Societal Participation Through the Eyes of People of Low Literacy and Non-native Migrants

Results of a participatory design study with people of low literacy and non-native migrants in the Netherlands on the barriers of societal participation.

2013-2014

Dylan Schouten, Rosie Paulissen, Anita Cremers, Marieke Hanekamp, Annemarie Groot, Knup Fuhri
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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is a result of an exploratory study into the societal participation of Dutch people of low literacy and non-native migrants in the Netherlands. The aim of this study was to gain insight into the issues people of low literacy and non-native migrants experience in day-to-day societal participation, particularly as they relate to reading and writing ability and information and communication demands. This study serves as a part of the COMMIT P02 WP8 ‘Social Conventions Learning in Mixed Reality’ project, which investigates the use of virtual learning environments as societal participation learning support for people in these demographics.

The data in this study was gathered in a series of participatory workshops with native Dutch people of low literacy and non-native migrants living in the Netherlands, in interviews, and through the ‘cultural probe’ method of qualitative data collection (Gaver et al., 1999). Using Schouten’s (2013) model of societal participation, participants were asked to talk about and report about their experiences with participating in society in various contexts. Workshops and interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the cultural probes yielded spoken, written and photographed material made by the participants. This material was analyzed using Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in order to arrive at the current results.

Results of this study are presented as a four-part model describing the concepts and factors that play significant roles in the societal participation experiences of low-literates and non-natives. The personal category describes the factors attributable to the individual itself: cognitive skills and knowledge and experience, emotional and affective factors, socio-cultural influences, needs, and self-efficacy and motivation. The formal and informal categories describe societal factors, in accordance with Schouten’s (2013) model. The informal category contains the concepts of support, social conflict, and the social consequences of being low-literate or non-native, while the formal category contains societal norms and values, barriers to participating in formal society, the notion of stigmatization of low-literates and non-natives, and the role of technology in society. Finally, the interaction category describes factors related to the way people of low literacy and non-native migrants interact with formal and informal society: this takes the shape of the attributes of both information and communication messages and learning behaviour.

This report presents an in-depth overview of these four categories, including overviews of the general data structure and the sub-categories underlying the four main categories. Categories and sub-categories are explained in detail, and highlighted with quotes and pictures taking from the cultural probe data where appropriate.

Acknowledgements
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Factors influencing societal participation of people of low literacy and non-native migrants in the Netherlands:
2. PERSONAL

SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION
people of low literacy & non-native migrants

PERSONAL

- SOCIAL-CULTURAL
- COGNITIVE SKILLS
- EMOTION AND AFFECT
- KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE
- MOTIVATION
- SELF-EFFICACY
- NEEDS

INFORMAL

INTERACTION

FORMAL
COGNITIVE SKILLS

‘Cognitive Skills’ category topic: Issues relevant to people of low literacy and non-native migrants that relate to cognitive skill development and mastery.

General
For low-literate and non-native participant both, the most interesting subset of cognitive skills (as relates to the topic of societal participation) is that of language skills. This language skill-subset is explored in its own node tree, Language Skills. Similarly, the idea of cognitive coping strategies for dealing with situations that fall outside the remit of current skill levels and comfort is explored in Coping Strategies.

Low-literates

“Uh, math is also a factor, uh... you rightly said that it’s not just reading and writing but also calculation. Eh, I think they call that not dyslexia, but dyscalculia...”

For low-literate participants in particular, two additional cognitive skill-related elements surfaced. First, attention was paid to the (semi-off-overlooked) math dimension of low literacy, which can be as much of an impediment to societal participation as the more well-known language comprehension dimension. Low-literate participants also expressed difficulties with recall, especially where highly information-rich, detail-heavy tasks and environments were featured. More study on this aspect could be beneficial (possibly/likely/partially from literature).

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
"Coping Strategies’ node topic: The cognitive strategies people of low literacy and non-native migrants develop and use in order to deal with difficult societal participation demands.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Earlier work, particularly with low-literate participants, has revealed a preponderance for these people to employ certain coping strategies in order to deal with - and work around - their low literacy. These coping strategies allow them to engage in at least a satisfactory level of societal participation without having to ‘come out’ as being low-literate, something they try to avoid due to Stigmatization and Fear.

The use of heuristics and mental shortcuts is mentioned as a way of dealing with situation where issues of content complexity (Content) and use constraints (Constraints) threatens to exhaust and overwhelm. ‘You recognize that bit of information, so you just work with it.’ ‘You only have to read this and that, and ignore the rest’.

The occurrence of societal participation avoidance behaviour can also be seen as a kind of coping strategy, in line with these heuristics: participants make a snap judgement on whether or not engaging with a certain information-communication message is ‘worth their time’, and can and will decide not to engage with something if the pay-off seems unlikely or highly taxing.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
LANGUAGE SKILLS

"Learning Needs" category topic: Needs and desires expressed by people of low literacy and non-native migrants as they relate to learning.

General
Both low-literate and non-native participants express several kinds of issues related to their (general) Dutch language skill level. Participants very often report having difficulties comprehending language and extracting meaning in its entirety: it is often difficult (or even self-perceived as impossible) for them to extract the meaning from an information-communication-message. The difficulty of (Dutch) grammar interact negatively with certain aspects of the message itself, such as language use (Language) and content (Content).

Low-literates
Low-literate participants report additional issues of general complexity when it comes to language skills and language understanding. These issues should probably be looked into closer later down the line.

"I received a letter recently, really incredibly complicated! [...] I had someone read it, who uh... is pretty well-educated, a lawyer, that I know. [...] If you bring me someone to help, who goes just you wait, sit right here, and starts typing all that stuff in... that way you can directly see what it all means, otherwise you don’t understand the whole letter!

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

"Difficult to read, sometimes. I get a letter from the government, but it's difficult..."
‘Emotion and Affect’ category topic: Emotions and affective factors reported by people of low literacy and non-native migrants in the context of societal participation experiences and issues.

General
Several emotions/affective factors have been found to be relevant and/or influential with regards to the topic of the societal participation of low-literates and non-natives. These emotions are all further explored in their respective node trees.

Emotional factors of interest are:
- Fear
- Frustration
- Pride
- Shame
- Stress
- Surprise

Low-literates
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
FEAR

‘Fear’ category topic: Examples of and attributes relating to the fear experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General

With regards to the fear, the only principal overlap between people of low literacy and non-native migrants can be found in the significant levels of fear with regards to societal participation they exhibit. The later specified sub-topics of fear found are all in some way related to participating in society, but a more general sense of fear about the concept of societal participation can nevertheless be seen quite often.

Low-literates

Low-literates report a large number of overt fear topics. A strong fear of being outed as low-literate is present, particularly for low-literates that haven’t ‘crossed the threshold’ yet (The Threshold), and is strongly caused and influenced by the (participant perception of) stigmatization of low literacy in modern society (Stigmatization).

Fear with regards to the financial consequences of engaging in participation behaviour ‘wrong’, or participating and failing, is a common subject, one that can (in certain cases) also be seen as a fear of long-term future effects of wrongful behaviour.

Related to societal participation-financial matters and issues (see Financials), the core of these fears seems to be a worry to ‘mess things up beyond repair’. Fear with regards to uncertainty is related to this. And because of the position technology holds in modern society (Technology), fear of using technology wrong (exacerbated by the perceived permanence of technology mistakes) is a topic of significance as well.

Non-natives

Interestingly, while a significant amount of fear data was retrieved from the non-native workshops as well, some non-native participants actually report a lack of fear with regards to societal participation in situations where fear was expected to be a factor. Phone avoidance behaviour, for instance, mentioned in Medium, was explained not as a result of fear, but rather as a result of skill deficiencies and a preference for personal interaction (Personal Contact).

Yeah but some people don’t know, so they’re afraid of it. Now my money’s gone, now what?

So I went to Deurne, I happened to go in and I thought dammit, you just know I’m going to run into someone! Neatly suited up, nice tie, and you know. I come in, ooh, it’s you! It’s... it’s crazy, but I thought... there’s going to be someone there. [...] That’s the fear you have. And before you can deal with that fear... before you cross that threshold...

[after question ‘are phone calls scary’] No, not really. [...] I’ll call, but I don’t understand... phone....
FRUSTRATION

‘Frustration’ category topic: Examples of and attributes relating to a sense of frustration experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
Without our current data set, frustration has only been mentioned in the context of frustration due to slow learning. As frustration as an emotional state is well-known, a second coding set with this emotion (and others) in mind could be beneficial.

Yeah, well I want do things much faster, but then, then I can’t do it, and then you run into this wall again.

