



Relational diversity and neighbourhood cohesion. Unpacking variety, balance and in-group size



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ABSTRACT

Ethnic diversity is typically measured by the well-known Hirschman-Herfindahl Index. This paper discusses the merits of an alternative approach, which is in our view better suited to tease out why and how ethnic diversity matters. The approach consists of two elements. First, all existing diversity indices are non-relational. From the viewpoint of theoretical accounts that attribute negative diversity effects to in-group favoritism and out-group threat, it should however matter whether, given a certain level of overall diversity, an individual belongs to a minority group or to the dominant majority. We therefore decompose diversity by distinguishing the in-group share from the diversity of ethnic out-groups. Second, we show how generalized entropy measures can be used to test which of diversity's two basic dimensions matters most: the variety of groups, or the unequal distribution (balance) of the population over groups. These measures allow us to test different theoretical explanations against each other, because they imply different expectations regarding the effects of in-group size, out-group variety, and out-group balance. We apply these ideas in an analysis of various social cohesion measures across 55 German localities and show that both in-group size and out-group diversity matter. For the native majority as well as for persons of immigration background, the variety component of diversity seems to be more decisive than has formerly been acknowledged. These findings provide little support for group threat and in-group favoritism as the decisive mechanisms behind negative diversity effects, and are most in line with the predictions of theories that emphasize coordination problems, asymmetric preferences, and network closure.

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1. Introduction

In spite of a rich set of empirical findings, the overall picture on whether ethnic diversity and social cohesion are negatively associated remains inconclusive (Portes and Vickstrom, 2011; Stichnoth and der Straeten, 2013). Two recent meta-analytic reviews show that studies focusing on specific measures of social cohesion, rather than abstract notions of generalized trust, as well as small-scale aggregate units, such as neighborhoods or cities, mostly find confirmatory evidence of a negative association (van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014; Schaeffer, 2014). In striking contrast to this debate, social science research on organizations has produced a similarly lively debate on the economic benefits of ethnically diverse work teams (e.g. Page, 2008). Here ethnic diversity is regarded as a driving factor behind innovation and problem solving. So is ethnic

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diversity enriching and beneficial or harmful and constraining for society? We believe that there is little to gain from charging the potential positive and negative consequences of diversity against one another. Instead, these complex findings highlight the necessity to study in an interdisciplinary way the mechanisms through which ethnic diversity is linked to valued outcomes such as engagement and trust, or innovation and efficiency.

We focus on the negative consequences of ethnic diversity for neighborhood trust and cohesion that have been documented in many studies. Over the last years, several theoretical approaches have been put forward to explain the potentially negative effects of ethnic diversity. We specify how these explanations can be linked to specific aspects of population heterogeneity and thereby tested against one another. However, we also explain why existing indices of population heterogeneity are not suited for such a task. First, the existing measures of the different aspects of population heterogeneity (true diversity, polarization, minority share and so on) are highly collinear, and can hence hardly be applied to test competing theories against one another (Schaeffer, 2013a). Second, the existing measures carry ambiguous meaning in at least two regards. First, diversity means fewer in-group members for majority members, whereas the opposite tends to be the case for minority members. Second, conventional diversity indices reflect, next to the in-group share, two components of outgroup diversity that they cannot disentangle: the variety of outgroups and the unequal distribution (balance) of the population over these groups. Against this background, we propose an alternative coherent measurement framework that relies on a decomposition of the overall population heterogeneity into group-specific (a) in-group shares and (b) out-group diversities. In addition, we show how (c) generalized entropy measures can be used to test which of the group-specific out-group diversities' two basic dimensions matter most: variety or balance. Taken together, these measures allow us to test the different theoretical explanations against each other.

To empirically illustrate the merits of our decomposition of diversity, we use the German sub-set of the Ethnic Diversity and Collective Action Survey (EDCAS) with its roughly 7500 respondents, who live in one of 55 theoretically and randomly sampled German cities and regions. As dependent variables, we investigate three indicators of neighborhood cohesion and an overall neighborhood cohesion scale. Our findings provide little support for group threat and in-group favoritism as the decisive mechanisms behind negative diversity effects, and are most in line with the predictions of theories that emphasize coordination problems, asymmetric preferences, and network closure, which are maximized where there are many small groups.

2. Theoretical background

Several theoretical approaches have been proposed to explain the potentially negative effects of ethnic diversity (for overviews see: Habyarimana et al., 2007; van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014; Koopmans et al., 2015). Evidence about the relative explanatory power of these competing theoretical approaches is needed, both for a deeper scientific understanding and for the development of successful policy interventions. Yet, most studies provide no evidence for the supremacy of one explanation over others. The so far existing attempts operationalize the competing mechanisms by linking them to different aggregate levels (e.g. Williamson, 2015; Dinesen and Sønderskov, 2015), as (field) experimental treatments (e.g. Habyarimana et al., 2007; Koopmans and Veit, 2014a), or via cognitive perceptions of diversity (Koopmans and Schaeffer, 2015). Most of these studies question the dominant view that feelings of group threat are the dominant force behind negative diversity effects.

Alternatively, the competing theories can be linked to specific aspects of population heterogeneity, as we will detail in the following. Our approach is broadly in line with van der Meer and Tolsma's statement that 'In the threat mechanism, rising relative out-group and decreasing in-group size primarily stimulate feelings of ethnic group threat. Feelings of anomie find their origin in diverse environments; the anomie mechanism stresses the lack of common language, identities, and values regardless of the size of the in-group itself' (van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014: 464). But in line with Schaeffer (2013a), we identify a third position represented by scholars who emphasize polarization as particularly harmful.

The majority of studies refer to theories of biases against out-group members, in particular group threat theory (e.g. Blalock, 1967; Olzak, 1992) and in-group favoritism (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Brown, 2000). From the viewpoint of these dominant theoretical accounts, it should mainly matter whether an individual belongs to a small minority group and is thus mostly surrounded by members of one or more ethnic out-groups, or belongs to the dominant majority and is therefore mainly surrounded by co-ethnics. In particular, scholars who refer to group threat theory argue that ethnic struggles for resources and symbolic representation compromise social cohesion (e.g. Hou and Wu, 2009; Helbling et al., 2015). Accordingly, it is not ethnic diversity per se that undermines trust and cooperation, but simply out-group presence. Vice versa, it is the in-group share that matters for in-group favoritism, i.e., the drive to boost one's self-esteem via 'favourable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and relevant outgroups' (Brown, 2000: 747). Hence, for these approaches the in-group/out-group relation matters irrespective of whether the out-group is itself diverse or not. The group-specific in-group shares that have been used in some studies reflect this relational aspect (Bécares et al., 2011; Bakker and Dekker, 2012).

Some proponents of group threat theory object and argue that the most contentious situations are polarized, meaning those where two equal opponents face each other: 'Conflict is less likely in societies in which fractionalization is minimal or maximal' (Dincer, 2011, p. 291). Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005a, 2005b) base this claim on a formal game-theoretic rent-seeking model. Gould (2003) on the other hand explains that polarized situations are characterized

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