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**DOI**

[10.1177/0042098010375318](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098010375318)

**Publication date**

2011

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Urban Studies

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Karsten, L. (2011). Children's social capital in the segregated context of Amsterdam: an historical-geographical approach. *Urban Studies*, 48(8), 1651-1666. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098010375318>

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# Children's Social Capital in the Segregated Context of Amsterdam: An Historical-geographical Approach

Lia Karsten

*[Paper first received, July 2009; in final form, March 2010]*

## Abstract

This paper addresses children's social capital across space and over time. Empirical evidence comes from an in-depth study of changes in children's daily lives in Amsterdam over the past 50 years. Different dimensions of religious and ethnic segregation at school and in the neighbourhood have influenced children's capacity to build social capital. The main conclusion is that children's social capital in two out of three selected neighbourhoods has narrowed considerably. Children today have lost many of the loose social ties across age, class, religion and ethnicity. It is not only the segregated school choice that lies at the heart of this narrowing process; schools have always reflected parents' status, whether in religious or in class terms. It is also the loss of children's agency on the street that contributes to the decline in children's bridging social capital.

## Introduction

Segregation is a widespread phenomenon in cities. Barriers between residential groups are common with inequalities as one of the outcomes (Wilson, 1987; Musterd and Ostendorf, 1998). Segregation has consequences for all urbanites, but particularly for the youngest (Karsten, 1998). Children cannot easily escape their—segregated—daily living conditions. Their freedom of movement is much more restricted than it is for adult residents. To build a social network outside the family, children depend on their school and their neighbourhood. These are potentially the main

domains where they meet other children, learn and play together, and get to know their contemporaries.

Schools and education have always been surrounded by high expectations. Schooling is considered to be the ultimate instrument for civilisation, emancipation and personal achievement. Education creates a vehicle for social mobility. Ideals and daily practice, however, have never run parallel. History shows that schools have not only produced mobility, but have also reproduced inequalities. Nevertheless, the ideal continues to be

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important in the present times of segregated school choices (Schindler Rangvid, 2007). Like schools, the neighbourhood is a place associated with high expectations about different social groups living together. The socially cohesive neighbourhood and the street as the communal meeting-place for all its residents are purposes aspired to by many European policy-makers. Segregation has to be avoided (Andersson, 2006).

Because most segregation studies concentrate on the present, it is easy to forget that urban segregation has always been with us. Historical studies of segregation are rare, particularly when it comes to children. It is the aim of this paper partially to fill this gap. The Netherlands is an interesting case for historical research on segregation and the conditions that stimulate or prevent the breaking through of boundaries between population groups. Dutch society has long been characterised by its strict segregation between religious groupings (*pillars*): Protestantism, Catholicism and the non-religious formations (Humanism/Socialism), with many sub-divisions. The pillars were evident in all strata of society from sports clubs to housing corporations, but above all in schools (Sturm *et al.*, 1998). With the secularisation of society from the end of the 1960s onwards, the pillarised organisation of Dutch society crumbled away. Yet with the rise of the migrant population a new form of segregation emerged: ethnic segregation. Different forms of segregation have arisen in schools and in the neighbourhood, affecting the lives of children, not least in their capacity to build crossing networks beyond their own narrowly defined social groups.

In this paper, I compare the social networks of children growing up in three Amsterdam neighbourhoods in the first two post-war decades with children growing up in the same neighbourhoods in the first years of the 21st century. (Crossing) social networks are not a natural given, but are constructed under certain historical, social and spatial conditions.

The central questions are, how have children growing up in a segregated urban context built their social networks and to what extent have they been able to meet children from a different social background? I first review the literature and relate the concept of social network to theories about social capital. Details of the (historical) methods used and the precise locations of the research follow. The results are structured along the lines of history. First, we turn to the daily lives at school and on the street of children growing up in the 1950s and early 1960s (adults of today looking back). And, secondly, we look at the situation today and investigate school affiliation and neighbourhood outdoor play as conditions influencing children's capacity to build social networks. The paper ends with conclusions and discussions about mixing policies.

