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Meeting on the marketplace: on the integrative potential of The Hague Market

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ABSTRACT
Marketplaces are important commercial and gathering places in cities. After decades of decline and negligence, they are recently rediscovered as potential meeting grounds that bring different people together. Their integrative potential goes beyond the “ground level” of the market (with encounters between traders and visitors), also uniting different stakeholders (municipalities, traders, entrepreneurs, inhabitants, social institutions) joined around the market on an “organisational level”. Using The Hague Market in the Netherlands as case, and drawing on participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this paper investigates the integrative potential of the marketplace. It illustrates how the market indeed serves as an important meeting ground for external stakeholders, but does not (yet) unify the direct beneficiaries: the local government and market traders. Top-down government planning, previous conflicts, distrust, group loyalties, diverging business views and commercial competition are important factors hampering the integrative potential of The Hague Market.

Introduction
From the early days in history, marketplaces have played a fundamental role as commercial and gathering locations in the city (Janssens and Sezer 2013a; Ünlü-Yücesoy 2013; Urbact Markets 2015a). However, due to the strong competition with supermarkets and lack of recognition of their importance by local governments across Europe (Janssens 2014; Watson 2006, 2009), they have experienced increasing decline over the decades. Yet, there are recent initiatives that try to turn the tide. The European Union, for example, has launched the “Urbact Markets” project in 2013 in order to “understand and explore the role of urban markets as key drivers of change in terms of local economic development, regeneration and sustainable living” (Urbact Markets 2015b). This initiative resonates with the – relatively recent – growing body of literature emphasising the importance of marketplaces for cities (e.g. Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015; Hou 2010; Morales 2009; Watson 2006, 2009). They are recognised as much more than just commercial areas (Ünlü-Yücesoy 2013) and framed as important urban actants and part of urban regeneration strategies (Janssens and Sezer 2013a). Marketplaces are flexible spatial and temporal organisations that can provide vivid and inclusive public spaces, facilitating an improvised and spontaneous synergy between people. They give a sense of the life and “soul” of a city (Urbact Markets 2015a).

One of the most important potentialities of marketplaces is the experience and appreciation of diversity through (meaningful) encounters with “others” (Lin Pang and Sterling 2013; Polyák 2014;
Pottie-Sherman 2013; Valentine 2008; Watson 2009). Intrinsically characterised by uniting people of different social, cultural and economic backgrounds, marketplaces can play an integrative role and support inclusive city life (Janssens and Sezer 2013a). Yet, academic research on the integrative potential of marketplaces is still relatively recent (Watson 2009), with existing studies often focusing on the everyday life on the market, including exchanges between and amongst sellers and buyers (e.g. Lin Pang and Sterling 2013; Mele, Ng, and Chim 2015; Polyák 2014). However, although bringing conviviality to the city, it is questionable to what extent these – often brief and functional – meetings on the “ground level” of the marketplace, actually lead to mentality change and prejudice deconstruction (Valentine 2008; Watson 2006).

Therefore, this paper takes the focus away from the “ground level” to what we call the “organisational level”, analysing marketplaces’ potential in integrating different stakeholders joined within and around the market. This not only includes market traders, but also the municipality, local inhabitants and other relevant actors and institutions that perform activities related to the market’s organisation. Through the creation of networks and partnerships, meetings on this organisational level could in fact result in deeper contact between the different stakeholders, thus promoting more “sustained encounters” (Matejskova and Leitner 2011). In other words, our hypothesis is that the integrative potentiality of the marketplace might rather be found “above” it, in the organisational sphere, than in exchanges performed by sellers and buyers on the “ground floor” of the everyday event of the market.

To investigate this hypothesis, we have selected The Hague Market (De Haagse Markt) as case study. It is the biggest street market in the Netherlands and located between two highly multicultural neighbourhoods of The Hague (i.e. Schilderswijk and Transvaal). The market has recently passed through extensive (physical and managerial) renovation, after being overlooked by the municipality for a long period (City of The Hague 2011). The redevelopment process required intensive contact between different stakeholders such as the local government and the traders. Yet, The Hague Market’s network extends beyond these direct beneficiaries; it also includes collaborations with less obvious partners such as local schools. As such, it is an interesting case study to investigate the level of organisational integration.

The research shows that while the market increasingly functions as meeting ground for external stakeholders (i.e. the External Realm), there are many struggles that hamper collaborations between those directly responsible for its (legal and social) management, including the local government and the market traders (i.e. the Managerial Realm). The following sections present the theoretical basis of the research, the adopted methods and the case study features that led to this conclusion.