Low-literates
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
PRIDE

‘Pride’ category topic: Examples of and attributes relating to pride experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
In the results of the cultural probe study in particular, both low-literate and non-native participants express a great deal of pride in their accomplishments. Pride with regard to societal participation is a particularly broad field of pride, but still useful to encompass various otherwise-unconnected participation-related activities that our participants report being proud of. More specifically, participants report pride about going to school, pride about writing, and pride with regard to complex information understanding. It’s interesting to note that many of these topics have also been found on the self-efficacy side of things (Self-efficacy). Is the pride on display here a result of self-perceived improvement and pushing boundaries?

Participants in both demographies also report a pride about creating something, which is perhaps less intrinsically related to societal participation.

Low-literates

Low-literate participants additionally report pride with regards to technology use. As low technological self-efficacy is, for them, a factor of both their low-literate nature and attributes like age, pride in overcoming these barriers seems natural.

“Reading to my son.”

Non-natives

Non-native participants additionally report pride with regard to helping out others. Intuitively, this could be a counter-reaction on living in a society where your participation and your contributions are seen as lacking and value-less: actually, tangibly helping someone would probably feel really good in this case.

“I went to school, to the ROC, to take classes, I’m really proud of that.”
SHAME

‘Shame’ category topic: Examples of and attributes relating to a sense of shame experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Based on previous, unpublished work, the topic of shame has received some prior attention. In the data, shame primarily surfaces among low-literates, expressed as shame with regards to insufficient reading-writing skill. The social stigma of low literacy, written about in Stigmatization, is used as an explanation for the occurrence of shame-related feelings in low-literates.

For such a major topic, there are relatively little mentions of shame in the current coding of the data. A recoding focused more on the emotional side of things seems to be in order for multiple reasons.

Currently, mentions of shame are only found in the low-literate data. This is in line with prior expectations, but should obviously not always be taken for granted (during the aforementioned recoding).

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

A low-literate person... often if you approach them- and we in school, we’ve reaped a lot of benefits from this... it’s like, they take the first step, to cross that threshold. But... once they’ve taken that step, and you say one thing to that low-literate person: you don’t have to be afraid, that the other people in your town find out you’re taking classes here... that relieves this tension on these people, like you’ve never seen before.
STRESS

‘Stress’ category topic: Examples of and attributes relating to stress experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
The stress mentioned in our current data seems mostly a result of real or imagined social judgement and social pressure in time-sensitive, 'difficult' situations. Contrary to other data nodes, this stress does not seem to be a direct result of stigmatization of low literacy and/or low reading-writing skill, but is rather more related to societal expectations of and demands on time and speed. As this concept has not been coded for or looked at, no further data links can be made here at the moment.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

“Traffic is really difficult for me. What I have is, in certain situations I can’t read traffic signs quickly enough. Because either the light starts blinking or turns green again, or someone behind you starts honking their horn, or it’s just incredibly busy, and you just can’t read things fast enough.”
**SURPRISE**

'Surprise' category topic: Examples of and attributes relating to a sense of surprise experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

**General**
No general aspects have been found in this category.

**Low-literates**
While the notion of surprise is not inherently positive or negative, the data node of being surprised or overwhelmed currently covered under this category is unilaterally negative. Low-literate participants report 'being surprised' in the sense of 'suddenly being confronted with an unexpected and/or difficult situation, and not knowing what to do.'


"When I lost my job, I had to register myself for benefits and everything. Well, they give you this envelope, good luck, here's the computer. And you're just flabbergasted, because you can't do anything, because... I can hardly read or write, so... I can't even get unemployment benefits! So yeah, that's really difficult, because in that moment you're really faced with that dilemma, that was really awful for me. One of the worst moments I've experienced in my life, really. That they hand you this thing and hey, figure it out yourself."

**Non-natives**
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

‘Knowledge and Experience’ category topic: Societal participation-related issues caused by/related to various kinds of knowledge and experience possessed by (or not possessed by) people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
Possession of the correct knowledge and experience, or lack thereof, is a significant factor in successful societal participation. Possessing the needed knowledge and experience can stimulate new behaviour in spite of fear (Fear) and low self-efficacy (Self-efficacy). Not possessing this knowledge and experience, or feeling like you don’t possess this knowledge and experience -- itself a strong indicator of low self-efficacy -- can inversely be a powerful impediment to participation behaviour.

Low-literates
Low-literate people report that they occasionally weigh the benefits of acting and the costs of not acting in ‘difficult’ situations. This weighing of factors is not strictly financial-functional, though: affective factors are involved as well (Emotion and Affect).

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

Each of these categories are further explored in their respective node trees.

Broadly, the knowledge- and experience-related issues and stories shared by participants can be divided into four categories:

- Background
- Society Knowledge
- Language Mastery
- Technology Knowledge

You’re not used to something like that, right. [...] Reporting on your day like that. [...] And then when you try it, it’s the same as with that other thing, you get these weird half-formed sentences, you get... then you lose your way entirely.

Maybe you can save a lot of money that way... but as a low-literate person, you’re afraid to start doing it.
'Background' category topic: Aspects of the knowledge and experience gained from one's personal development background, and how this knowledge and experience influence societal participation.

**General**
No general aspects have been found in this category.

**Low-literates**
Intuitively, the background one came from has a major influence on their reading-writing prowess and information and communication skill levels, their expectations and assumptions in society (see for instance Formal Institutions), and their accepted norms and values (Norms and Values).

**Prior academic experience** is mentioned as a strong potential causation factor for low literacy. Particularly poor prior academic experience, either caused by or a leading factor in causing poor self-efficacy (Self-efficacy), seems to be influential both in causing low literacy, and in helping the problem persist.

Why am I here? Because I couldn’t do anything in school back in the day. Yeah, that’s the basis! That’s how that works! You can’t catch up anymore after that.

**Non-natives**
Non-native migrants in the Netherlands always bring a part of their cultural background with them.

Specific instances of this can be seen in Social-Cultural, and again in Norms and Values, but many other examples exist. These cultural factors can be a significant influence on life and participation in the Netherlands, particularly in cases where the originating culture is significantly different from the new host culture.
LANGUAGE MASTERY

“Language Mastery” category topic: Issues caused by/related to levels of (Dutch) language mastery.

General
Both low-literates and non-natives report issues with translation, although the direction of these translation problems are probably inverted across target groups (similar to Information and Communication Needs). Remember that for the low-literates, the (increasing) use of English terms in Dutch society was considered a major stumbling block (Language).

Sometimes, uh, filling out a form, you get a few words that are, uh, quite different. And it’s... yeah. If you... you read it and, what’s that? And then you translate and oh, it’s something else entirely.

Low-literates
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives

Being ‘polite’, that’s not the same as being ‘neat’?

Language mastery issues with societal participation are primarily the domain of the non-native migrant target group, who experience particular difficulties with societal participation in the Netherlands because of this (Social Consequences). Perhaps the single most easily identifiable problem here is their Dutch language uncertainty, which could also be called ‘insufficient Dutch vocabulary knowledge’. Or, in layman’s terms: they simply don’t know the correct Dutch words for expressing their ideas. Evidence for this idea can be found in the participants’ propensity for using non-Dutch words to get the point across in a wide variety of situations. These data nodes (and the nodes linked to it) make a very strong case for the importance of including “standard” language learning, especially vocabulary expansion and things like grammar and reading strategies (Language Skills) into a societal participation learning system/program.

I find it difficult to fully understand Dutch people.
SOCIETY KNOWLEDGE

“Society Knowledge” category topic: Issues caused by/related to knowledge and experience with society.

General
In a similar vein to their technology-experience issues (Technology Knowledge), many problems related to societal participation experienced and reported by low-literate and non-native people can be attributed to a lack of operant knowledge with regards to societal participation. ‘I don’t KNOW how to DO this thing’. A lack of experience-based knowledge makes engaging in societal participation behaviour that much more difficult, which makes it that much more frightening, which exacerbates existing issues related to low self-efficacy (Self-efficacy).

Inversely, situations where the presence of knowledge does lead to successful participation behaviour underscore the perceived importance and usefulness of learning (see Motivation). The subset of shared stories relating to financial diligence show this well. One can also make a point for the importance of situatedness from these examples: as financial issues are clearly a major thing for (at least) these target groups (Financials), learning about this is not only seen as important and worthwhile, but actually pursued with a certain degree of vigour.

Low-literates
Related to the two general aspects a little, certain low-literate participants express a certain uncertainty about societal processes. The examples provided all had a strong financial element: ‘I don’t understand how they can do this, for so little money’. This aspect may not necessarily be low-literacy related, however.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

What we have here is an NH, NHA from West, money back, I didn’t graduate. But how, how does that all work? If you, how do they make money, you get all these gifts and if you don’t graduate you get your money back. It’s baffling that it can work like that. I don’t get it.

