure E18

Normal distributions of score cultural exchange

Mean = 3,82
Std. Dev. = ,812
N = 32
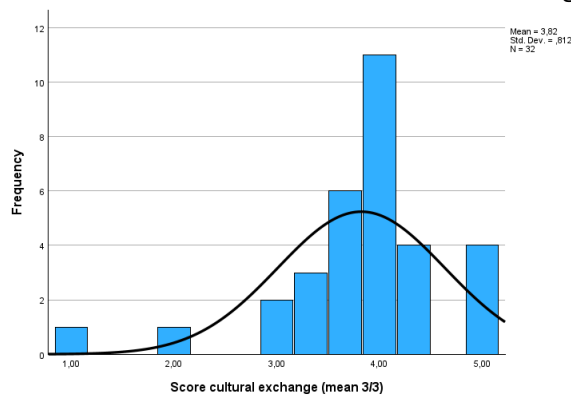
Appendix F – Reliability analysis

Table F1

Reliability analysis of all computed variables

Variable	# items	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Decision	Notes
Score sub-dimension				
Social networks (CK)	3	.52	Reviewed	Unreliable (α ≤ .60)
Social networks (CK)	3 à 2	.52 à .67	Excluded item 1	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Social networks (NB)	3	.72	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Participation (CK)	3	.44	Reviewed	Unreliable (α ≤ .60), deleting an item does not improve alpha
Participation (NB)	3	.61	Included	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Trust (CK)	3	.60	Included	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Trust (NB)	3	.64	Included	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Acceptance (CK)	3	.68	Included	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Acceptance (NB)	3	.70	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Overall score dimension				
Social relations (CK)	12	.74	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Social relations (NB)	12	.81	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Belonging (CK)	4	.73	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Belonging (NB)	4	.78	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Orientation common good (CK)	4	.68	Included	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Orientation common good (NB)	4	.81	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Social cohesion score				
Social cohesion (CK)	3	.80	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Social cohesion (NB)	3	.87	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Reason to join				
Food quality & nourishment	3	.53	Reviewed	Unreliable (α ≤ .60)
Food quality & nourishment*	3 à2	.53 à .76	Excluded item 2	Reliable (α ≥ .70)

Emotional & social connection	3	.65	Reviewed	Acceptable for few items, but removing 1 item can increase alpha to reliable
Emotional & social connection	3 à 2	.65 à .86	Excluded item 1	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Food waste	2	.86	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Financial support	3	.86	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Practical support	3	.69	Included	Acceptable for few items (α ≥ .60)
Shared meals & togetherness	2	.81	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)
Cultural exchange	3	.89	Included	Reliable (α ≥ .70)

Note. All variables with five or more items showed acceptable reliability if α ≥ .70. For the variables with fewer items (≤ 4), values of α ≥ .60 were considered acceptable.

Appendix G – Differences in social cohesion perceptions between groups

Table G1

Descriptive statistics of perceived social cohesion scores for the community kitchen and neighbourhood level.

Group	n	Mean (CK)	SD (CK)	Mean (NB)	SD (NB)
Gender					
Women	23	3.80	0.46	3.69	0.59
Men	10	3.71	0.58	3.49	0.62
Age					
50–64	10	3.54	0.43	3.48	0.49
65+	8	3.83	0.56	3.69	0.66
Income level					
Low	14	3.82	0.44	3.63	0.57
High	14	3.72	0.56	3.62	0.63
Country of birth					
Netherlands	23	3.72	0.54	3.74	0.62
Outside Netherlands	7	3.89	0.35	3.74	0.43
Neighbourhood residence					
≤10 years	7	3.79	0.55	3.57	0.74
>10 years	21	3.73	0.52	3.64	0.58
Travel time to CK					
≤15 minutes	13	3.87	0.53	3.82	0.57
>15 minutes	17	3.66	0.53	3.46	0.58
Visit frequency					
Weekly	23	3.78	0.58	3.54	0.65
Less than weekly	8	3.69	0.29	3.57	0.71
Total visits					
1–20 visits	12	3.70	0.48	3.55	0.66
>20 visits	21	3.76	0.52	3.52	0.65
Time visiting					
<1 year	16	3.63	0.40	3.52	0.58
>1 year	17	3.83	0.59	3.54	0.71
Eat with same people at CK					
Yes	17	3.85	0.48	3.72	0.57
No	14	3.64	0.56	3.35	0.71
Eat alone or with others					
With others	13	3.92	0.65	3.64	0.82