**Marketplaces and their integrative potential**

**The rise, fall and rise of marketplaces**

In the past, cities and marketplaces were intrinsically connected and dependent on each other: cities providing location, demand and social context for marketplaces; marketplaces providing sustenance, profit and culture to cities (Bestor 2001 in Janssens and Sezer 2013b, 245). Markets were often located at the heart of urban settlements, surrounded by institutions of power. Cities gained their legitimacy to rule and their right to collect taxes from their ability to guarantee a constant flow of food and other necessary goods through the market’s presence (Steel 2009 in Janssens and Sezer 2013b, 249), which was crucial for the city’s expansion. Yet, despite this important function, marketplaces were also perceived as chaotic, messy, sinful, difficult to manage, occupying public space and a burden to residents (Janssens 2014). Paradoxically, the authorities had to both facilitate and restrict the market, as its exuberant expansion threatened the everyday life of the city. They often preferred market halls, which were easier to control in terms of prices, quality and hygiene standards (Polyák 2014).

In industrial times, the importance of the marketplace further declined due to competition with department stores and later also supermarkets. Since these were much easier to control, local governments gradually stopped supporting markets (Hou 2010; Mehta and Gohil 2013). Subsequently, marketplaces all over the world faced difficult times. In the US, many markets, especially those serving
medium to low-income communities, have failed or are facing problems with sustainability (PPS 2003). In the UK, markets have been under threat, closed down or resituated over the past 20 years, suffering from a distinct lack of investment as local authorities choose to invest in higher priority services such as education and housing (Gonzalez and Waley 2013; Watson 2009). Polyák (2014) reported that in Budapest open-air markets have been closed down and market halls turned into supermarkets because of what the city calls their “uncontrollable nature”, serving as magnets for “loiterers, the jobless and the homeless” (Janescko 2010 in Polyák 2014, 48). Also the image of the trading profession has changed: from prestigious, independent, and family oriented – passing from father to son – to a futureless job (Janssens and Sezer 2013b; Watson 2006).

However, recent decades have witnessed a revival: “Public markets are making a comeback” (PPS 2003, 9). Farmer and craft markets have sprung up alongside more traditional marketplaces in cities throughout the US and Europe (Janssens 2014; PPS 2003), often being “reinvented” to attract relatively wealthy customers interested in local, environmentally friendly, ethical and “authentic” shopping experiences (Gonzalez and Waley 2013). It is increasingly acknowledged that markets support business activities (PPS 2003) and public health due to the provision of affordable fresh and healthy food (Morales 2009; Polyák 2014):

Local governments have re-discovered or are rediscovering the centrality of markets in their city and their relevance to urban development, their role in jobs creation and entrepreneurship and their importance for the social development of neighbourhoods. Markets have a broad impact over cities: most of the quality of life indicators are influenced, such as social development and integration, sustainability, availability of products and employment. (Urbact Project 2015c, emphasis added)

Potentialities of marketplaces

The renewed interest in marketplaces results from an increased awareness that they are not merely locations of economic transactions, but also nodes of complex social processes and generators of cultural activity (Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015; Mele, Ng, and Chim 2015; Ünlü-Yücesoy 2013). Oftentimes, when we visit a place for the first time, we head to its main marketplace to get a sense of the city. Through the bustle of traders and the chatting of customers, we feel its “pulse” (Janssens and Sezer 2013b) and its distinct identity (Mehta and Gohil 2013). Open-air markets transmit a sense of authenticity, by offering the opportunity to encounter local people and products (Brand 2005 in Polyák 2014, 57). Moreover, they can be places of cultural heritage (Lin Pang and Sterling 2013), transmitting local history, culture and traditions. Yet, at the same time, markets share certain commonalities which makes them familiar environments. That is why immigrants often look for places like markets: the routines there are similar all over the world (Reijndorp 2009) and the social codes of conduct are known (Ünlü-Yücesoy 2013). This turns the marketplace into a “cosmopolitan canopy”, where “people of diverse backgrounds feel they have an equal right to be there. In this space, they can observe and be observed by others, modelling comity unwittingly” (Anderson 2011, 278, 279). Therefore, an important potentiality of marketplaces is their contribution to the experience of diversity and integration within localities and cities (Morales 2009; Janssens and Sezer 2013a, 2013b; Lin Pang and Sterling 2013; Polyák 2014; Urbact Project 2015a).

City governments see lively international marketplaces as targeting immigrant integration (Watson 2009), intercultural relationships (Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015), neighbourhood revitalisation (Pottie-Sherman 2013) and community building (Hou 2010). PPS (2003) discovered that the greatest benefit of markets to the community is the fact that they bring people together, more so than providing products or business opportunities. This points to what we call the integrative potential of marketplaces.