## Literature

Social networks can be considered as building-blocks for social capital. Reviews of the literature reveal that social capital is an elusive concept (Portes, 1988; Morrow, 1999; Leonard, 2005). We define social capital as a resource derived from people's social networks. Social capital helps individuals to get by and to get ahead in life. Yet in order to benefit from relationships, one needs to be able to trust network members (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Without mutual levels of trust, social relationships remain without positive effects. Social capital research focusing on children has only recently started. Children used to figure primarily as passive receivers from their parents' investments (Coleman, 1988) rather than as actors building their own social networks. Drawing on the new discipline of children's studies (James *et al.*, 1990; Holloway and Valentine, 2000), the study reported here started from children's agency in the construction of their social networks. Putnam (2000) draws a distinction between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. Bonding

capital refers to the inward-looking social relationships within socially homogeneous groups. Strong mutual ties usually characterise these relationships. Bridging social capital is characterised by looser networks with people who cross divides in terms of class and ethnicity. According to Granovetter (1973), we should not underestimate weak social ties. While strong bonding ties can be experienced as being warm towards members of the group, they often work in an exclusionary and thus segregated manner towards outsiders. Forms of integration between different groups can only be established when weak social ties between the members of different kinds of group flourish. Social ties outside the immediate circle of 'people like us' can be fruitful in creating mutual understanding and in making progress in life (Wellman, 1992). Collecting bridging capital is important for children at both the lower and the upper rungs of the social ladder. Both groups have to learn how to deal with differences, although children with relatively few resources benefit particularly from knowing people in higher socioeconomic strata. The questions of when children have and had the chance to develop forms of bridging capital are addressed in this paper. To answer these questions, we focus on school- and neighbourhood-related conditions.

Primary schools in the Netherlands have always been freely accessible to all—private schools are very exceptional—and offer a great variety of religious and pedagogical directions. Today, religious differences among schools are far less dominant than they used to be (Dekker and Ester, 1996) and form only a modest element in parents' school choice. School-based research concentrates on the relationship between pupil and school characteristics and children's achievements (Dronkers and de Graaf 1995; Ball, 2003; Jungbluth, 2003; Gramberg, 1998; Oberti, 2007; Butler and Hamnett, 2007; Duncan *et al.*, 2001). In addition, the effects of ethnic

segregation on children's academic levels have received considerable attention, as has the related question of White flight (Karsten *et al.*, 2003; Butler and Robson, 2003). Only a limited number of studies focus on schools as communities for building social capital. Some American studies address the effects of school heterogeneity on the bridging (inter-racial) friendships among pupils (Moody, 2001; Rodkin *et al.*, 2007). The conclusion is that friendships among children with different backgrounds are less a matter of course than among children of homogeneous groups. A recent study in the Netherlands reveals that friendly contacts between ethnicities depend mainly on the majority/minority balance in the classroom (Vervoort *et al.*, 2008). When autochthonous children form a majority, they are more open towards minority classmates. Feeling secure (forming a majority) seems to be conditional for bridging boundaries.

Besides schools, neighbourhoods are important environments for the development of social capital. Social life among adult neighbours has been extensively studied (Wireman, 1985; Volker and Verhoeff, 1999). Homogeneity is generally considered to be an important condition for social contact among neighbours (Gans, 1986; Gijsberts and Dagevos, 2005). Recent studies of children's neighbourhood life show them actively building community networks (Weller and Bruegel, 2009; Chawla, 2002). Children's ability to do so, however, is negatively influenced by the deteriorating conditions of the urban outdoors. Several studies reveal a reduction in playing outdoors and limited freedom of movement (Björklid and Nordström, 2007; Christensen and O'Brien, 2003; Karsten, 2005; Pinkster, 2009; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997). Consequently, children are restricted to the use of their own neighbourhood as a resource for developing social capital. Karsten (1998, p. 573) adds to this the impact of segregation on the further marginalisation of ethnic groups that already form a minority in

a multicultural neighbourhood. Ethnic groups that are only small in number are even more underrepresented in outdoor play and thus even more restricted in developing neighbourhood friendships. The relationship between children's social networks at school and in the neighbourhood is seriously under-researched. Do children develop school friendships after school by inviting schoolmates into their neighbourhood play groups and do children get to know neighbourhood children without attending the same school? Dubois and Hirsch (1990) showed that most students at an integrated mixed-race school reported having a close other-race friendship at school, but only about a quarter of the sample saw such a friend frequently outside the school.

We return to our Amsterdam study of children's social capital. In this study, social capital is defined on the individual level of children as active constructors of their social networks. We are aware of the restricting conditions related to school and neighbourhood and distinguish between bonding and bridging social capital. On the basis of the literature, we expect the development of bridging social capital to be difficult in neighbourhoods with a low quality of the outdoors and high levels of heterogeneity. Whether that has been the situation in the past and/or today—and under what conditions a different picture emerges—is the focus of this study.