Alone			20	3.62	0.37	3.46	0.51
Travel time to CK							
≤15 minutes			23	3.80	0.46	3.69	0.59
>15 minutes			10	3.71	0.58	3.49	0.62

Note. CK = community kitchen, NB = neighbourhood. SD = Standard deviation

Table G2
Descriptive and Mann-Whitney U statistics of dimensions of community kitchen social cohesion between groups.

Grouping variable	Group	Dimension	N	Mean	SD	U (Mann–Whitney U)	p (2-tailed)
Travel time	0–15 minutes	Social relations	13	37.908	0.49029	80.0	0.200
	15+ minutes	Social relations	17	36.025	0.45088		
	0–15 minutes	Belonging	13	39.231	0.58081	71.0	0.092
	15+ minutes	Belonging	17	35.147	0.65830		
	0–15 minutes	Orientation to common good	13	39.038	0.72556	108.5	0.932
	15+ minutes	Orientation to common good	17	38.529	0.52335		
Eat with same people	Eats often/always	Social relations	17	38.004	0.49210	82.0	0.141
	Switches often	Social relations	14	35.714	0.43222		
	Eats often/always	Belonging	17	38.382	0.52247	96.0	0.351
	Switches often	Belonging	14	35.000	0.94054		
	Eats often/always	Orientation to common good	17	39.118	0.62463	105.0	0.574

	Switches often	Orientation to common good	14	38.512	0.57936		
Duration visit	< 1 year	Social relations	16	35.696	0.34862	113.5	0.416
	> 1 year	Social relations	17	37.741	0.54773		
	< 1 year	Belonging	16	34.688	0.58363	88.5	0.081
	> 1 year	Belonging	17	38.235	0.83743		
	< 1 year	Orientation to common good	16	38.594	0.58430	128.5	0.784
	> 1 year	Orientation to common good	17	39.069	0.60084		
Age	< 65	Social relations	10	36.530	0.40345	103.0	0.932
	> 65	Social relations	21	36.861	0.49976		
	< 65	Belonging	10	34.500	0.68516	74.0	0.182
	> 65	Belonging	21	38.333	0.60381		
	< 65	Orientation to common good	10	36.250	0.35843	64.0	0.079
	> 65	Orientation to common good	21	40.119	0.65896		
Eating company	Alone	Social relations	20	35.220	0.27796	80.0	0.065
	Not Alone	Social relations	13	39.103	0.59944		
	Alone	Belonging	20	35.375	0.58081	91.0	0.143

	Group	Dimension	N	Mean	SD	U	p
	Not Alone	Belonging	13	38.269	0.92638		
	Alone	Orientation to common good	20	37.875	0.56937	96.5	0.211
	Not Alone	Orientation to common good	13	40.321	0.59758		

Note. N = number of respondents; SD = standard deviation; U = Mann–Whitney U statistic; p = two-tailed significance. Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine differences between groups. Significant level of p < .05 level.

Table G3
Descriptive and Mann-Whitney U statistics of dimensions of community kitchen social cohesion between groups.