[...] so I ask, yeah, what should I do with [a formal letter from the bank]? Should I cancel it, should I keep it, eh... yeah. What am I supposed to do here?
TECHNOLOGY KNOWLEDGE

'Technology Knowledge' category topic: Issues caused by/related to knowledge and experience with technology.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Many issues that people of low literacy run into with regards to technology can be explained by way of their lack of knowledge and experience with it. While certain participants are certainly technology savvy to a degree, most of the stories shared and questions asked display an unfamiliarity with modern technologies borne from lack of exposure and use.

"It was difficult at the start, because you don’t really know what... but once you understand it a little, you can start..."

Reasons for this lack of exposure include age (many low-literate participants in particular are of advanced age), fear with regards to technology (Fear), low self-efficacy (Self-efficacy), and technology use complexity (see Medium, for instance).

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
MOTIVATION

‘Motivation’ category topic: Aspects, factors and examples relating to the role of and effects of motivation in the societal participation of people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
The role of motivation in engaging in and persisting with all kinds of behaviour is well-documented (although it hasn’t been memo’d yet here). For people of low literacy and non-native migrants, the concept of motivation plays a salient role in their societal participation.

While low-literates and non-natives both report a certain motivation to participate, many other factors play into any given decision to do or to not do. These factors are explored in their own node trees: factors related to starting things and persisting can be found in Starting Something, Persisting, while factors related to avoiding things and quitting are found in Avoiding Something, Not Persisting.

"Yeah, but I really like that, because it’s really educational. It also removes that uncertainty of going there. And that’s a big step for people to begin with! So I think that’s really important."

Specifically related to learning, the (in-vivo) concept of ‘the threshold’ provides an encompassing look into the social, mental and affective factors involved in starting language learning for people of low literacy. This concept is further explored in The...
AVOIDING SOMETHING, NOT PERSISTING

‘Avoiding Something, Not Persisting’ category topic: Aspects of avoiding the start of some (societal participation-related) endeavour, and factors related to the choice to quit.

General
People of low literacy and non-native migrants sometimes choose to quit engaging in certain behaviours or to avoid certain behaviours altogether. Two potential reasons/explanations for this have been found in the data.

In some cases, the decision to quit is made when people find themselves reaching the limits of their ability with regards to reading, writing and information understanding. For people with low levels of reading and writing skill (Cognitive Skills), absorbing and comprehending complicated messages can be a mentally fatiguing affair that taxes the willpower. At some point, a message of behaviour can prove ‘too much’, leading to them abandoning it. A pre-emptive fear of this happening can also lead to a decision to not engage in the first place, which can be seen as a coping strategy of some sort (Coping Strategies).

Low-literates
In other cases (currently only found with low-literate participants), rather than a cognitive skill-related exhaustion, people may instead display the more affective response of not wanting to start with or continue with a certain behaviour, showing a refusal to engage or act. This refusal to continue (usually) has a very strong emotional dimension (Emotion and Affect). Examples from the data currently can currently be divided into two general response patterns: a more angry ‘I’m fed up with this’, and a more resigned ‘I’m just not going to bother’. In either case, however, the behaviour in question is either abandoned, or not picked up to begin with.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

This node is, obviously and by design, counterpart to Starting Something, Persisting.
STARTING SOMETHING, PERSISTING

‘Starting Something, Persisting’ category topic: Aspects of starting some (societal participation-related) endeavour, and factors related to the choice to persist.

General
Once started on particularly ‘difficult’ behaviours, the importance of persistence is clearly underscored by both low-literate and non-native participants. Both demographics tell stories about particular events that ‘triggered’ them to get started: triggers for engaging in learning and triggers for societal participation in general are reported. These triggers represent a certain event, experience or (new-found) need that is highlighted as the ‘turning point’ (or ‘trigger point’, if you will) that made the participant decide that engaging in this behaviour was now worthwhile.

Yeah, a little bit every time. You just have to try, have to keep trying [...] and then be mad for three hours once or twice, that’s a part of it.

Low-literates
For people of low literacy, the choice of getting started on certain societal participation behaviours -- learning, technology use, social media -- is reported as being a significant moment. These startup issues are often mentioned in the context of technology use, and next to the aforementioned societal participation and learning triggers that play into this, triggers for learning technology use were mentioned a few times as well. In this particular case, the potentially inviting nature of technology and services can be a factor of interest.

Particularly for learning, the perceived importance of learning as a supporting factor for personal development and increasing societal participation also plays a role of some significance.

[...] my wife is in England now, yeah, I can’t do that, but my daughter does it for me and then we Skype her together.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

This node is, obviously and by design, counterpart to Avoiding Something, Not Persisting.
The core idea of the threshold, a construct reported on by low-literate participants, is that it represents a barrier between two discrete and opposite mental states. ‘Pre-threshold’ people of low literacy behave in a shy, fearful, hiding way: in part because of the societal stigmatization of low literacy (Stigmatization), they are very fearful of being ‘found out’ as being low-literate (see Fear), particularly by people in their close social environments (which, given aspects of Negative Consequences, may not be entirely un-justified). As schools are public places, and classes and lesson plans are long-running projects with many other people involved, the threshold primarily manifests itself as a reluctance to become involved in school-based literacy learning.

‘Post-threshold’ people of low literacy, on the other hand, have committed to engaging in this kind of school-based literacy learning. This has exposed them to many positive aspects of learning, such as help from teachers, interaction with peers, and the benefits of skill level growth with regards to reading and writing (see Learning Attributes for more on these). Perhaps most importantly, contact with these peers makes the post-threshold low-literates realize that they are not the ‘only one’ with these kinds of issues (Social-Cultural), and that the stigmatizing general idea of low-literacy being an indicator of low skill and intelligence is largely unfounded. All of this conspires to raise self-efficacy in many aspects of their life (Self-efficacy).

Consequently, post-threshold low-literates tend to turn around completely as far as shyness and hiding are concerned: their need to be heard (Need to be Heard, Need for Attention), and possible a need to help others (briefly seen in Social Consequences) outweigh their now-defunct fear of being found out. Extensive story sharing and proactive study participation are a result, and many participants informed us of their attempting to improve the situation, either for themselves or for other low-literate people in general.

In general, the idea of the threshold can be connected to expressed notions of the importance of bravery, and the perceived importance of pushing boundaries when it comes to learning in general. The threshold represents the largest, most significant mental and social hurdle that a person of low literacy needs to overcome in order to really make progress in self-improvement.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
‘Needs’ category topic: Needs related to areas of societal participation, as expressed by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

**General**
Many needs, wants, wishes, problems, and desires, related on some level to areas of societal participation, were expressed by our participants. These needs have (currently) been divided into four node trees: Needs with regard to information and communication messages and behaviour (Information and Communication Needs), needs with regard to leaning (Learning Needs), needs with regard to technology (Technology Needs) and the need to be heard and to be paid attention to (Need to be Heard, Need for Attention). These needs are further explored in their respective node trees.

**Low-literates**
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

**Non-natives**
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS

“Information and Communication Needs’ category topic: Needs and desires expressed by people of low literacy and non-native migrants as they relate to various aspects of information and communication messages and behaviour.

General
When it comes to information and communication messages and behaviour, our low-literate and non-native participants have expressed a number of wants, needs and desires that (they feel) would improve these messages and behaviours for them. Generally speaking, these needs appear to be experience-based reflections of the information-communication-message aspects discussed in more detail in Information-Communication Attributes.

Both low-literates and non-natives expressed a desire for clearness and simplicity in message meaning, short length in message size, and the availability of language options for better understanding. The former three options seem to express the desire that the content of the message, the steps involved in the behaviour or the use of the technology in question should be able to be comprehended by everyone. The desire for language options has similar aims, though it’s worth noting that the actual direction of these

language options is more or less inverted across demographics: people of low literacy want more Dutch, whereas non-natives seem to want less of it.

With regards to presentation, participants expressed a desire for personal contact so strongly that this topic has been captured in its own node sub-tree (Personal Contact).

Low-literates
Low-literate participants have expressed some additional information and communication needs

and desires. Guidance and good explanation were identified as important factors related to their information and communication life. Furthermore, in an analogue to the language options, low-literate participants also suggested offering the use of audio instead of text. In both cases, providing customization options that play into the strength of the participants (allow them to avoid their weaknesses) is seen as a desirable change here.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

“Use simple language, so that even a child can understand it. Then other people will get it too. People who didn’t go to school for that sort of stuff, or people who aren’t familiar with it.

It could be... made easier, yeah, stepwise, one part at a time. Don’t show too much at once, because then, uh... you lose your way. And that makes it even more difficult!"
PERSONAL CONTACT

‘Personal Contact’ category topic: Aspects of the needs and desires of low-literate and non-native migrant participants with regards to personal contact.