For some members of society, in particular elderly and groups with weak social ties (e.g. newcomers), the market represents a crucial way to maintain social relationships (Watson 2009). For those people, having a place where they can meet and communicate is of vital importance (Urbact Project 2015a), generating senses of belonging and attachment (Ünlü-Yücesoy 2013). Of course, all public spaces facilitate diversity and sociality to some extent (Carmona 2014; Carmona et al. 2010; Spierings, Van Melik, and Van Aalst 2016), but the openness of market spaces, the proximity of stalls to one another, and
the lack of restraint on entering and leaving market sites clearly can give rise to a multitude of “easy” encounters (Watson 2009). Not all of these meetings might in fact be “large-scale and gregarious” or run very deep – often restricted to “the intimate, quiet, and even insular” (Carmona 2014, 28). Yet, these meetings are social interactions nonetheless, even when limited to a smile or nod (Janssens and Sezer 2013b). Such “unfocused interaction” (Goffman 1963) can be of great importance to urban life, because even without direct, “focused” contact, sharing spaces with people different from oneself has the potentiality to develop public familiarity, strengthen communal ties, achieve the feeling of comfortable “co-presence”, and challenge racists discourses and stereotypes of unknown others (Mele, Ng, and Chim 2015; Spierings, Van Melik, and Van Aalst 2016; Watson 2009).

**Integration at organisational level**

Most of the literature discussed above tends to focus on the integrative potential of the event of the market itself; on the daily selling activity when traders and visitors “randomly” meet and interact (e.g. Lin Pang and Sterling 2013; Polyák 2014). For elucidation purposes, this kind of integration is labelled here as “ground level”. However, to our knowledge, there have hardly been any investigations on the potential of marketplaces in fostering integration through an above layer: a network or “organisational level” where partnerships are developed around the market’s existence bounding different stakeholders, groups and projects more deeply and structurally. Hou’s (2010) research on Seattle’s night market is an exception. He showed how the collaboration of different organisations (including the Police Department, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Neighbourhoods, business associations and non-profit social service organisations) was critical to the event’s success, ensuring that all major stakeholders in the neighbourhood took ownership and pride of the market. Moreover, it created the opportunity for interaction and collaboration between individuals and organisations despite their political and ideological differences, empowering them to take on future challenges (Hou 2010, 121). As a result, not only public space benefited from the collaboration (due to a pooling of knowledge and resources), but also the public realm: the network and reciprocity among individuals and groups within the community.

With this research, we aim to investigate to what extent marketplaces facilitate integration on this organisational level. Yet, integration is a highly contested and complex concept (e.g. Matejskova and Leitner 2011; Phillips 2010; Valentine 2008; Watson 2006, 2009). We loosely define it as “bringing together” individuals and organisations with different backgrounds, capacities and interests within the “force field” of the marketplace. We assume that integration is promoted by sustained encounters (Matejskova and Leitner 2011) and the developed collaboration between members of different groups. However, this requires a certain level of social trust, equality and reciprocity (Svendsen 2014).

**Research design**

As indicated in the introduction, we have selected The Hague Market as our single case study. We considered this marketplace valuable to investigate the level of organisational integration due to the conjunction of its scale, highly multicultural location and the fact it has undergone major physical and social transformations over the past years, requiring intensive collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders. A single case study was not just the most feasible, but also the most desirable way to elaborately research the integrative potential of marketplaces, allowing for in-depth interviews and observations.

In our single case study, we mostly relied on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders. Important documents were also consulted to gather information about the recent situation of The Hague Market and the two surrounding neighbourhoods, including The Hague’s integration policy and market policy, community action plans, municipal statistics and the documents regarding The Hague Market’s regeneration.
Participant observation is a very common research method in investigating the social universe of markets (e.g. Janssens 2014; Mele, Ng, and Chim 2015; Pottie-Sherman 2013; Watson 2009). As ethnographic approach, participant observation requires spending time being, living or working with people or communities to understand them. Our participant observation consisted of a five-month internship (March–July 2015) at the Markets Department of The Hague, attending four meetings of the Market Chamber and regularly visiting the market. This allowed us to identify the main stakeholders and understand their mutual relations and responsibilities. Since the Markets Department itself is a major stakeholder, basically all interactions between projects and representations involving The Hague Market happened someway around the department. This greatly facilitated the process of selecting and recruiting interview respondents.

In total, we conducted 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with representatives of five “categories” of stakeholders: Markets Department (2 interviews), market traders (5), institutions and social projects in the market’s surrounding (4), local entrepreneurs working near the Hague Market (2) and local inhabitants (1). The number of interviewed traders is relatively large compared to the other categories, due to the group’s total population size (more than 350 registered persons). The selected traders, entrepreneurs and inhabitants were all representatives of, respectively, the Market Chamber, Entrepreneurs Chamber and Neighbourhood Chamber. This might imply that we talked to very active stakeholders, who may not represent the “average” opinion. However, precisely because we are interested in those involved in the network around The Hague Market, being actively involved is a prerequisite.

