

Interethnic relations and social cohesion in the neighbourhood

Workshop theme

Contact, identification, prejudice: revisiting the contact hypothesis

Organizers:

Rob Bijl
The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP
P.O. Box 16164, 2500 BD The Hague
The Netherlands
(+)31703407141
E-mail: r.bijl@scp.nl

Han Entzinger
Erasmus University, Rotterdam
E-mail: entzinger@fsw.eur.nl

Abstract:

Putnam (2007) suggests in his article *E pluribus Unum* that ethnic diversity in people's immediate living environment leads to decreasing solidarity and less trust. In ethnically diverse neighbourhoods the inhabitants incline to turn more strongly inwards upon themselves. Putnam calls this phenomenon 'hunkering down.' Trust is decreasing, mutual help and cooperation becomes more rare, friendships more loose, and all this even happens within the own group. In earlier publications Putnam brought up the fragmentation of community ties in the United States: *bowling alone* as metaphor of decreasing social cohesion. Now he has stressed a direct relationship with ethnic diversity. His interpretation is that in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods bridging social capital (contacts outside the own group) is lacking, causing a lack of mutual trust between groups.

In this workshop we want to discuss if there is evidence whether Putnam's findings for the USA also apply for European countries. The idea that a growing ethnic and cultural diversity might be a threat for the social ties in society is alarming. Many scientists have tried to replicate Putnam's findings (e.g. Leigh, 2006 for Australia; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2008 for the UK). Policy makers used it as an argument for community building policies in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods.

This issue has many important policy implications. In many European countries the integration policies aim at mixing neighbourhoods. Basic assumption is that mixing is beneficial. Mixing is thought to prevent neighbourhoods for being stigmatized as problematic neighbourhoods. It would also be beneficial because deprived inhabitants would lean on more privileged inhabitants by recognising that there are opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, the assumption is that social networks will emerge in mixed neighbourhoods leading to privileged inhabitants supporting the more deprived inhabitants.

The issue in this workshop is whether mono-ethnicity in neighbourhoods is better for social cohesion? Do we need a plea for segregation and withdrawal? Is social cohesion better realised if each ethnic group withdraws to its own neighbourhood? If this is true, policies focusing on mixing aimed at promoting social cohesion might have contrary effects. Or is the issue more delicate and complicated? What is the role of socio-economic deprivation: is the key factor for successful social cohesion socio-economic inequality, or ethnic diversity, or a combination of both factors? There are indications that poverty in a neighbourhood is a strong predictor of weak social cohesion, Inhabitants of economically deprived areas have less trust because of the perception of disorder and unrest in the neighbourhood (much crime and vandalism).