General
A subset of their needs with regards to information and communication in general, both low-literate and non-native participants often expressed a desire for personal interaction in both spheres of messaging and behaviour. Particularly the idea of a hostess -- the archetypical idea of a personal point of contact/guide in difficult situations -- was raised quite often. Intuitively, this desire seems strongly correlated with the desire to be heard and listened to (Need to be Heard, Need for Attention) overlapping with a desire to learn and grow (Learning Needs).

Correspondingly, the notion of people and institutions using an impersonal approach was lamented.

If there’s a problem, I can call, I’ll be, how do you call that, supported, sure. But see, over the phone, I can’t absorb it very well. So for me, I need eh... what’s the word? Just examples, one-on-one.

Next to the aforementioned impersonal approach, low-literate participants also spoke of the impersonal nature of technology as a negative factor.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Low-literate participants in particular displayed a face-to-face communication preference, and were generally very positive about the idea of personalized help in all forms. Personal, face-to-face interaction would likely alleviate some of the issues this demographic experiences with regards to medium (Medium) and language (Language), owing to reasons of adaptability.

... so you get this callcenter on the line, yeah, so that’s a woman who should... a host or hostess is what they should be. And they should be able to explain to you the things they know, uh, understand what you’re asking.
LEARNING NEEDS


General
The most immediate learning need put forward by both participant groups is probably their base desire to learn. Both people of low literacy and non-native migrants in our studies express wanting to learn to a significant degree. Note, however, that the fact we got our workshop participants in classroom settings has probably skewed views here a little.

Low-literates
Low-literate participants spoke of their desire for guidance and supervision. Likely related to their need for personal contact (Personal Contact), participants reported really enjoying and even requiring personal teacher- or expert-assistance in their learning. Situatedness in learning, or the use of meaningful real-life examples, was brought up as well.

Non-natives
Topics raised by the non-native participants were more of a curriculum-technical nature: some non-native migrant participants complained about inconsistent lesson plans, and about how different language skill levels in different student groups are currently insufficiently taken into account.

I speak English, so the teacher said, you’re very smart... you’ll understand Dutch. But I don’t, that’s wrong. I understood it in English, but that’s not the same as understanding it in Dutch.

I go to school because I want to learn to speak and write better.

[in reply to ‘do you have people at home who can help you?’] Yeah, I could do that, you know, but... a teacher is very important, and like-minded people.
NEED TO BE HEARD, NEED FOR ATTENTION

'Need to Be Heard, Need for Attention’ node topic: Aspects and expressions of participants’ desires to 'be heard', to make themselves be heard.

General
Both low-literate and non-native participants were very quick to share examples from personal experience during the data gathering workshops. Low-literate participants often offered suggestions and tips in their own accord, telling stories without prompting, and were generally very engaged and active during the workshops. The non-native participants were a little less proactive, which could be because of language-based communication issues (Language Mastery) or cultural differences (Social-Cultural). Both participant groups, however, occasionally complained about a sense of not being listened to.

Low-literates
The low-literate ambassadors in particular also engaged in proactive partaking in the study quite a lot.

"Should I do that with you later, then I’ll stick around for longer.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

"...That woman had a very good story, you know, like you have to do this, and that, and than you can do such and such, and that all went pretty well until the end. Then she told me, you can also check www.volunteerwork. Yeah, and that makes me wonder, did these people actually listen to what you said?

This tendency to share stories, particularly with people of low literacy, seems to contrast to what we know about shame and hiding low literacy (see Shame, and probably ties into the concept of ‘the threshold’ (The Threshold).
TECHNOLOGY NEEDS

‘Technology Needs’ category topic: Needs and desires expressed by people of low literacy and non-native migrants as they relate to technology.

General
Where modern technology is concerned, there does not really seem to be any single ‘demographic’-wide stance on technology: many personal preferences with regards to technology were expressed by as many people. These preferences should probably be investigated further, and re-coded, in order to make them represent actually useful data.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
With regards to technology use, people of low literacy do generally express a preference for simple tools, and a liking of ‘simple technology’, over more complicated modern technology.

Yeah, but I wouldn’t know, because look… I think it’s interesting to know, you know, now I have a better idea of what Twitter is, because you hear about that a lot […] okay, it helps, but… but I’m going to be cautious about for a little while more, you know?

Well, I mail very little, because I, I… I prefer calling. […] Just turning that thing on makes things difficult… so, uhm, so calling is way easier. And much more live.
While this split in specific self-efficacies makes intuitive sense, with regards to these uncertainties, it is currently unclear whether or not this division is the result of actual demographic differences, or if more careful re-coding is required. There does not seem to be a clear reason why non-natives wouldn’t display uncertainty in the face of difficulties, and the idea of low-literates not experiencing uncertainty with regards to societal participation can almost immediately be discarded.

Low-literates
Low-literate participants also report a specific low self-efficacy with regards to writing, as well as occasional uncertainty in the face of difficulties.

"Yeah, but that’s difficult for me as well, like with the computer, not just [...] I can’t write either, right, so for me, it’s... writing is really difficult for me, [name] knows that too, and putting the words in the right place and that’s always difficult for me, and then sometimes I just get stuck."

Non-natives
Non-natives, on the other hand, report specific low self-efficacy with regards to speaking Dutch, as well as a general uncertainty with regards to societal participation.

"I find it difficult to pick up the phone and call. Speaking, writing, and understanding Dutch are still very hard for me."
“Social-Cultural” category topic: Judgements, perceptions and beliefs related to society, culture and societal participation expressed by low-literates and non-native migrants.

General
When looking at the social-cultural beliefs side of people of low literacy and non-native migrants, only a few things seem to be common for both of them. Issues of trust and distrust in certain societal elements are common enough that these are explored in their own node tree (Trust, Mistrust), and both low-literates and non-natives express a certain tendency towards conflict avoidance, which seems to relate to (Social Conflict).

Low-literates
Because of the social stigmatization of low literacy and the associated/resultant invisibility of the problem (Stigmatization), many low-literate people experience a sense of being the only one with these kinds of issues. This is, in effect, a society-style judgement: they believe that no-one else in society is ‘like them’. The negative connotations of low-literacy mean that this judgement makes them feel inferior and embarrassed (Shame). This, in turn, explains their incredibly strong and (unfortunately) often very successful attempts at hiding (their) low-literacy from the world. Which, in turn, contributes to the problem’s invisibility.

Non-natives
Non-native migrants run into some issues related to the discrepancy between their cultural expectations and Dutch cultural expectations. For example, people from cultures where respect for elders is a major element run into problems of deferred or avoided social conflict (again, Social Conflict) with elderly people.

We talked about class before. Before you take that step into Dutch classes, that’s a major step for me at least, to do that. That’s, eh, just going through that door was a major step, so... but it is the first step. And then you immediately notice that you’re not the first one. Or the only one.

I thought to myself, I can get rude, or... no, I think to myself, never mind. They haven’t listened to my story anyway, otherwise you don’t say things like that.

I don’t do anything [with regard to social conflict with older neighbour]! But... I’m Jamaican, and I have a lot of respect, for older people. But... you, sometimes... I think, it’s all not so good.
‘Trust, Mistrust’ category topic: Judgements and perceptions of trust or mistrust related to societal participation expressed by low-literates and non-native migrants.

**General**

Our low-literate and non-native participants expressed several interesting examples of trust or distrust related to societal institutions. Possibly due to study direction and/or coding focus, distrust was found more commonly: many participants vocalized attributions of negative intent when talking about the actions or choices made by (especially) formal institutions. ‘They’re doing it to bully us’, ‘they don’t care about us’, ‘they just want our money’. A perceived unwillingness to help was a particular example of this: for whatever reason, many institutions and people are attributed not wanting to help people with reading and writing issues.

Low-literates

Trust was mainly found in this demographic, in the context of trusting authority. Doctors in particular: countermanding or debating a doctor ‘is just something you don’t do’, because ‘they’re the doctor’.

> Back then, at the doctor, if he said take three pills a day, you wouldn’t dare take two. [...] He said three, right!

Non-natives

No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

> Yeah, I’ve encountered in the past, that... they just don’t want to help, in some way. So I get this idea of, like for instance when talking about finances, that... would I be eligible for this thing or that thing? And then, they somehow twist everything in such a way that, you haven’t learned anything useful at the end of the conversation.
3. INFORMAL

SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION
people of low literacy & non-native migrants

- SOCIAL CONFLICT
- SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES
- SUPPORT
- INTERACTION

PERSONAL

INFORMAL

FORMAL
SOCIAL CONFLICT

‘Social Conflict’ category topic: The occurrence of (and consequences of) conflicts within one’s day-to-day social environment, as experienced by people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives
The occurrence of social conflict, or ‘conflict within one’s day-to-day social life’, intuitively seems like a major influencing factor on societal participation behaviour and success if and when it happens.