The five categories can be conjoined in two distinct groups: those directly involved in the management and performance of the market (what we define as the “Managerial Realm”, including the Markets Department and traders), and actors and institutions that are connected to the market in a more indirect way (i.e. the “External Realm”, including the latter three categories). This division is drawn for explanatory purposes and some overlap does happen. The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2015 and ranged in length between 45 and 60 min. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, coded and analysed. To respect the respondents’ anonymity, we refer to their professions instead of using names and – if applicable – to their region of origin rather than specific nationalities.

Introducing The Hague Market

Our empirical analysis is situated in The Hague – the third largest city in the Netherlands with a population of around 516,000 inhabitants. Although Amsterdam is the nation’s capital, many important institutions are located in The Hague, including the national government, ministries, embassies and the international court of justice. Subsequently, The Hague is an ethnically diverse city in the Netherlands, especially the two highly multicultural neighbourhoods that border the investigated marketplace: Schilderswijk and Transvaal. Respectively, 91.8 and 92.2% of these neighbourhoods is non-Dutch (compared to The Hague’s average of 48.8%; City of The Hague 2015a).

The Hague Market is the biggest street market in the Netherlands and supposedly even in Europe (City of The Hague 2013). It moved to its current location in 1938, when space in the city centre became too scarce due to increased traffic. The marketplace is bounded by two squares (Hobbemaplein and Hoflandplein, each with a commercial building), a street (Herman Costerstraat) and a tramline, occupying an area of approximately 23,000 m² (see Figure 1). It is regarded as an accessible meeting place where a mix of different social and cultural groups interacts. The range of products, diversity of visitors and traders’ multiple origins (see Table 1) reflect the population’s diversity: “you will find Dutch cauliflower next to fresh coriander seeds, baklava, Sharon fruit, fresh fish or catjang peas” (City of The Hague 2013). Moreover, it serves as economic motor (City of The Hague 2011), not just because of the economic activities at the market itself (offering employment for more than 1000 persons), but also triggering customers flows to nearby entrepreneurs. Visitors come from Schilderswijk (15%) or Transvaal (9%), but also from other neighbourhoods of The Hague (46%), surrounding cities (14%) and even the rest of the country (16%) (WPM Group 2009). As such, the market is certainly not a closed universe.
The Hague Market is open four days a week (Mon, Wed, Fri and Sat) and includes 526 stalls with varied products, such as clothes, shoes, furniture, fresh fish, fruits and vegetables, computer equipment, strollers and suitcases. Each operating day, approximately 35,000 people visit the market. Many of the visitors, especially those from Schilderswijk and Transvaal, are very loyal: 90% visits the market at least once a week. Shopping is the most important reason to visit the market (68%), followed by socialising (19%), illustrating not just the commercial but also social importance of the market (WPM Group 2009).

In recent years, however, a decay in the number of visitors and product’s range was noticed (city of The Hague 2011), assigned to an external combination of economic crisis and the decreasing income of local residents. Yet, research also revealed two internal bottlenecks: lacking maintenance and a restraining management system of the market (WPM Group 2009). Its physical structure was characterised by outdated and badly maintained public space, lack of resting places, unclear entrances and too narrow corridors between the stalls (see Figure 2). In 2011, the municipality and the market traders jointly signed a so-called “covenant” for The Hague Market’s reconstruction (City of The Hague 2011), which not only included plans for physical renewal, but also a rearrangement of the market’s management system.

The physical renewal started in March 2014 and was executed in four phases to keep the market fully functional during renovation. Throughout each phase, a certain part of the market was redeveloped,
with new pavement and permanent stalls replacing the former mobile containers, while the traders
could continue doing business at the adjacent Herman Costerstraat. The official opening ceremony was
on 20 November 2015. The interviews with the traders revealed that, in general, they appreciate
the renewed marketplace: “it is clean, bigger, safe (…) I am proud now” (Trader 1 – Dutch). Even so, there
are also negative sounds of traders reporting the feeling that the new layout was a top-down municipal
decision: “what they [the municipality] want, they do” (Trader 2 – Dutch). The reduced front size and
relocation in the new stalls (with traders being “geographically” reorganised) also raised resistance.
Moreover, since the refurbishment started “very late” (eight years after the first presented design), some
traders have to deal with economic setbacks: due to the lack of faith on the reconstruction realisation,
they invested in new containers that cannot be reused. In combination with the higher market rents, a
considerable number of traders are quite sceptical about their future market survival.