## Research Design

To answer the research question, we return to the large quantities of data collected in the context of an historical research project about children's changing daily lives in Amsterdam (Bouw and Karsten, 2004; Karsten, 2005). The material collected contains data about various topics, including children's social networks. The historical study was based on children's changing daily lives in Wognummerstraat, Bankastraat and Van Breestraat, streets we considered to be representative of a specific

type of neighbourhood built in Amsterdam before World War II.

Wognummerstraat is in Tuindorp Nieuwendam (North Amsterdam). It is a working-class neighbourhood with semi-detached rented housing and back gardens typical of the urban villages built in the 1920s. Purmerplein, at the centre of the neighbourhood, is a square used for skateboarding and is surrounded by small shops. Nearby, there is a playground. The neighbourhood is bordered by Nieuwendammerdijk (a dyke) and the river IJ. The neighbourhood's status has not changed much over the years: it accommodates low-income households. Today, many older residents continue to live here, but over the past decade new (migrant) families with children have settled here (Buijs, 2003). There are no schools in Tuindorp Nieuwendam, but many in the direct environment. Most are home to working-class and/or migrant pupils.

Bankastraat is in the Indische Buurt (East Amsterdam). It used to have roughly the same status as Nieuwendam, but is now a highly multicultural neighbourhood. Residents are migrant families, students and older people with a Dutch background. Bankastraat is a crowded street overlooked by four-storey buildings of small (mainly) rented apartments of one storey each. The pavements are narrow and often littered, and parked cars line the road. There are play areas for children (a football square and a small playground) at both ends of the street. There is a primary school, with over 90 per cent migrant children. This migrant status applies to all the schools in the Indische Buurt (Stroo, 2003). In 2004, the reconstruction of Bankastraat started with the building of a large new apartment block as one of the features. This renovated Bankastraat is not part of this study.

Van Breestraat is in the Museumkwartier (South Amsterdam), which has always been one of Amsterdam's most prosperous neighbourhoods. Interestingly, the street is as narrow as Bankastraat and has the same

four-storey walls of apartments on each side. Neither does the car parking differ very much. However, large trees, several private benches and decorated pots of flowers create a gracious atmosphere. The dwellings (in contrast with Bankastraats two-storey apartments) are owner-occupied and quite large. Play space is practically absent, apart from two small squares not meant for playing, but actually used for football. Vondelpark is within walking distance, but a busy road separates it from Van Breestraat. In the Museumkwartier, there are several primary schools: all 'White' and middle-class (van den Bos, 2003).

Over 50 years, these three streets have not changed very much in physical layout. What has changed is the number of children; that has decreased enormously. And, importantly, in the 1950s very few Amsterdam children had a migrant status. There were some Chinese, Italian and Spanish families living in Amsterdam and some families who migrated from Indonesia after the Dutch colonial war. Amsterdam has become a multicultural city, although the number of migrants varies considerably from street to street.

Today, the child population in Wognummerstraat and Van Breestraat is still largely dominated by Amsterdam children with a Dutch background, in contrast with the situation in Bankastraat (see Table 1). The category 'Other migrants' in Van Breestraat consists of children whose parents originate mainly from Western industrialised countries like the UK and Germany, while in Bankastraat this category contains children with a non-

Western background from such countries as Egypt and Afghanistan.

In a methodological sense, we opted for a tight design—namely, the same streets to which all data and stories of the present and the past are related. In addition, we employed mixed methods in order to get different sources of evidence for the specific cases (Yin, 2003). We started by interviewing some older residents with a long history of living in one of the three selected streets and who may have raised children there. These older residents could compare different periods within the context of the same street. They were helpful in tracing the second category of interviewees: adults brought up in one of the streets, but who no longer lived there. We asked both categories of adults about the family, the neighbours, the school, children's daily activities (including playing outdoors, club membership and freedom of movement) and related social life (including the neighbourhood and school friends). We were aware of the pitfalls of recording personal histories, particularly the risk of romanticising the past. We used checklists to be as precise as possible (Emans, 2002) and to be specific in terms of time (distinguishing between younger, middle and older childhood) and space (working with detailed neighbourhood maps). Interviewing the children of today had its own complications (Cele, 2006). Some children had a lot to say, others preferred to be interviewed in pairs or in the company of their parents, sometimes we were invited to take a neighbourhood walk. We tried to be