From our current data, it seems that particularly non-native migrants run afoul of social conflicts with close-by social actors, particularly neighbours. In these cases, language (Social Consequences) and culture differences (Social-Cultural) seem factors of causation: an inability to communicate easily and different expectations and moral values lead to difficulties. Interestingly, most participants report being hesitant to actually ‘fight’ in such a conflict, instead preferring avoidance behaviour (as described in Coping Strategies).

Eh, I live in an apartment with many... old people, and I’m the youngest. Uhm... and I have a problem there. Because, with... my TV is on, my neighbours shows up, I can hear your TV!
3. INFORMAL > SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

‘Social Consequences’ category topic: The (informal-setting) social consequences associated with being a low-literate native Dutch citizen or a non-native migrant citizen of the Netherlands.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Strongly related to the ‘negative social feedback’ aspect of Negative Consequences, low-literate participants report an aspect of social judgement of low literacy in their informal social environment. Not being able to read and write is, after all, in contrast with commonly-accepted cognitive-social norms (Norms and Values). It’s possible that this kind of social judgement plays a role in the occurrence of social isolation among low-literates, though data on this is inconclusive.

The notion of accidental exposure to information was brought up in relation to the knowledge one needs to effectively participate in society (see also Knowledge and Experience). People of low literacy have a reduced capacity to seek out and comprehend this knowledge on their own, leading some of them to rely on accidentally learning this information from support networks and happenstance.

Participants also reported lamenting their inability to help others as a consequence of their low literacy, particularly in the context of the older (low-literate) participants being unable to help younger family members with various things.

Non-natives
Non-native migrant existence in the Netherlands is associated with having a small support network. This (understandably) reduces the occurrence of and effectiveness of direct-social-environment support (Support), and reaffirms the importance of language understanding as a prerequisite for full-fledged societal participation (see Impediments for examples).

Culturally dictated language restrictions were mentioned as well: non-native migrant participants living in smaller Dutch communities experience difficulties with other inhabitants simply not speaking English. This is, somewhat interestingly, opposed to low-literate issues with the increasing use of English terms in Dutch society (Language).

Participant do report experiencing the first-hand benefits of improving societal participation, ‘fitting in better’ over time.

‘...my six-year-old niece is dyslectic, and it’s pretty useful if you yourself can write pretty well, then - other people can learn from that better, to... read and write a word correctly.

‘[I find it difficult to] explain why massaging is painful sometimes.'
SUPPORT

‘Support’ category topic: Aspects of support and help originating from one’s immediate, close-by social environment.

General
Support plays a major role in societal participation learning. Both low-literate and non-native participants report receiving help from a great number of sources: we can identify help from family, help from friends and acquaintances, help from neighbours, and the use of situational help as common in both groups. (Note that other sources of help, such as help from official institutions and help from teachers and experts, have been coded into different nodes: Formal Institutions and Learning Attributes.)

Using help of this kind is not unilaterally positive, however: participants identified a number of negative consequences to using outside help, which are explored in more detail in the Negative Consequences node tree.

Low-literates
Help can be of the functional variety, but low-literate participants also mentioned the role of moral support as being important for their motivation to engage and persevere in behaviour (Starting Something, Persisting).

I thought this letter was a little difficult because I couldn’t understand everything about it, but my sister helped me out and now everything is okay.

Non-natives
One additional kind and source of help for non-native participants was help from Dutch speakers: either native Dutch participants, or other migrants with higher skill levels.

I, uh, my husband helps [with reading difficult letters]. I’m married to a Dutch man. And yeah, that’s easy for me.

[...] You learn from each other and the teacher. Talk together at school and hearing everyone’s opinion.

[...] And they’ll often say, uh, 99% will say that’s really positive, good job guy, keep it up! And... and I like hearing that...
Especially when related to technology, the information society norms to reading, writing and technology use (Norms and Values) can lead to prospective helpers assuming a degree of understanding on the part of low-literate users that simply isn’t there, thus hampering learning and potentially increasing dependence on this source of help.

This dependence on outside help then leads into the consequences of losing outside help: by not/never having learned to do things ‘for yourself’, the loss of outside sources of help can be crippling and debilitating.

What I do sometimes is send mails to my father [...] and then when I visit in the weekend, he uh... he tells me, you made over twenty mistakes.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
4. FORMAL

SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION
people of low literacy & non-native migrants

TECHNOLOGY

BARRIERS

INTERACTION

STIGMATIZATION

NORMS AND VALUES

INFORMAL

PERSONAL

FORMAL
‘Barriers’ category topic: Factors playing a role of any significance in formal societal participation.

General
A subtopic of the larger ‘formal society’ header, this topic deals with societal factors that play a clear and significant role in the active behaviour of formal societal participation. While other factors mentioned in relation to formal society shape (for instance) the context and expectations of societal participation, factors under this header have a more direct impact on the occurrence of and shape of participating behaviour.

As a major determining factor of ‘formal’ societal participation, the attributes of and experiences with formal institutions participant reports form one node tree (Formal Institutions). This tree strongly relates to Impediment, the impediment node tree, which deals with various social, legal, financial and technological matters that impeded successful societal participation behaviour. The legal aspect is also caught in the legal node tree, Rules.

Low-literate
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

‘Formal Institutions’ category topic: Aspects of the way people of low literacy and non-native migrants view and interact with formal institutions.

General
Viewed from a general perspective, this relationship between demographics and institutions is characterized strongly by what people perceive to be attributes of this kind of institution in general: see child node Attributes for an in-depth look into these attributes, as well as Impediments for the cross-overlap between these nodes.

Based on both these attributes and on the role these institutions play in societal participation and in daily life, participants can be said to have expectations of formal institutions. The expectations mentioned were primarily either neutral -- ‘the power company should keep the power up, that’s what we pay them for’ -- or negative -- ‘the banks are going more and more impersonal’ -- with almost no kind words being reserved. Correspondingly, the attitude towards formal institutions on display is mostly negative... though examples of good (unprompted) behaviour and received help from agencies have been mentioned as well.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Interestingly, one topic that low-literate participants brought up is that of the consequences of low reading-writing skill for formal institutions themselves. It is clear that low literacy and cultural- and language-related differences make life difficult for people of low literacy and non-native migrants, but this lack of successful information-communication behaviour can hurt formal institutions as well. ‘Safety at work’, compromised due to reduced reading ability, was offered as an example, and used to imply that these institutions can have good (non-altruistic) reasons for wanting to reduce low literacy and language deficiencies as well.

...make companies aware, that it’s for their own safety too, because... if people can’t read or write...

route designation at the hospital ...for many people it is very difficult until they come and ask.
ATTRIBUTES

‘Attributes’ category topic: Those aspects of the way people of low literacy and non-native migrants view and interact with formal institutions, that can be characterized as being (intrinsic) attributes of those institutions.

General
‘Formal institutions’ -- e.g. banks, insurance agents, store chains, and the government -- are viewed in a certain light. Specifically, participants attribute a set of attributes to this type of institution in general. These attributes are generally rather negative, though that may or may not be an artifact of our current study design. They also primarily relate to the interactions people have with these institutions, for much the same reason.

Perceived intensities of these attributes differ somewhat. The complex language use by formal institutions is experienced almost as bullying, ‘picking on people who can’t read and write well’, and institutions are near-held accountable for the fact they don’t do anything to change this: this node has Impediments as its prime classification for exactly this reason. And there is often a very negatively-experienced power imbalance between customer/citizen and institution: this is experienced particularly strongly in the area of housing.

Low-literates
As mentioned in Impediments, low-literate participants experience the somewhat) common occurrence of diffusion of responsibility, of ‘being sent from pillar to post’, in the light of the institutions ‘making things harder than they should be’. On the other hand, while institutions are also perceived as having conflicting interests -- for instance, customer service call centers ‘want’ to help you, but ‘have to’ keep costs and call times down as much as possible -- this attribute does not necessarily represent active malice on the part of the institution (though it is seen as a negative thing).

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

“ [...] You get this callcenter, so this woman that... a host or a hostess, that’s what they should be. And they try to explain to you what they also know, to understand what you’re asking [...] a lot of people are hired in those callcenters, and they’re told that this and this will be asked, but - okay, they have to, you know, they have to help people as quickly as they can! So as short as...
**IMPEDEMENTS**

‘Impediment’ category topic: Those factors of participating on in formal society that are experienced as impeding, hindering, making life ‘more difficult’.

**General**

The impeding factors to formal-societal participation can broadly be divided into four topics: language factors, institution factors, technology factors, and financial factors (not treated in this memo, but see Financials). Note that some overlap between factors invariably exists, however.