Next to the physical renovation, the market has also been undergoing managerial rearrangements
in the last couple of years. Traditionally, two unions represented the market traders: CVAH (Centrale
Vereniging voor Ambulante Handel, Central Union for Ambulant Trade) and VETRA. Although not being
officially divided by ethnic lines, CVAH is mainly constituted by Dutch traders, while VETRA mostly
supports the interests of foreign salesmen. There were also independent traders not represented by a
particular union. In 2011, the Market Chamber was founded, following instructions from the previously
mentioned covenant. It consists of the municipality, two CVAH representatives, two VETRA represent-
atives and four elected, non-union market traders. The Chamber provided more democracy since the
municipality previously only talked to union representatives, leaving out voices of independent sales-
men (see Figure 3).
However, the municipality did not want to negotiate with three groups of representatives and also looked for opportunities to shift responsibilities for the market’s management. One option – so the rumour goes – is the privatisation of the market, selling it to a single investor as if it was a mall. Another option is to transfer responsibilities such as the allocation system of stalls to a new traders’ cooperative. Investing in this possibility (also as a way of “defeating” the privatisation option) the Market Chamber led to the creation of the so-called Coöperatie in September 2014. The cooperative of traders is supported by the Markets Department. Representative 1 of the Markets Department described the Coöperatie as a
single organisation for us [the municipality] to deal with when it comes to give them [traders] roles or responsibilities which are now ours and therefore I strive to a membership of the co-op of 70 or 80 per cent of the people.

Thus, the aim was to develop one institution representing all traders, with “the noses in one direction” (Trader 3 – Dutch). The Coöperatie is a very recent initiative, making it difficult to assess. Traders generally express good will, although there is also resistance of union representatives that fear diminishing power. Moreover, traders will need to acquire new management skills for the cooperative to be able to take over management responsibilities in due time.

The Coöperatie fits within a broader collaborative mindset of the Markets Department. Cooperation is not only stimulated amongst traders within the collaborative, but also sought between the municipality and other stakeholders, including entrepreneurs in adjacent buildings (through the Entrepreneurs Chamber) and inhabitants of the market’s surroundings (through the Neighbourhood Chamber). Other institutions and projects in Schilderswijk and Transvaal were also approached. As discussed below, these include connections with two schools (ROC Mondriaan and De Einder) and a multicultural meeting centre (Multicultureel Ontmoetings Centrum, MOC).

Integration at The Hague Market

As outlined in the research design, we distinguish two domains of integration: the Managerial Realm and the External Realm. While the former refers to collaboration between stakeholders directly involved in the functioning of the market and its core commercial activities (i.e. the municipality and traders), the latter also includes “external” stakeholders.

Managerial Realm

The interviews revealed that collaboration within the Managerial Realm appears to be turbulent and still fragile. Traders have a rooted negative perception about the municipality due to a continuous change of personnel in charge of the market, the top-down decision regarding the market’s layout and an overall sense of “negligence”. “All the time there are new people at the Gemeente [i.e. municipality],” complained Trader 2 (Dutch). There is also a perceived distance: “the people from the municipality must come more to the marketplace itself. Not in the office, but here. Here it happens” (Trader 1 – Dutch). Such negative perceptions were partially deconstructed during the redevelopment process owing to the more collaborative mindset of the Markets Department. Nevertheless, the cooperation remains very vulnerable due to the structurally changing (physical and managerial) setting of the marketplace. For some traders the recent changes are very welcome, but for others they lead to suspicion and unrest. The Markets Department also pointed at established “salesmen behaviour” as a hampering feature for cooperation. Traders were regarded as “being very oriented on conflict and very much individual-driven (…) One of the problems is they are not very used to cooperate (…) they are not used to having a strategy or a long-term objective” (Representative Markets Department 1). Both sides thus have a relatively negative perception of each other, fuelled by previous experiences.

However, the problematic collaboration does not exist only between the local authorities and the traders, but also within these two groups. The Markets Department has differences of opinion with representatives of Town Hall (i.e. Mayor and Aldermen) about the future of The Hague Market. While the former is advocating for the development of a cooperative, Town Hall appears to be in favour of privatising the marketplace. This municipal disagreement – in combination with continuously changing personnel responsible for the marketplace and possible dismantling of the Markets Department in the future – does not contribute to the level of trust in the local government by the traders. However, in turn, these traders also have problematic internal collaboration. Although the cooperative requires them to join forces, an individualistic mindset seems to prevail. Internal competition on the marketplace, increased by the economic crisis, is said to make the traders more “selfish” and profit-oriented instead of working towards the common goal of achieving a better market.
In addition, group loyalties also hamper internal collaboration of the traders. Members of CVAH and VETRA find it painful that the power of these unions is diminishing in the new managerial system. Although sharing this sentiment, the two unions have different perceptions about their collaboration. VETRA and other independent traders of foreign background mostly believe that their ethnic origin disqualifies them in the negotiations with the Markets Department and other market representatives in the Coöperatie since they are all Dutch and mainly white. Trader 4 (South Asian background) explained:

The municipality, they are also white people mostly and the Coöperatie also. And that difference between black and white, it was, it is, and it will be (…). The municipality doesn't listen and our Dutch colleagues don't listen to us (…) So why should we work together?