**Table 1.** Number of children per ethnicity and street, 2003

	<i>Wognummerstraat</i>	<i>Bankastraat</i>	<i>Van Breestraat</i>
Surinamese/Antillean	1	4	2
Turkish/Moroccan	2	35	0
Other migrants	8	20	22
Dutch	34	1	72
Total (0–12 years)	45	60	96

**Table 2.** Number of interviewees per category and per street

	<i>Wognummerstraat</i>	<i>Bankastraat</i>	<i>Van Breestraat</i>
Older neighbours	5	3	5
Adults not living in the selected street anymore	4	8	4
Children	11	13	10
Parents	7	9	6
Professionals (teachers, civil servants, play workers)	4	7	3
Total	31	40	28

flexible and accurate at the same time and made notes as soon as possible afterwards. Sometimes we returned to an interviewee when something was not clear. Carrying out similar extensive interviews with the children and parents currently living in each of the streets and with those who used to live there provided a solid—although never perfect (Radstone, 2000)—basis for comparison (see Table 2).

In the historical interviews, we concentrated on middle childhood (ages 7–12). Of all 34 children selected for the interviews about the present, 29 were in middle childhood. The interviews were all fully transcribed and provided with anonymous names. A short questionnaire concerning such features as age, gender, family size, parents' profession, club memberships and housing conditions complemented each interview. To complete the fieldwork, we carried out 21 specific observations in and around the streets. These observations often led to additional informative talks with residents, including the children; these conversations were written down in field notes. In addition to the interviews and the observations, we complemented the data with archive research and statistics over time (1950 onwards) such as the number of children and cars and household composition (de Graaff, 2003). Taken together, the mixed methods resulted in a voluminous and rich databank on changing childhood in Amsterdam.

### School Segregation and Strong Street Culture in the 1950s

What did children's social network look like at school and in the neighbourhood? It is easily forgotten that, in nostalgia for the 1950s, pillarisation was such that school segregation was a major issue. For parents to send their children to the nearest primary school was not a matter of course. On the contrary: children growing up together in the same street attend four or five different schools according to their families' backgrounds. A woman from a Protestant family in Wognummerstraat went to Jan van Nassau school as all other Protestant children did: "That was a matter of course". She remembered that her neighbours went to a Catholic school: "We didn't even think about it, that it was strange that children living in the same street went to different schools". Apart from religion, status was another motivation for choosing a school. We heard nothing of that in North or South Amsterdam, but in East Amsterdam status was at least a discussion point among parents. The location of the Indische Buurt, very near the middle-class neighbourhood of the Watergraafsmeer, would have stimulated those discussions. Some parents were convinced that their children would be better off in a middle-class school outside their own working-class neighbourhood. One female respondent reported that she and her sister had to change schools when she was eight years old. It was a school with a higher status,

but with the same (Protestant) denomination as the neighbourhood school

My parents felt they were better than their neighbours. I think they felt more at ease with people living in the Watergraafsmeer, a higher social level. They wanted to belong to the middle class. They told me that the education at my new school would be much better than I had been used to. Maybe they were right, but I didn't notice that. For me it was no fun having to change schools.

She continued by saying that she missed her former school friends during school time, but only then. Daily life after school did not change very much. She kept on meeting her old friends who, like herself, spent a great deal of their time after school outdoors in the residential environment.

All three neighbourhoods were an arena for intensive playing outdoors: "Playing meant playing outdoors" was a frequently heard phrase in the interviews. There were hardly any other opportunities for children to spend their time, except for helping at home with household chores. After school, the streets were crowded with the children of the big families of that time. Although children lived separated in apartment blocks built by the pillarised housing associations, the blocks were next to each other in the same street. And so the street was the place where children with different backgrounds met each other. A woman growing up in the Indische Buurt said

I joined a steady group of children, who all lived in our street or one of the streets nearby. When we came out of school, out of our different schools, we used to meet on a small square nearby and play together: Catholics, Protestants, also Communist children, it didn't matter to us.

And another respondent from South Amsterdam told us about playing with the 'new' children from Indonesian families who came to live in his street

I played with the Indonesian children, too. I played with them, because I simply wanted to play outdoors and you needed other children to play with. There was a group of them living in a boarding house at the other end of the street. I can't remember taking much notice of their being different.