Complex language use by formal institutions is often named as a significant impeding factor on the formal institution side of things, for reasons that -- seen through the lens of the current demographics -- seem fairly straightforward (see Language Skills). Other factors that both low-literates and non-natives perceive as problematic are societal impediments to learning. The importance of learning to improving societal participation is well-underscored, but legal rules and decisions, particularly with regards to finance and subsidy, are experienced as reducing and removing opportunities for these people to learn. Again, a negative affective state towards formal society could easily be envisioned as a result.

Finally, because of the major role technology occupies in a modern information society (Technology) certain aspects of technology use are seen as impeding with regards to participation. Low-literate and non-native people have difficulty in using technology, an issue that is only exacerbated by the error-prone nature of modern technology. These factors amplify any existing problems with information-communication interaction, in effect creating an additional barrier to successful formal-societal participation.

**Non-natives**

For non-native participants, language is a factor in formal-societal participation insofar that people see participation being conditional on language understanding. You can’t participate if you can’t understand information-communication messages (see also Language and related links). ‘If you speak Dutch, and if you know the rules, you’ll be fine’; inversely, if you don’t... This language barrier can also be a factor in -- or an excuse for -- the experience non-natives report with people ignoring or misrepresenting their input.

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**Low-literates**

Low-literates report on two additional particular factors, primarily related to dealing with formal institutions (Formal Institutions): the experience of a diffusion of responsibility, ‘being sent from pillar to post’ and a general unwillingness to adapt to low-literate and non-native needs. The latter in particular seems to indicate a generally negative affective state with regards to these formal institutions (see Social-Cultural and child nodes for more), which could easily reduce motivation to participate and act (Motivation).

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Complex language use by formal institutions is often named as a significant impeding factor on the formal institution side of things, for reasons that -- seen through the lens of the current demographics -- seem fairly straightforward (see Language Skills). Other factors that both low-literates and non-natives perceive as problematic are societal impediments to learning. The importance of learning to improving societal participation is well-underscored, but legal rules and decisions, particularly with regards to finance and subsidy, are experienced as reducing and removing opportunities for these people to learn. Again, a negative affective state towards formal society could easily be envisioned as a result.
Financials

‘Financials’ category topic: The subset of impeding factors to societal participation that involve money and financial issues.

General
Not all financial issues people of low literacy and non-native migrants run into are necessarily related to their specific situation and abilities: participants report cost-of-living expenses, health expenses and insurance, and the costs of internet and television as relevant issues. These issues are still probably exacerbated by their low-literate or non-native status, but it’s not clear whether or not they are caused by them (i.e. they seem larger issues).

A certain subset of reported issues, however, can clearly be defined as the financial consequences of reduced reading-writing ability. Differences from regular financial issues are subtle, but clear: the fact that health insurance costs a lot of money every month is something that many people run into... but mistakenly assuming coverage where there is none and running into additional bills as a result of not reading the insurance terms correctly is clearly either a reading-writing comprehension problem (see Cognitive Skills) or a motivation-to-put-effort-into-it problem (see Motivation).

Another interesting subset of reported financial issues involves the financial costs of getting help. While this is, again, an issue many people run into, it’s clear that people of low literacy and non-native migrants suffer from this to an advanced degree, seeing as though they (generally) NEED more help. Out of the three nodes, this one represents the clearest actual formal-societal impediment to societal participation for these people.

Low-literates
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

“Yeah, the barbecue collection is nice, but you have to buy ten boxes first... and then you get this package with only two things in it, only two parts of the collection... I think that’s misleading, you need to buy forty boxes to get the whole thing.”

“One time, I made an appointment with my GP. And we talked, and I got medicine. And I got home, and I looked, and oh. Two euro, three euro, five euro, and why? And uhm... I don’t know why I pay, every month I pay insurance, €160. And uh...”

4. FORMAL > BARRIERS > IMPEDIMENTS > FINANCIALS
RULES

‘Rules’ category topic: The legal rules and laws aspect of participating in formal society.

General
As far as the legal side of societal participation is concerned, participants have relatively little to report. Rules knowledge is mentioned as a prerequisite factor for successful societal participation: you have to ‘know what you can get’, and ‘if you know the rules right, you can participate’. In a sense, this holds for any kind of situation: see Society Knowledge for the personal trait operationalization of this. In a formal society setting, however, the legal nature of these rules carries a different kind of weight from, say, norms and values (Norms and Values). This difference can be seen expressed in the legal issues participants report as a factor of their day-to-day life.

Because-eh, in Iran, I understand the rules, but I don’t understand very well, the Dutch rules. And-eh... if you forget one thing... then, for me, that’s a big problem! So first, understand all the rules, then it’s easy! To live in the Netherlands.

Low-literates
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.

Non-natives
The idea of cultural differences regarding rules in our non-native migrant demographic is suspected, but current data does not seem to support this idea to a significant degree.

“I’m good at following Dutch rules, like separating garbage, going to school on time, staying polite.
‘Norms and Values’ category topic: Aspects of the norms and values holding in modern Dutch society that influence the day-to-day life experience of people of low literacy and non-native migrants.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Many of the concepts listed under Norms and Values can be said to deal with the way the normative make-up of current society proves difficult for people of low literacy. The increasing importance of societal self-reliance, for instance, is a topic I’ve already written at length on. The common assumption of reading and writing skill in information societies is a similar normative-value aspect that is at odds with the reality of low-literate citizens.

Non-natives
The non-native participants did not engage in this kind of past-present reflection, but they did compare Dutch society to their country of origin occasionally. Particularly the Dutch tendency of adherence to rules was called out as being a major formal-participation difference. Other cultural differences regarding norms were found too. These differences can be cast in a societal light, which is what this category does, or more in a personal trait-oriented light; the latter interpretation can be found in Social-Cultural.

It’s a lot of information, and they all always assume you can just understand what they write. That’s also, reading for understanding, they often don’t take that into account. And that’s with Facebook too, and... but it happens with a lot of things.

In my country... there’s discrimination. And no rules. But in the Netherlands, there are rules for... uh, streets, and cars, and fishing. Very good, that’s safe.

Perhaps because of the sometimes incompatible nature of modern information society mores, a number of comparisons regarding societal differences between information and societies and non-information societies and regarding societal differences between past and present have sprung up. Particularly the latter seems connected to the fact that many of our low-literate participants are/were older people -- which in itself ties into issues of shame (Shame) and motivation (Motivation) -- as many of them shared stories from ‘their time’. The state of modern technology being one major aspect of over-time change, the changing technology-related social norms were mentioned a few times too; like reading skill, there is an increasing assumption of internet proficiency that is not often mentioned in a good light.
**STIGMATIZATION**

“Stigmatization” category topic: The effects of the pervasive negative social judgement with regards to not being able to read and write very well, and about being low-literate and/or non-native.

**General**
No general aspects have been found in this category.

**Low-literates**
For people of low literacy, a big factor in perceived stigmatization is the **invisibility of low literacy**. Because low literacy is not an outwardly visible problem, participants report it being conflated with (or at least them feeling like it is conflated with) ‘being dumb’. After all, the only ‘outward’ sign of low literacy is the inability to read and write well. This ties into certain societal expectations of self-reliance as well: see **Impediments** and **Norms and Values** for more on this. People who cannot read and write very well are seen as less self-sufficient, and therefore as LESS.

“It’s small wonder, then, that our low-literate ambassadors have developed **subtle means of discovering low literacy**, aimed at avoiding the obvious ‘outing’ of low literate people (which is something they report fearing: see **Fear**).

**Non-natives**
While few of our non-native participants report overt racism (they actually occasionally report that the absence of overt racism is a part of Dutch society they greatly enjoy), one issue that did get reported was of one participant being questioned, and not being believed, likely because of their non-native migrant status and their inability to fluently speak Dutch. Discrimination of this kind would be somewhat analogous to the low-literate stigmatization, but our lack of data examples makes it unclear whether or not overt discrimination of this kind is happening much. More study is required.

“No, I called, uhm, the woman talked, and... she was not very nice to, you can’t [unclear] I don’t believe you. [...] We made these requests, but, I don’t know why, nobody believes you- me, she didn’t believe me.”

(Note that this node is not talking about internal, self-attributed causes of stigmatization! For these factors, I refer you to **Emotion and Affect**. Rather, this node discusses the external, societal factors that give our low-literate and non-native participants the impression of stigmatization.)
Low-literates
Low-literates report that the widespread nature of technology in modern-day society is experienced as a bad, frightening thing (likely related to the aforementioned general issues). And learning about technology is difficult, both in and by itself, and because of the rapid pace of technological change.

But is Facebook really, uh, safe? Because the one says it is, the other says it isn’t... what should you?...

Existing negative attitudes towards technology are exacerbated by the occasional scary representation of technology in the news. Correspondingly, many low-literates report that they feel that over-much reliance on technology has drawbacks, on a societal level. This seems like an expression of technology-specific fear (Fear), both regarding their own societal participation and the development of later generation (that grow up surrounded by this technology).