The foreign traders have difficulties in expressing their opinions in the meetings conducted in Dutch, but that is not the only problem. There is also little consensus about the future functioning of The Hague Market. The often repeated claim “they don't listen to us” can rather be interpreted as “they don't agree with us”. One point of dispute is the length of holidays. While Dutch traders do not want the stalls to be closed for a long period of time, foreign traders feel that they are hampered in their routines and autonomy if their holidays are restricted. They need more time to visit family in faraway countries. Trader 5 (South Asian background) stated:

“Your shop must be open,” [according to the Coöperatie]. How is it possible? (…) This is my shop, I can close it. “No, it must be open.” (…) I think it is more difficult for us, because I have a small shop, I cannot bring any person in job [i.e. have personnel] (…) Dutch people have family here, so they don't go [on holidays to far countries], maybe you go one week and come back here.

Trader 2 (Dutch), on the other hand, described that “They [foreign traders] want not only six weeks for holidays, because they want to go three months to their own place (…) Sometimes there is a little bit of 'strike.” Trader 3 (Dutch) added: “I always walk to a wall with them [VETRA] (…). They must see that the problems that they have are not always solvable. And that is always a learning process. And that is why they are always mad”. If there really is limited power in the decision-making process or not, is something we cannot judge. Yet, the simple sense of being discriminated and unheard can have a profound impact on the foreign traders and their willingness to collaborate.

Disputes do not just run along lines of ethnicity and union membership; there are also generational differences of opinion. Older traders generally seem to have a lack of faith in a prosperous future for The Hague Market: “It doesn't matter if the market is looking better, beautiful (…) The rich men are not coming to the market (…) It is not going to help bring up our business”, Trader 4 (South Asian background) said. Younger traders, on the other hand, “want everything, they are motivated (…) when there is a customer, they smile and they are helping. And what we see in the old men is that they are grumpy” (Trader 3 – Dutch).

Overall, the integrative potential in the Managerial Realm of The Hague Market is unexpectedly low. The combination of an individually driven mentality, the commitment to social groups and cultural/ethnic as well as generational differences make collaboration between traders very troublesome. Having a complex multicultural setting with more than 350 enrolled traders, diverse branches and business opinions cause challenges to “sustainable encounters” efficiency (Matejskova and Leitner 2011). Trader 3 (Dutch) explained:

The bigger the market, the more difficult it is. The smaller the market, the better it is. You have less owners, it makes it easier to make appointments. Because you have different branches and each has its own problems, and that makes it difficult (…). On the market, people live 'in boxes' (…) [getting them] out of the boxes (…) is the difficulty on the market nowadays.

In addition, the recent physical and managerial changes added instability to the scenario, further hampering trust in each other and in the local government.

External Realm

Contrary to the frictions within the Managerial Realm, the interviews revealed that The Hague Market does function as a fertile meeting ground for other stakeholders in the neighbourhood. Within the
External Realm, partnerships are developed with people and organisations from the market’s surrounding and even the rest of the city. For example, there is collaboration between the market and two schools of practical knowledge: De Einder and ROC Mondriaan. De Einder has a stall on the marketplace since September 2014, which serves as a kind of internship agency, bridging the contacts between the traders and students of the school and providing the latter with job experience and opportunities. The agreement between the Markets Department and ROC Mondriaan already existed before the regeneration. The school has interns working in the securitisation of the market: “the market is a very good project for our students to learn to see security, safety, dangerous objects, suspect behaviour” (Representative of ROC Mondriaan). However, the market offers more than learning certain practical skills. According to the representative of De Einder, being present at the marketplace also has huge personal advantages for his students: “This is the place where they can dramatically change their behaviour. And that happened also with some people. They changed their behaviour because they like to be here (…) they feel safe, convenient”.