It was in the public space of the street that children with different backgrounds and attending different schools played together, fought and tried to dominate each other. It was not always peaceful (Wridt, 2004). Children report defending their streets against 'outsiders': children from other streets in the neighbourhood. In such situations, the territory of the street was, at least temporarily, more highly valued than the differences in background. And, although the children living in the same street were often playmates, ties were rather loose. They were actively engaged in crossing boundaries by their playing together, but most children drew a distinction between children from school (same pillar) and the children they met outdoors. They did not meet the latter group at home; they were mostly not best friends. A woman growing up in North explains

The children I played with in their own homes, they were children from school. The neighbourhood children were different. We played together on the street, but we didn't meet them at home. I consciously chose my school friends; neighbourhood friends were more a matter of chance encounter.

Children in the 1950s were able to bridge differences, not only because they played outdoors so frequently, but also because they used to have considerable freedom of movement. Parents were too busy themselves (mothers needed time for cleaning, cooking and laundry) and had too many children to supervise them all the time. All children, without exception, went to school on their own; on foot or by bike. They walked or cycled



with siblings and friends. Four times a day, a big group of children crossed the neighbourhood in different directions to go to different schools. The number of adults and children informally known throughout the neighbourhood was large. Many adults remembered very clearly the names of families, shopkeepers, friends and friends' families living in the same neighbourhood and beyond. We asked the children of the 1950s to tell us which locations they used to visit, which schools, shops and playgrounds. It became clear that daily territories often went beyond their own neighbourhood. We heard stories of small adventures and adult-like responsibilities that took children beyond the boundaries of their own neighbourhood. A child raised in South Amsterdam and remembering that he had not yet left primary school

My grandmother was becoming demented. She used to visit us once a week, but she started to forget everything and then she began to visit us every day. When it became too much for my mother, I was told to take Grandma home. I got two tram tickets to take her home somewhere near the city centre. And when people in the tram recognised me, I felt really grown up.

Children knew a wide circle of people with different backgrounds living nearby and further away.

The 1950s were characterised by strict school segregation on the one hand and a strong street culture on the other. Over the past few decades, the residential population has changed in all three neighbourhoods. Importantly, the number of children has decreased considerably. Within a context of change, North Amsterdam shows the highest degree of continuity. Today, the dominance of a White working-class population is still there, albeit with more single-parent households and migrant families than there used to be. South Amsterdam has always been a middle-class neighbourhood, but socioeconomic

diversity in the 1950s was much greater than today. There was a mix of rented and owner-occupied housing, family housing, student houses and boarding houses accommodating Indonesian migrants. Shopkeepers, and thus their children, used to live in the area. Today, Van Breestraat is without exception a prosperous, White, upper-middle-class neighbourhood. Owing to the secularisation of Dutch society, religious background is no longer an issue in either North or South, but Islam is in evidence in the schools and neighbourhoods of East Amsterdam. While this 'new' religion has grown in the Indische Buurt, the lower socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood has changed very little. How do present social conditions at school and in the neighbourhood influence children's social networks today?

### **School-based Social Networks, Today**

All the children interviewed told us about their best school friends, friends from school and children they knew from school. The school population they derived their social network from, however, differed widely. Again, children living in one street went to four or five different schools: the same number of schools per street as we found for the children growing up in the 1950s. The children from the prosperous Van Breestraat went to five local primary schools. Some had a specific curriculum like Montessori. All these primary schools are exclusively 'White' and with highly educated parents, as are the neighbourhoods in which they are located. Pupils are doing well, they achieve high Cito scores (DMO, 2004) and they are expected to continue their education in the academic secondary schools as their parents did before them.

The group of children living in Wognum-erstraat also attend five different schools. One school, Wespennest, is a 'White' middle-class school. The other four schools are either

mixed or have a high share of migrant pupils. Their primary school careers only occasionally continue to selective secondary schools preparing for higher education (DMO, 2004). In that regard, these schools and their pupils reflect the socioeconomic status of the neighbourhood and the school careers of the parents. Two migrant families we spoke with decided to send their children to the Wespennest. These parents spoke at length about their choice and were apparently fully aware of the value of education.

