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Cocooning urban life: Exposure to diversity in neighbourhoods, workplaces and transport

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ABSTRACT

Although one's neighbourhood is continuously structuring everyday lives and influences encounters between different people, place of residence is only partially the site where interactions and possibly integration between population categories occur. Another well-known domain is the place of work, where many spend hours per day and may meet various 'others'. However, people's mobility is also strongly differentiated between class and ethnicity. Here too, different modes of transport may offer opportunities for encounter and engaging with others. In order to assess exposure to diversity of individuals from various ethnic and social class backgrounds to 'the other' we focus on these three important realms of daily life: neighbourhoods, workplaces and modes of transport. We use individual level data from the Mobilities Netherlands Database combined with detailed individual level register data from the Social Statistical Database. We found that, overall, higher income natives are, compared to the other combinations of country of origin and income category most frequently *cocooning* in homogeneous residential, workplace, and mobility spaces. However, native-Dutch with a low income stand out in the residential domain, where they are living more frequently in homogeneous neighbourhoods than high-income natives.

1. Introduction

Exposure to diversity, generally defined as the probability of encountering people with different attributes, has frequently been ascribed potential positive effects: Diversity would create better socialisation opportunities, better conditions for offering strong role models, and more supportive social networks with helpful weak ties (Wilson, 1987). Diversity, however, refers to a wide variety of visible and less visible attributes, all of which make people differ from others (Dukes and Musterd 2012, p. 1983); diversity is a multidimensional concept, which may for instance refer to gender, age, lifestyle, household type, class or ethnicity/race. Most commonly, however, diversity is only conceived in ethnic or racial terms or in terms of class. In this paper we focus on diversity as a combination of socio-economic position and ethnicity defined by income and country of origin. The rationale for this choice is that much of the social urban discourse is actually dealing with neighbourhood poverty, social inequality, and the gap between rich and poor, as well as with inter-cultural relations. Many debates are on social and 'ethnic' (spatial) segregation and are confined to exposure to 'the other' in these spheres. In these realms, several policy makers and politicians see exposure to diversity as a useful 'instrument' to help avoid the development of 'parallel societies' that might limit opportunities of full participation in society of some, and be a threat to social order (see Phillips, 2010; Uitermark, 2003). In part of the urban economic literature diversity is celebrated for its potential value for advanced economic development, with the idea that the 'creative class' would like to be exposed to diverse places (Florida, 2002).

However, a plea for more diversity does not always have to imply that this also is a plea for more exposure to diversity, let alone that it will result in mixed communities with lively interaction between diverse people. Critical academics have found that support for diversity may just serve other purposes; increasing diversity in initial stages may ultimately result in socially homogeneous territories, something that seems to be quite common in gentrification processes that are favouring the affluent (Lees, 2008); others have suggested that exposure to diversity may actually result in withdrawal from community life (Putnam, 2007) or will result, at best, in a situation in which diverse people living together may have a higher probability to be exposed to others, but are in reality not interacting or integrating much (see Blokland, 2003; Blokland & Van Eijk, 2010; Robson & Butler, 2001); a certain segment of the socially and economically powerful middle and upper class or the ethnic majority may even decide to leave exposure to diversity entirely behind and dis-affiliate from the rest of the population and withdraw in encapsulated homogeneous environments (Atkinson, 2006). The latter case suggests that social class is actually a key concept to address. A relevant question to be answered then is to what extent higher classes are organising their life in homogeneous settings?

A second reason to approach the diversity debate in a critical way is the fact that this debate has mainly focused on exposure to diversity in the residential domain, whereas other spheres of (daily) life may

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be just as important. In particular the place of work stands out as an environment in which many people spend a lot of time (Åslund & Skans, 2010; Blumen & Zamir, 2001; Strömgren et al., 2014). Exposure to others in that domain of life may be just as relevant as it is in the residential environment. In addition, we might want to scrutinise the way people get to and from their place of work, because the selected modes of transport may also vary in terms of the exposure to diversity it involves (see Alaily-Mattar, 2008; Wilson, 2011). We intend to expand the knowledge about diversity in all three domains in which people spend a large amount of time on a daily basis. We argue that there is, in particular, insufficient knowledge about the confrontation to various levels of diversity in these 'other' domains, the realms of work and transport between home and work. Whereas our focus will be on obtaining more insight in what the exposure is to different levels of diversity in all three domains, and how they relate to each other, the findings may also help to eventually understand the effects of it on the life chances of individuals.

We would like to stress that we do not assume that exposure to diversity will automatically result in smoother interaction between different people, or in improved mutual understanding or respect. Other conditions may be required before such effects may happen. However, non-exposure to diversity – in other words: cocooning – will, in our view, almost certainly block opportunities to come closer to each other. This is a major argument for the focus of this paper: to study exposure to diversity in crucial domains of daily life.