In the same vein as the benefits of technology that were mentioned, many low-literates espoused the benefits of simple tools, a class of technological complexity that they seem to prefer much more (Technology Needs).

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
5. INTERACTION

SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION
people of low literacy & non-native migrants

INFORMAL
PERSONAL

INFORMATION-COMMUNICATION ATTRIBUTES

INTERACTION

LEARNING ATTRIBUTES

FORMAL

INFORMAL
Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

General
As information expression and communication are both, in principle, about transferring information, thoughts and ideas from one (human or non-human) source to another, the attributes captured in this category can be said to apply to this principle in general. In this node and the nodes below it, this info-transfer -- whether in the information or communication domain -- will be called a ‘message’.

Five major attribute trees that play a role of significance in the connection between information-communication messages and people of low literacy / non-native migrants have been identified from the data.

These attributes are:
Content
Constraints
Language
Medium
Modality

More information on each attribute can be found in their respective memos.

Low-literate
No low-literate specific aspects have been found in this category.
5. INTERACTION > CONSTRAINTS

CONSTRAINTS

‘Constraints’ category topic: Aspects of information and communication interaction-behaviour that revolve around the constraints placed on interacting with the message.

General
No general aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
Occasionally, certain constraints are placed on interacting with information-communication messages. The nature of these constraints can be diverse: technical, temporal, social, cognitive, or other factors. The existence of time pressure and a time limit for (for instance) entering data into a form is suggested as such a constraint. Strictly technically enforced time limits are seen as problematic for low-literates because of cognitive skill issues this demographic suffers from (Cognitive Skills). However, self-perceived time limits can also crop up: ‘having a line form behind you at the ATM’, for instance, is a good example of a self-imposed time limit created by social pressure and stress (Stress).

Non-natives
Some occurrence of choice overload has been seen with non-native participants.

Usage context complexity is another factor low-literate participants report on: this factor reflects the notion that certain elements of the context of use (particularly related to modern technology in this case, see Technology Knowledge) are complex in and by themselves. Character limits are mentioned, for instance:

“...those research institutes, they have that thing where, you can use this many characters to indicate something. But one downside is space, they count the space separately, because... in that case, you’re beating on yourself immediately.

“It’s hard for me to select books that my children will like, because there are so many fun books.”
CONTENT

‘Content’ category topic: Aspects of information and communication interaction-behaviour that revolve around the content of the message (whether information of communication).

General
So far, when talking about information- and communication-interactions, the content level seems to be interesting primarily for the difficulties that can be identified there. Both low-literates and non-natives report issues of detail complexity: high levels of complicated detail in messages is experienced as off-putting, requiring a high investment of mental resources in order to be fully comprehended.

Non-natives
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates
People of low literacy report additional issues with the unclear meaning and confusing content of certain messages. Messages can also contain a degree of information density that’s experienced as being too high, leading to the mentally taxing sensation of information overload.

There seems to be a clear link between issues reported on the content level and the cognitive skills of the participants (see Cognitive Skills). Issues of information presentation also link to an additional layer of negative intent and blame attribution, casting light on the participants’ affective views on (formal) institutions (see Formal Institutions) and possible on their self-identification as being marginalized and ‘less capable’.

"Every month I have to write, how many days, how many hours... and some months, I forget. It’s a problem for me, and for others...

"...and then she says, if you walk outside the [community center] here, there’s a big board with all kinds of fun things you can undertake. Well, I took two pictures of that board [...] Maybe this way you’ll understand my problem: I can’t see the forest for the trees."
Non-natives
On the issue of ‘foreign’ language use, non-natives report running into situations where language deficiencies prevent them from being understood: they don’t speak Dutch well enough, and other people don’t speak English and/or their native languages well enough, for conversation to be possible. It’s unclear from current data how the non-natives perceive this issue: specifically, while they all seem to accept that ‘learning Dutch’ is something that’s on them, their stance on Dutch people not speaking English has not been investigated yet.

Non-natives also complain about the difficulty of understanding accents in spoken dialogue.

So you get this piece, and you run into this really difficult word... yeah, you completely lose track, and then I say... you can keep that up for five minutes, and then...

On the issue of ‘foreign’ language use, low-literates complain about the increasing degree of foreign languages and the use of English terms in all aspects of society: social media, shopping, schooling... the phrase ‘we live in the Netherlands, so why don’t they just use Dutch’ encapsulates the sentiment well. This is, again, perceived as being a society-level issue.

I can read for understanding really well, television, and if I... go to Rotterdam, I can understand well and talk well. But in Nijmegen, if you want to go shopping, they talk differently... I can’t understand what they’re saying!
5. INTERACTION > MEDIUM

MEDIUM

‘Medium’ category topic: Aspects of information and communication interaction-behaviour that revolve around the medium in which the message is sent.

General
On the ‘medium’ level of information-communication interaction, both low-literates and non-natives report a mix of positive and negative experiences with the temporary nature and speed of certain communications media. The temporary nature aspect is primarily experienced as negative, and is often associated with audio-based information and communication, like phone calls and television (although the flighty nature of television subtitles is also mentioned once). The cognitive-physical nature of mediated (aural/ephemeral) information suggests that this kind of information/communication can be difficult to correctly understand for people of low literacy and non-native migrants (potentially related to Cognitive Skills).

I often feel as if I’m racing against the subtitles.

The ‘speed’ part of the temporary nature and speed aspect is seen as both positive and negative. ‘Email is faster and more reliable, but I make more mistakes, and calling is more difficult to get going, but at least I only have to talk.’ The rapid dissemination of world news is considered positive as well. See also Technology for this.

Low-literates

You just can’t do everything over the phone.

Low-literate participants report disliking mediated communication in general: this unsurprising finding ties into their professed preference for ‘personal’ interaction (see Personal Contact). This dislike lies mostly on the timing side of things: low-literate participants mention the temporal aspect of certain informations and communications media in general, and report a dislike for asynchronous communication in particular. Aside from the mentioned preference for face-to-face interaction, this aspect of medium-related issues seem to have to do more with the functional-social side of things. Letters are slow and take time to arrive, phone calls can be missed or can be ‘missed’, emails need to be seen and opened and read. There are many moving parts, and a lot of things that can go wrong, and it can be really difficult to tell WHEN something has gone wrong. At least in face-to-face communication, you can always immediately know that the message has been received, comprehended, understood, and acted upon.

Non-natives

I find it difficult to answer the phone and to make a call.

Non-native participants display a particular aversion to talking on the phone. This could indicate a dislike for the medium of phone specifically, but it seems more likely that this aversion underlies a more general dislike for mediated speaking. For the non-natives, this issue and the temporary nature and speed issues reported earlier overlap: phone calls are difficult because understanding rapid, ephemeral audio -- in Dutch, no less, related to factors of Language Mastery -- is quite difficult for non-native Dutch speakers. Quite probably more difficult than understanding face-to-face spoken language and written Dutch.
MODALITY

‘Modality’ category topic: Aspects of information and communication interaction-behaviour that revolve around the modality the message is presented in.

**General**
Modality characteristics currently seem to be divided along lines of ‘text’ and ‘not text’. With regard to the former, see Text. With regard to the latter, both demographics express a wide range of both benefits of non-textual information and drawbacks of non-textual information, but the current coding is not granular enough to make many significant claims about this.

> I really think they should work with icons, because... that’s, with images, you can do so much more, instead of just having long swaths of text there.

**Low-literates**
As can be expected, low-literate users are almost exclusively negative about the use of text as a modality. One interesting thing that emerges with this demographic is the importance of modality applicability and modality choice: different presentation modalities have different strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of which modalities to use in which message should depend on the expected benefit of the presented information versus the difficulties the expected user demographics will have with it. Looking beyond the ‘expected’ issues with text and writing, examples that were given involved colour-blindness as a deterrent for colour navigation systems, and the idea that ‘just putting a picture next to a newspaper article won’t immediately make it better’.

**Non-natives**
As opposed to the low-literate participants, non-native participants do see the benefits of textual information. That said, written text is still often regarded negatively, with reading avoidance behaviour occasionally being expressed.

> Because, if I read the paper... I read a word I don’t understand, I can ask my friends. And I get it immediately. But now, it’s gone immediately, and then I don’t know what the news said today. It’s difficult. They talk really fast.
'Text' category topic: Aspects of information and communication interaction-behaviour that revolve around specific attributes of the presentation modality of written text.

**General**
No general aspects have been found in this category.

**Low-literates**
The (information-communication-interaction) presentation modality of text has a number of specific attributes that come up in relation to (particularly) reading difficulties for low-literates. 