Children in Bankastraart attend four different schools. Three of these have a majority of pupils with a migrant background. The majority of the children interviewed attend the JP Coenschool, located in Bankastraart itself. Yet also in this street, there are two migrant families we talked to who send their children to a middle-class school outside the neighbourhood. They hope that their children will get a better chance to continue their school career at a higher level. That is not to say that parents with children attending the schools in the neighbourhood do not have high aspirations. Nevertheless, figures show that only small minorities of the children attending the schools in the Indische Buurt succeed in gaining access to the secondary schools preparing for higher education (DMO, 2004). That situation has not changed since the 1950s, when nearly all the working-class children of the JP Coenschool went on to schools for home economics (for girls) and technical education (for boys). Some adults told us that they had 'compensated for' their dead-end early education by piling up diplomas later in life. The future will show whether this road is also open to the migrant pupils of today.

Teacher Jaap, working at the JP Coenschool for over 30 years, has witnessed the transformation of the school to the present migrant status

When I came to work here it was a White working- to middle-class neighbourhood,

many children and very large groups per year. In the 1970s, the residents started to suburbanise, East emptied and the school lost many children. Each year we started with one class less. But suddenly, the situation started to change: the first guest workers and their families came to live in Bankastraart. I remember very well the first Moroccan boy in my group, that was very special ... Oh, I have a Moroccan child in my group, how nice! After several years, the change went very fast. It could happen that, after the summer holiday, we were met by a whole new group of children who had all arrived in Amsterdam just a few weeks earlier. Within five years, we were a Black school.

Parent's freedom of school choice is reflected in the number of schools attended by children who all live in the same residential street. Behind this at first sight democratic process, we still see the powerful mechanism of class reproduction and segregation. Like 50 years ago, very few parents choose a school with a different status than they themselves have. That means that both in the 1950s and in the period 50 years later, children's friendships developed at school mainly consist of 'children like us'. At school, children used to meet and still meet other children with much the same background. However, owing to the strong street culture of 50 years ago, neighbourhoods functioned as a resource for building social capital, too. Yet what is the situation, today?

### **Neighbourhood-based Social Networks, Today**

What does children's street life look like, do they know children living in the same neighbourhood and do school friends participate in neighbourhood outdoor play? Wognummerstraat is unique in the sense that it is the only one of the three locations where children still frequently play outdoors. Children living nearby know each other and

observations revealed lively street scenes with children playing on the pavement, in the playground and on the small green areas spread throughout the neighbourhood, as children have done for generations. Even the composition of the playgroups we observed reminded us of the 1950s: big groups mixed across age and gender and the minority of migrant children living in Wognummerstraat playing along with the rest. Spatial and social conditions are favourable for children exploring the neighbourhood. Knowing children from school makes it easier to ask neighbourhood children to play outdoors, but school is certainly not the only resource for finding playmates. Children in North know where neighbourhood children live, as their parents know who the neighbourhood families are. Levels of mutual trust are high. Children simply ring the doorbell (or rattle the letterbox) of each other's houses and in so doing they build their personal networks. Children's agency in the spending of their after-school time is considerable and parental interference is restrained.

The situation in Van Breestraat is quite the opposite. Children in this South Amsterdam neighbourhood play outdoors less frequently than do the children in North. The outdoor environment is indeed far less attractive, with narrow pavements and many large cars parked in the street. Space indoors, however, is alluring. Children have spacious rooms with all kinds of play equipment. In addition, they are members of sports, music and other children's clubs and parents take care of their transport. This is a street where the backseat generation lives (Karsten, 2005). Parents' interference with how children spend their time is extensive. Parents are the gatekeepers when it comes to diaries and social networks. And it all starts with the choice of a particular school. The primary school determines the children's social world. As in North, children know many children from school and have best school friends, but knowing each other

from school reaches further: it is the basis of companionship for all other after-school activities—home visits, club membership and playing outdoors. Children growing up in the same street without attending the same school do not know each other well. A mother in Van Breestraat says

Many children live in this street, but they don't all go to the same school. A boy of his [son's] age lives two or three houses down this street, but they never play together...

Her (only) son confirmed this situation and added that he sometimes regretted not knowing how to start up a friendship with a child of his own age living so close by. Sometimes parents become aware of this situation and try to shape the conditions for children to meet. Families belonging to the same social circle can introduce each other easily to each other's networks. Onno (10) told us

The boy who lives on the other side of the street, he's not from my school, but I know him through a friend from school. Their mothers are friends and that's why I know him. And now we sometimes play outdoors together.