Grouping variable	Group	Dimension	N	Mean	SD	U (Mann–Whitney U)	p (2-tailed)
Eating company	Alone	Social relations	20	3.405	0.454	114.00	0.555
	Not alone	Social relations	13	3.541	0.755		
	Alone	Belonging	20	3.513	0.656	112.00	0.503
	Not alone	Belonging	13	3.673	1.002		
	Alone	Orientation to common good	20	3.475	0.643	106.00	0.371
	Not alone	Orientation to common good	13	3.705	0.925		
Age	<65	Social relations	10	3.427	0.381	99.50	0.816
	>65	Social relations	21	3.550	0.635		

			N	Mean	SD		
	<65	Belonging	10	3.550	0.848	94.50	0.653
	>65	Belonging	21	3.738	0.645		
	<65	Orientation to common good	10	3.500	0.500	91.00	0.549
	>65	Orientation to common good	21	3.714	0.792		
Duration visit	<1 yr	Social relations	16	3.418	0.493	135.00	0.971
	>1 yr	Social relations	17	3.497	0.671		
	<1 yr	Belonging	16	3.594	0.741	133.00	0.913
	>1 yr	Belonging	17	3.559	0.873		
	<1 yr	Orientation to common good	16	3.563	0.798	131.50	0.870
	>1 yr	Orientation to common good	17	3.569	0.750		
Retirement	<65	Social relations	10	3.427	0.381	99.50	0.816
	>65	Social relations	21	3.550	0.635		
	<65	Belonging	10	3.550	0.848	94.50	0.653
	>65	Belonging	21	3.738	0.645		
	<65	Orientation to common good	10	3.500	0.500	91.00	0.549

			N		SD	U	p
	>65	Orientation to common good	21	3.714	0.792		
Eating company	Alone	Social relations	20	3.405	0.454	114.00	0.555
	Not alone	Social relations	13	3.541	0.755		
	Alone	Belonging	20	3.513	0.656	112.00	0.503
	Not alone	Belonging	13	3.673	1.002		
	Alone	Orientation to common good	20	3.475	0.643	106.00	0.371
	Not alone	Orientation to common good	13	3.705	0.925		

Note. N = number of respondents; SD = standard deviation; U = Mann–Whitney U statistic; p = two-tailed significance. Mann–Whitney U tests were used to examine differences between groups. Significant level of $p < .05$ level.

Appendix H – Differences in reasons to join the community kitchen between guests

Table H1

Mean scores for reasons to join BuurtBuik per group

Group	N	Food quality	Social connection	Shared meals	Food waste	Practical support	Financial support	Cultural exchange
income								
Low income	14	3.78	3.96	4.29	3.92	3.50	3.76	3.78
Higher income	14	4.1	3.76	3.79	3.89	3.00	3.40	3.64
Age								
<65	10	4.05	3.75	3.85	3.95	3.25	3.30	3.43
65+	21	3.88	3.93	4.10	3.98	3.67	3.89	4.00
Travel time								
≤15 min	13	4.08	3.88	4.19	4.00	3.81	3.87	3.79
>15 min	17	3.85	3.88	3.88	3.88	3.29	3.61	3.76
Time visiting								
<1 year	16	3.94	3.81	3.94	3.84	3.47	3.69	3.69
>1 year	17	3.91	3.87	4.06	3.97	3.63	3.75	3.96
Eat with same people								
Yes	17	4.09	3.97	4.12	4.03	3.53	3.75	3.88
No	14	3.79	3.69	3.85	3.68	3.58	3.64	3.72
Eat alone or with others								
Alone	20	3.90	3.75	3.85	3.90	3.48	3.62	3.67
With others	13	3.96	4.00	4.25	3.92	3.67	3.87	4.08
Loneliness								
Not lonely	14	3.68	3.58	3.69	3.82	3.62	3.74	3.87
Lonely	18	4.08	4.03	4.22	4.14	3.64	3.85	3.78
income								
Low income		3.78	3.96	4.29	3.92	3.50	3.76	3.78
Higher income		4.1	3.76	3.79	3.89	3.00	3.40	3.64
Age								
<65	10	4.05	3.75	3.85	3.95	3.25	3.30	3.43
65+	21	3.88	3.93	4.10	3.98	3.67	3.89	4.00
Travel time								
≤15 min	13	4.08	3.88	4.19	4.00	3.81	3.87	3.79
>15 min	17	3.85	3.88	3.88	3.88	3.29	3.61	3.76
Time visiting								

<1 year	16	3.94	3.81	3.94	3.84	3.47	3.69	3.69
>1 year	17	3.91	3.87	4.06	3.97	3.63	3.75	3.96

Note. Descriptive statistic presented here is the mean score.