*Text size* is mentioned, both in the context of small letters being difficult to read and comprehend, and in the context of larger letters being experienced as 'better'. *Readability and colour contrast* are mentioned as factors too.

In both cases, these issues seem primarily to be perceptual in nature. They may in and by themselves not directly be related to issues of low literacy and language deficiency, but they do present an additional layer of difficulty, compounding existing problems that do spring from those sources.

*Small letters are always difficult, they’re always hidden under...*

**Non-natives**
No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.
Non-natives

No non-native specific aspects have been found in this category.

Low-literates

Next to help from peers, low-literate participants reported the important role of help from teachers and experts too, both in the classroom and in real-life situations. The element of skill level growth (related to the importance of the correct learning difficulty) came up as well: sources that were once on the correct difficulty level for a participant are later found to have become ‘too easy’, by virtue of the participant progressing in learning.

Then I do have one suggestion, that’s something you notice yourself, that for some... for some former low-literate people, it’s too simple. Because you keep growing. You’re low-literate, so you do something to combat your low literacy, but you’re not standing still.

Then I do have one suggestion, that’s something you notice yourself, that for some... for some former low-literate people, it’s too simple. Because you keep growing. You’re low-literate, so you do something to combat your low literacy, but you’re not standing still.

Because there’s nothing better than being in a group with people who all have the same, kind of the same... it’s not a problem, I don’t see it as a problem, I just see as you’re all doing it together.

Learning Attributes

‘Learning Attributes’ category topic: Attributes of the learning process, and concepts related to learning.

General
As the learning process is vital to improving societal participation, and as our participants were mainly derived from Dutch-language class groups, several interesting concepts related to learning were identified.

Learning is almost never a solo act. The importance of both help from peers was underscored in the data. This concept often came up in an affective angle: help from peers is beneficial not necessarily because of actual learning help, but because it makes people feel less alone. Consider how this relates to Stigmatization: people of low literacy feel invisible, undervalued and dumb, and non-native migrants report not being believed because of language issues (and possibly racism/their migrant status). Peers (by definition people in the same boat as you) benefit the learning process for the ameliorating effect they have on these negative affective feelings. Note, of course, that peers DO also help in a more traditional sense, by offering level-appropriate (situated) support.

Learning almost never takes place only in the classroom. Many participants reported many occurrences of learning from experience, of going out and doing things and learning from that. ‘I tried it out, and now I’m better at it’. As this is exactly the kind of situated learning we are interested in, it could be interesting to investigate which concepts relate to this learning from experience. Motivation and Self-efficacy seem to be clear influential factors for this kind of learning occurring, but other factors could prove relevant too.

Learning is almost never one-size-fits-all. Participants underscored the importance of the correct learning difficulty, reporting that ‘too difficult’ lesson plans had adverse affects and almost no learning outcomes. Exactly what factors influence when which learning source is correctly attuned to which participant is currently unclear, but it is likely that this relates to the concepts captured under Knowledge and Experience.

Low-literates

Next to help from peers, low-literate participants reported the important role of help from teachers and experts too, both in the classroom and in real-life situations. The element of skill level growth (related to the importance of the correct learning difficulty) came up as well: sources that were once on the correct difficulty level for a participant are later found to have become ‘too easy’, by virtue of the participant progressing in learning.
6. REFERENCES


7. COMPLETE LIST OF CATEGORIES AND NODES

Personal

Cognitive Skills
- Math dimension of low literacy
- Recall

Coping Strategies
- Heuristics, mental shortcuts
- Societal participation avoidance behaviour

Language Skills
- Complexity
- Comprehending language, extracting meaning
- Grammar

Emotion and Affect

Fear
- Fear about being outed as low-literate
- Fear of long-term future effects
- Fear of using technology wrong
- Fear with regards to financial consequences
- Fear with regards to societal participation
- Fear with regards to uncertainty
- Lack of fear with regards to societal participation
- Permanence of technology mistakes

Frustration
- Frustration due to slow learning

Pride
- Pride about creating something
- Pride about going to school
- Pride about writing
- Pride with regard to complex information understanding
- Pride with regard to helping others
- Pride with regard to societal participation
- Pride with regard to technology use

Shame
- Shame with regards to insufficient reading-writing skill
- Social stigma of low literacy

Stress
- Stress

Surprise
- Being surprised or overwhelmed

Knowledge and Experience
- Benefits of acting, costs of not acting

New behaviour
- Background
  - Prior academic experience
- Language Mastery
  - Dutch vocabulary uncertainty
  - Translation
  - Using non-Dutch words to get the point across
- Society Knowledge
  - Financial diligence
  - Operant knowledge with regards to societal participation
  - Uncertainty about societal processes
- Technology Knowledge
  - Lack of knowledge, experience
  - Technology savvy

Motivation
- Motivation to learn
- Motivation to participate

Avoiding Something, Not Persisting
- Reaching limits of your ability
- Refusal to engage or act

Starting Something, Persisting
- Getting started
- Importance of persistence
- Inviting nature
- Perceived importance of learning
- Trigger for engaging in learning behaviour
- Trigger for learning technology use
- Trigger for societal participation

The Threshold
- Attempting to improve the situation
- Importance of bravery
- Perceived importance of pushing boundaries

Needs
- Information and Communications Needs
  - Audio instead of text
  - Clarity
  - Good explanation
  - Guidance
  - Language options

Reduced information density
- Short length
- Simplicity

Personal Contact
- Desire for personal contact
- Face-to-face communication preference
- Hostess
- Impersonal approach
- Impersonal nature of technology
- Personalized help

Learning Needs
- Desire for guidance
- Desire to learn
- Different language skill levels
- Inconsistent lesson plan
- Situatedness in learning

Need to be Heard, Need for Attention
- Example from personal experience
- Pro-active partaking in study
- Example from personal experience

Technology Needs
- Personal preference
- Preference for simple tools
- Simple technology

Self-efficacy
- General self-efficacy
- Self-efficacy with regards to learning
- Self-efficacy with regards to societal participation
- Self-efficacy with regards to speaking Dutch
- Self-efficacy with regards to technology
- Self-efficacy with regards to understanding information
- Self-efficacy with regards to writing
- Uncertainty in the face of difficulties
- Uncertainty with regards to societal participation

Social-Cultural
- Being the only one
- Conflict avoidance
- Hiding low-literate
- Respect of elders
- Trust, Mistrust
Attribution of negative intent
Trusting authority
Unwillingness to help

Informal
Social Conflict
Social Consequences
Accidental exposure to information
Inability to help others
Social isolation
Social judgement of low literacy
Benefits of improving societal participation
Language restrictions
Small social network
Support
Help from Dutch speakers
Help from family
Help from friends and acquaintances
Help from neighbours
Help from others
Moral support
Situational help
Negative Consequences
Consequences of losing help
‘Doing it for you’ instead of teaching you
Impact on social relations
Negative social feedback

Formal
Barriers
Formal Institutions
Attitude towards formal institutions
Consequences (of low reading-writing skills) for formal institutions
Expectations of formal institutions
Help from agencies
Attributes
Conflicting interests

Power imbalance
Impediments
Complex language use by formal institutions
Difficulty in using technology
Diffusion of responsibility, ‘being sent from pillar to post’
Error-prone nature of modern technology
Ignoring or misrepresenting input
Participation being conditional on language understanding
Societal impediments to learning
Unwillingness to adapt to low-literate and non-native needs
Financials
Financial consequences (of reduces reading-writing skills)
Financial costs of getting help
Financial issues
Rules
Cultural differences regarding rules
Legal issues
Rules knowledge
Norms and Values
Adherence to rules
Assumption of internet proficiency
Assumption of reading-writing skill
Cultural differences regarding norms
Societal differences between information societies and non-information societies
Societal differences between past and present
Societal self-reliance
Technology related social norms
Stigmatization
Being questioned, not being believed
Invisibility of low literacy
Subtle means of discovering low literacy
Technology
Benefits of simple tools
Benefits of technology
Mandatory technology use
Rapid pace of technological change
Reliance on technology, drawbacks
Scary representation of technology in the news
User threshold for social technology

Widespread nature of technology

Interaction
Information-Communication Attributes
Constraints
Choice overload
Time pressure, time limit
Usage context complexity
Content
Detail complexity
Information overload
Language
Abbreviations
Accents
Foreign languages, use of English terms
Inapplicability of text-based media
Language complexity
Language deficiencies, not being understood
Medium
Asynchronous communication
Aversion to talking
Mediated communication
Temporal aspects
Temporary nature, speed
Modality
Benefits of non-textual information
Benefits of textual information
Drawbacks of non-textual information
Modality applicability, modality choice
Reading avoidance
Text
Readability, colour contrast
Text size
Learning Attributes
Help from peers
Help from teachers, experts
Importance of correct learning difficulty
Learning from experience
Skill level growth