Onno's mother explained further the role of the parents in organising their children's network

He (Onno) met that boy because his mother and the mother of a boy from school he already knows are friends. And on New Year's Eve we were invited by this neighbour, we didn't know them before. We had friends in common, but we didn't know them until then. We've been invited home and now our sons can find each other when they want to play together.

This quote reflects the snowballing mechanism enlarging children's social contacts (Weller, 2007). In this case, it is an enlargement within the same social strata: creating bonding social networks for children. Van Bree children only marginally organise their

own networks; their parents' social circles determine their (school) friends. And observations revealed that the incidental playing outdoors in Van Breestraat is far more exclusive than it is in Wognummerstraat: small groups (mainly two or three) of the same age and sex.

In Bankastraat, as in Van Breestraat, playing outdoors does not occur as a matter of course. Most of the children belong to the category of indoor children (Karsten, 2005). Their parents do not allow them to play outdoors and to meet neighbour children. Bankastraat parents do not socialise with their neighbours very intensively and as a consequence do not feel much mutual trust. Parents and children alike are particularly afraid of the 'big boys', hanging about in the street and playing football in the cage. Some parents with an Islam background send their children to the mosque, the Moroccans to the Moroccan mosque and the Turks to the Turkish mosque. They consider the mosque a safer place than the street. On Sundays, children report family outings in the park nearby, with siblings and cousins. Thus, after school, most children in Bankastraat live in narrow ethnically based social circles. During school time, they enjoy a highly multicultural life, although with little variation in social class. In the classroom, they meet children from various backgrounds, but, as they and their teachers told us, best friends are seldom interethnic. No one took interethnic schoolmates home. Children know that their parents feel insecure; they do not know how to communicate or what rules to apply.

In Bankastraat, boundaries are only rarely crossed. One of our respondents is an older woman who has lived all her married life in Bankastraat, where she brought up her children, who are now all suburbanised. When her granddaughter Trudy comes to visit her, she arranges for Turkish Elef, who lives next door, to be a playmate. The girls enjoy playing together very much

I took care of my granddaughter when she was young and her parents had to work and sometimes at the weekends when they had other things to do. I used to settle myself down on the pavement and let her play outdoors. So, I got to know many of the neighbourhood children, and so did my granddaughter. Her friendship with Elef developed. And now Elef and another neighbourhood girl come and ask now and then whether Trudy is here.

While children in Wognummerstraat could easily rehearse the names of children living nearby, children growing up in Bankastraat and Van Breestraat found it difficult to name any neighbourhood children they did not know from school. For children from both Van Breestraat and Bankastraat, the school is the main resource for their social network. In the case of Bankastraat, school is a multi-ethnic reservoir and children's daily social contacts contribute to ethnic bridging. Yet without exception, these bridging social contacts are rooted within comparable socioeconomic circles and do not include Dutch-born children. And the bridging social connections of the children during school time do not undergo enlargement after school. School does not determine children's social life as it does in Van Breestraat. In Bankastraat, a determining role is preserved for the family and one's own ethnicity and thus for one's own limited resources. In Van Breestraat, parents behave in the same way, but their social backgrounds open up far more rich resources for their children.

### **Breaking through Boundaries?**

Two of the interviewed children living in working-class North attend a middle-class school, Wespennest; as we reported earlier they are migrant children. For Egzan (8) and his brother, the school is a resource for friendly contacts with middle-class children, but school is not the exclusive source for getting to know other children

After school, I play football with the other boys in this street. Sometimes some girls play with us, too. And I always ask some boys from school, too. One is older than we are. They live nearby and we always hope to play at least three against three.

His best friend is a boy from school who lives in Blokkerstraat, some streets further on. Best school friends come to play after school. Children's freedom of movement in North is rather large and mixed groups of school and neighbourhood children often play together.

Some migrant parents in Bankastraat also decided to send their child to a middle-class school outside the neighbourhood. However, playing with these indigenous Dutch middle-class schoolmates after school turns out to be rather complicated. Bankastraat parents do not know the other parents of the school; they live in different neighbourhoods and have different cultural backgrounds. Making connections is not easy and leads them to take—as they themselves say—the easiest path. A Moroccan father who chose a mixed school for his son outside the Indische Buurt said

We are usually among Moroccans. That is the easiest way, we speak the same language and we come from the same country. It's just easier. That's also the reason for choosing a football club with many other Moroccan boys. But school is different and that is the reason for choosing this mixed school with at least a number of Dutch pupils.