We will investigate the exposure to diversity in the metropolitan area of the five largest cities in The Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Eindhoven. These cities have much in common, but they also differ from each other, for example in terms of their economic profile and professional structure. Such differences may be reflected in the levels of exposure to diversity, which is a reason to include the cities as dummy variables in the analysis. The question to be addressed in this paper is:

> *To what extent are different categories of individuals exposed to diversity in the neighbourhood of residence, the place of work, and the mode(s) of transport they use?*

Hereafter, we will elaborate on the existing literature on exposure to diversity in various domains. This will be followed by a short exposé on the data and methods applied in the empirical section. Finally, there will be a conclusion and discussion section.

1.1. Literature

Diversity and segregation relate to each other, especially where spatial distributions of household categories across space are used to investigate the probability for encounter within delineated areas. The probability of encounter is often seen as a key to the understanding of societal questions related to social mobility, 'participation', 'co-existence', 'integration', mutual understanding, and 'living together' of different urban population categories (examples: Andersson, Musterd, & Galster, 2014; Robson, 1975; Wilson, 1987; Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998; Phillips, 2010; Maloutas & Fujita, 2012). The literature in this field has overwhelmingly been focused on segregation and exposure in the residential domain and literally looked at 'living together'. Moreover, much of this literature has been written with a focus on the poor or on migrant populations who find themselves in persistent poverty or who came from poor, so-called 'developing', countries. The literature on exposure to diversity of the affluent and 'natives' and the exposure to diversity 'at work' or 'in transport' received much less attention.

1.2. The residential domain

An important segment of the academic literature suggests that reducing poverty concentrations in certain neighbourhoods, especially reducing low-income ethnic residential concentrations, and stimulating socially and ethnically diverse or mixed communities is the preferred intervention because of the assumed positive impacts of exposure to diversity. Recently published neighbourhood effect studies, based on large-scale longitudinal quantitative analysis (for example Cutler, Glaeser, & Vigdor, 2008), and on in-depth qualitative research (see Hastings, 2009; Pinkster, 2009) are supporting that view. Oliver and Wong (2003) found that interethnic proximity corresponds with lower levels of prejudice to the out-group and saw this as a plea for more diverse environments. Galster, Andersson, Musterd, and Kauppinen (2008), however, found that social mobility was *negatively* affected by the neighbourhood context when the social distance between residents in the neighbourhood became rather large.

A view in support of diversity can also be found in the political arena. Policies include efforts to create 'balanced communities', or diverse communities, and involve programmes that assist residents to move to other, more diverse, neighbourhoods, with 'more opportunity' (see for example: Goetz, 2002; Lupton & Tunstall, 2008; Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998). Thus, many governments have adopted the idea that specific ethnic and/or social concentrations are detrimental to local societies. In particular this would hold for concentrations of immigrants with origins in poor countries, and for concentrations of poverty. Frequent exposure to such concentrations is thought to prevent the full integration and participation of those who are living there. As a response, policies have been developed to reduce residential concentrations and make them more diverse or mixed. Specific interventions include housing demolition, refurbishment, tenure conversion and new construction. Several social mix programmes aim to decrease the share of low-cost social housing and increase the share of more expensive housing. Higher income households would be attracted by such interventions, which would result in more diversity to which residents can be exposed.

Popkin, Levy, and Buron (2009) argued, however, that in reality much displacement in the neighbourhoods targeted by social mix policies occurs. This also reflects the ideas of other scholars who argue that interventions aimed at mixing, balancing, and diversification actually are not so much aimed at providing better opportunities for 'weaker' population categories in terms of access to resources that would give them a stronger position, but serve other objectives instead, such as changing the existing social structure by igniting gentrification processes. These processes of social change are often assisted by the state (see for example Uitermark, Duyvendak, & Kleinhans, 2007; Lees, 2008).

Other scholars (but fewer policy makers) also question the prevailing 'exposure to diversity' philosophy, emphasising that residents of specific groups hardly interact with residents of other groups (Blokland & Van Eijk, 2010). This phenomenon, which is also described as 'social tectonics' (Robson & Butler, 2001), is central in the argument of Watt (2009) and Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst (2005) as well. They state that middle classes in diverse neighbourhoods develop selective strategies of belonging by which they avoid certain forms of diversity while embracing others. Valentine (2008) came to similar insights. She questions the idealisation or even 'romanticization' of spaces of encounter in the city. She stresses that "proximity does not equate with meaningful contact" (p. 334), and found that proximity to others and diversity actually often generates or aggravates negative viewpoints toward other groups. These findings, which are in contrast to those of Oliver and Wong (2003) also come close to some of Putnam's (2007), who suggests that increasing diversity will only result in hunkering down of people because they do not trust the other; they would withdraw from community life, avoid exposure to 'the other', and try to move into more homogeneous environments. Putnam argued that "the more ethnically diverse the people we live around, the less we trust them" (Putnam, 2007, p. 147). He found these attitudes in a wide range of neighbourhoods, poor and affluent, but it is evident that especially those who can afford are able to achieve their homogeneity objectives.

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