Yet, gains are reciprocal: next to benefits for the schools and their students, the internship projects are also a way of providing traders with assistants without requiring full working agreements and salaries. Another recent example is the use of a cleaning service provided by a local, social-oriented company that aims to provide opportunities for relatively unemployable young men who experience a large social distance to the labour market. The cleaning service is cheaper, but it is also beneficial for the people who work on the market and for the owners. It also benefits the young men, because they have a goal in their lives (…) So it is a win-win situation. And that sort of projects we want to do more in the future. It is better to grab people around your area to help them to make the market. (Trader 3 – Dutch)

In addition to these institutions and social projects, there is increased connection between The Hague Market and local entrepreneurs and inhabitants as well. During meetings with the Entrepreneurs Chamber and Neighbourhood Chamber, they were informed and consulted about the market’s regeneration. The representative of the Entrepreneurs Chamber appreciated this: “Now I hear something [for example] which phase will start (…) They are going to try to connect the Market Chamber and the buildings in front of the market, so I think it is a good thing”. Also the local inhabitants, represented by the Neighbourhood Chamber, value being contacted: by being involved via the Neighbourhood Chamber I can give my own input, (…) not that everything I say is done, which never happens if you are in a group or anything, but at least I feel heard. [Moreover], now we [her and some market traders] know each other’s face and they greet me sometimes. That is nice, yeah.

She particularly enjoyed the increased contact with the people of the marketplace: “That is a totally different world to me… So that is kind of interesting, the way they [market traders] see things. Besides, they are also very straightforward verbally – which I do appreciate, I can be that way too” (Representative of the Neighbourhood Chamber).

Interestingly, when differences were recognised by the interviewees in the External Realm, they were generally seen as a positive quality of the partnerships, as opposed to being a barrier for collaboration within the Managerial Realm. The Representative of De Einder, for example, concluded that is the strength of this project [i.e. the partnership with the market]: you must “convive” with people who don’t expect it, don’t understand this. And therefore you should be smart, be sharp. That is good I think for the development (…) not only say “yes” always, but discussions are good for a better plan.

A remarkable finding is that – despite its internal struggles – the creation of the Market Chamber/Coöperatie implied a core change concerning the possibility of constructing bridges between the market and external stakeholders. The Hague Market is now seen as a single unity from the outside, while earlier there was a lack of a board or contact person. The representative of De Einder explained: “Now there is the Coöperatie (…) and now we can conduct business with them. In the past we could not because all the market people [were] alone and one-on-one”. Because the Market Chamber/Coöperatie was only recently founded, many external projects are still in a very early – sometimes even brainstorm – stage. An example is the proposed partnership with the multicultural meeting centre (MOC),
a non-governmental institution in Scholderswijk that has the intention of helping the local poor and encouraging interaction between closed ethnic groups. The MOC and the Markets Department are currently finding legal and practical ways to donate unsold food of the market to the Food Donation Bank run by the MOC. Possibly, other collaboration projects will emerge in the future, since contacting potential partners and developing an action plan requires time, especially when depending on legal permissions and other bureaucratic matters:

I am looking for space between the rules (…) when I say to them [legal department] “you are wrong”; then the conversation stops. So I am trying to find space between the rules and by asking them "could you look at it the other way around? What if…? (…) That is not common thinking in the municipality. (Representative 2 of the Markets Department)

Yet, these bureaucratic matters do not seem to be the main hurdle for facilitating integration in the External Realm. Rather, the struggles within the Managerial Realm pose threats, as the presence of a single organisation to contact is required for external partnerships to develop. If the Coöperatie would fail, the probability of The Hague Market becoming a “closed social ground” seem very high.

Conclusions and discussion

The Hague Market is the biggest street market of the Netherlands and located within two of the most multicultural neighbourhoods of the country: Scholderswijk and Transvaal. It constitutes a complex social environment that has very recently been passing through major physical changes. Simultaneously, and perhaps with further reaching impact than the physical changes, a new management system with a cooperative approach was implemented. Although still very embryonic, this brings new possibilities, not just for the future economic performance of the market, but also for its potential to serve as an epicentre of local collaboration and social integration.

In academic literature, the meeting function of marketplaces is generally applauded. They are seen as nodes of complex social processes and generators of cultural activity (Ünlü-Yücesoy 2013), where we feel the “pulse” of the city (Janssens and Sezer 2013b) and experience its distinct identity (Mehta and Gohil 2013), local history, culture and traditions (Lin Pang and Sterling 2013). As “cosmopolitan canopies” (Anderson 2011), marketplaces attract people from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds because everybody has equal rights and routines are known at the market (Reijndorp 2009). By bringing people together, marketplaces contribute to the experience of diversity and integration (Morales 2009; Janssens 2014; Polyák 2014; Urbact Project 2015a), even if encounters are “unfocused” (Goffman 1963) and limited to a smile or nod.

We certainly see these suggested benefits at The Hague Market. As Table 1 showed, there is a large ethnic variety amongst the market traders and visitors. Our observations revealed that there is an abundance of conversations between and amongst buyers and sellers. As such, the market definitely functions as meeting ground and has integrative potential, what we broadly defined as the capacity to bring people with different backgrounds and interests closer together.