Table H2

Results of Mann-Whitney U tests for differences in reasons to join between groups of BuurtBuik guests.

Dependent Variable	Grouping Variable	U	Z	Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)
Food quality	Income feeling	67	-1.509	0.131
Food quality	Loneliness	76,5	-1.978	0.048
Shared meals	Income feeling	60	-1.846	0.065
Shared meals	Age	84	-0.933	0.351
Shared meals	Eating company	82,5	-1.528	0.126
Shared meals	Table partners BuurtBuik	90	-0.892	0.373
Shared meals	Loneliness	67	-2.088	0.037
Food waste	loneliness	121	-0.194	0.846
Food waste	Table partners BuurtBuik	104,5	-0.586	0.558
Practical support	Income feeling	33	-3.073	0.002
Practical support	Live close	81,5	-1.252	0.210
Financial support	loneliness	111	-0.579	0.563
Financial support	Income feeling	58	-1.861	0.063
Cultural exchange	Eating company	84,5	-1.419	0.156
Cultural exchange	Loneliness	97,5	-0.799	0.424

Note. Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted to examine differences in reasons for joining BuurtBuik across groups of guests. U = Mann–Whitney U statistic; Z = standardised test statistic; Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = two-tailed p-value. Differences were statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Appendix I – Codebook thematic analysis

Table I1

Codebook created during the thematic analysis in Atlas.Ti

Code group	# codes	code
Introduction + travel time ck	4	Duration of attendance
		Referral source
		Travel time
		Visit other ck?
Reasons to join	6	Convenience
		Financial support
		Food preference
		Food waste
		Meal sharing
		Social connections
Atmosphere & experience at CK	9	Comparison with other ck
		Familiar faces
		humour
		Meal takes too long
		Pleasant atmosphere
		Pleasant atmosphere but crowded
		Positive interaction
		Positive interaction with volunteers
		Safe atmosphere
Friendships & connections made in CK	4	New acquaintances
		New friendships
		Relationship with other guests
		Shared cultural interests
Help & support	5	Direct help
		Help through presence & social contact
		Looking out for each other
		Sharing life experiences (help)
		Social activities outside of BuurtBuik
Atmosphere & experience nb	12	Atmosphere of nb
		- Atmosphere of nb positive
		- Atmosphere of nb negative
		Changes in neighbourhood
		International vs local community
		municipality
		Neighbourhood events
		Relationships with neighbours
		- Relationships with neighbours positive
		- Relationships with neighbours negative
		Social interaction with neighbours
		Covid 19

Benefits of BuurtBuik	7	Benefit - company
		Benefit – cultural exchange
		Benefit – good experiece
		Benefit – good food
		Benefit – good service
		Benefit – less food waste
		Benefit – takeway food
Relationships ck – nb	8	BuurtBuik connection with neighbourhood
		Impact participation ck on nb – additional activity
		Impact participation ck on nb - improved
		Impact participation ck on nb - none
		Participation in external events
		- Participation in external events – no change
		- Participation in external events – positive change
		Stronger community feeling in ck
Social cohesion (CK)	8	CK: social cohesion
		CK: social cohesion: social networks (social relations)
		CK: social cohesion: participation (social relations)
		CK: social cohesion: trust (social relations)
		CK: social cohesion: acceptance (social relations)
		CK: social cohesion: belonging / attachment
		CK: social cohesion: helpfulness (orientation to common good)
		CK: social cohesion: respect for rules (orientation to common good)
Social cohesion (CK)	8	NB: social cohesion
		NB: social cohesion: social networks (social relations)
		NB: social cohesion: participation (social relations)
		NB: social cohesion: trust (social relations)
		NB: social cohesion: acceptance (social relations)
		NB: social cohesion: belonging / attachment
		NB: social cohesion: helpfulness (orientation to common good)
		NB: social cohesion: respect for rules (orientation to common good)

Note. Table exported from codebook generated through Atlas.Ti.