However, we wondered to what extent the market also performs as meeting ground beyond the daily selling activity – or “ground level” – of the market. Because it unites a large number of involved stakeholders, including the local government, traders, inhabitants, entrepreneurs and other institutions and organisations in the neighbourhood, the market could also foster integration on a network or “organisational level” (Hou 2010). Through partnerships, these stakeholders supposedly have longer and more intensive contact with each other, leading to more sustained encounters (Matejskova and Leitner 2011) and a larger integrative potential.

Our research findings simultaneously confirm and disprove this hypothesis. Within the so-called External Realm, The Hague Market seems to rise up to its integrative potential. Local entrepreneurs and inhabitants feel more closely connected to the market; they are involved and informed, and collaboration is sought between traders and nearby entrepreneurs. There are also partnerships between The Hague Market, two local schools and a multicultural centre, with the marketplace offering learning opportunities for students and young people with a social distance to the labour market, while reciprocally
providing cheap labour for the traders. The experience of diversity is generally seen as a merit in this External Realm, resulting in different worldviews, fruitful discussions and learning opportunities.

In contrast, the collaboration in the Managerial Realm is troublesome. The main stakeholders – the local government and market traders – lack a certain level of social trust and equality that is required for successful collaboration (cf. Svendsen 2014). The local government is accused of being too top-down and negligent, while the traders are said to be individualistic, sceptical and profit-driven. Also within these two groups, differences of opinion exist. Although the traders are in theory united within the Market Chamber/Coöperatie, they do not yet operate as a single actor in practice. There is no general consensus about how the market should function, with conflicting views divided along cultural/ethnic and generational lines. Consequently, the integrative potential is currently low in this realm.

Having just a single case study makes it difficult to assess to what extent these managerial problems are typical or atypical for The Hague Market. Its history and setting of might certainly have contributed to our findings. While the municipality and the traders have a long shared history, with the market existing at its current location for over 75 years, the partnerships with the external partners are relatively recent. As a result, there are no previous conflicts or tensions hampering collaboration between parties in the External Realm. Moreover, the low integrative potential in the Managerial Realm should be seen in the light of major transformations The Hague Market has recently passed through. Not just the physical terrain was broken down; the social structure was also deconstructed to give space to a new management system. Although the physical renewal has now come to an end, the new management model of the Coöperatie is far from being solid. This period of change brings along much uncertainty, and unaddressed conflicts become more visible and deeply felt. Now the physical renewal is finished, and roles and responsibilities of the main beneficiaries will settle, some of the scepticism and unrest might disappear. Also the location of The Hague Market in a highly diverse and international atmosphere is not typical for most Dutch and non-Dutch marketplaces. The Hague’s integration policy describes this diversity as a reason of pride and empowerment for the city (Baldewsingh 2015); however, such “extreme” diversity is not only a potential but also a big challenge when trying to achieve integration and getting “all noses in one direction”. Within this context, the relatively low integrative potential of The Hague Market is perhaps not very remarkable. We therefore advocate for more research on the integrative potential of marketplaces, also including more “ordinary” cases that are less extreme (in terms of size, transformations and ethnic diversity) than The Hague Market.

Yet, despite these particularities of The Hague Market, the research does hint at some findings that are relevant for marketplaces and public spaces beyond this specific context. Our case illustrates that marketplaces can certainly serve as meeting grounds for a diverse population, but that reaching their full integrative potential – for the time being – still requires some form of government involvement. After decades of top-down city planning – relatively common in the Dutch spatial planning tradition – other stakeholders like the market traders are not yet equipped to take over municipal duties. They still lack the management skills to arrange the market’s daily functioning, but also a common consensus about and trust in the new management system. An option could be to educate traders more about management, global tendencies of markets’ development, branch changing, etc. Such “courses” could give them more clarity about these themes beyond the walls of The Hague Market, but perhaps also foster a sense of belonging and being “cared about”. Yet, the local government should not become too patronising, acknowledging the rich practical experience of the traders, who feel that the municipality should be more reliable, continuous (in terms of personnel) and “in the field”.

The research also shows that dealing with diversity cannot be “solved” by simply equalising rights and duties, but requires flexibility and respect for different needs and aspirations. The holiday example shows that Dutch and foreign traders think differently about their vacation duration. Enforcing one single rule (e.g. a specific number of weeks allowed to be away from the market) – although “democratically” applying to all traders – will hamper some more than others. Instead, an alternative – less
“homogenising” – option could be thought of such as having temporary traders to cover empty spots during the holiday season, thus addressing the needs of a diverse group of traders.

In conclusion, markets definitely have a potential for the negotiation of differences and integration at their “ground level”, but for integration to really flourish on the “organisational level” of the marketplace, the most deeply involved stakeholders (i.e. municipalities and market traders) need trust, knowledge and perhaps even empathy for their mutual differences.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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