In Bankastraat, children attending a school in another neighbourhood lose touch with the children in their own street. Jamal, a boy with a Dutch mother and an African father, who attends a school in the former port district

I don't know many children in this street. I don't like them either. They're stupid. Especially, those big boys in the cage.

His mother regrets this situation and describes her interventions to try to change it. These led to communication problems among the parents

That was very disappointing. I think it is more or less the Turks with the Turks, the Moroccans with the Moroccans, and maybe my children don't fit into the system. But maybe it's just the school, my children don't go to the school here around the corner, and so they are not at home in this street.

With the growing diversity in Bankastraat, social contacts have petered out and mutual trust is difficult to build. Migrant children rely on the ethnically based family circle. Some of them socialise after school time by using the Internet, but in most cases this is used to keep in touch with family members abroad. In contrast with the children in North, school relationships of these Bankastraat children do not continue after school.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This paper addresses children's social capital over time in the changing segregated context of Amsterdam. The central questions were whether and how children have been capable of building bridging social capital. The main conclusion is that children's social capital has narrowed considerably in two of the three selected streets: the migrant working-class Bankastraat and the White middle-class Van Breestraat. The children living in those streets lost most of the bridging social ties across age, class, religion and ethnicity. This conclusion is based on an in-depth study in the specific setting of Amsterdam. The case study character of this research limits generalisation. However, the use of a variety of intensive research methods enabled us to acquire a good understanding of the mechanisms underlying the narrowing of children's social circles.

In the 1950s, as 50 years later, school was the most important meeting-place for children and therefore the main site of social capital development. At school, children get to know many other children. Yet the school was and still is mainly the outcome of parents' status or the status they want to achieve. Parents have

chosen schools to underline their socioeconomic backgrounds, their religious convictions and their pedagogical principles. That combination creates schools as segregated nodes in the networks of 'people like us', not only for parents, but also for their children. This mechanism works at both the top and bottom strata of society. In the Netherlands of the 1950s, at the highpoint of pillarisation, school choice was primarily driven by religious background, although social class was also important. Today, we see that social class (Ball, 2003) and, in line with it, ethnicity are the main deterrents in choice of school with the narrowing of children's social capital as a result. Some migrant parents try to avoid the reproduction of their social class status and choose a middle-class school outside the neighbourhood. This choice may help their children to raise their status in the long run (Thrupp *et al.*, 2003). We looked at the present effects of 'Black flight' on the children's networks and saw positive effects in Wognummerstraat, but minimal effects in Bankastraat. This difference has much to do with children's loss of agency in Bankastraat. They are kept indoors and middle-class schools are located in places difficult for children to reach on their own. It turned out to be problematic for minority children to cross the divides between their personal backgrounds and the dominant background of the population of the middle-class school (Moody, 2001; Rodkin *et al.*, 2007). They have to fight segregation on three fronts: residential neighbourhood, social class and ethnicity. Consequently, developing bridging social contacts from school is complicated.

However, schools are not the only environment in which to build social capital. In the 1950s, neighbourhoods were important locations, too. Playing outdoors after school provided another, more heterogeneous social circle and the basis for crossing relationships between religious and/or status groups. Today, Tuindorp Nieuwendam is the

only neighbourhood that facilitates playing outdoors in an inviting way. The physical environment gives children the opportunity to continue with traditional forms of outdoor life, while social changes have not been drastic. Parents trust each other and support children in developing neighbourhood friendships. The autochthonous majority and the small number of migrant children meet outdoors and benefit from neighbourhood life in their own ways. In the higher-status district of South Amsterdam, the neighbourhood no longer functions as an environment in which children impulsively engage in neighbourhood play with children they do not know from school. The quality of the outdoors does not accommodate spontaneous social contacts, although the levels of social homogeneity are high. For the children growing up in the Indische Buurt, as in the Museumkwartier, outdoor play is not a matter of course. Physical space is not the major problem, but negative feelings of social safety related to the many unknown neighbours from various backgrounds are (Karsten, 1998). In this multicultural neighbourhood, high levels of heterogeneity go along with low levels of mutual trust.

In all three neighbourhoods and compared with the past, parents have become more important in organising the social life of their children, the least so in Tuindorp Nieuwendam. Children's agency is low both at the lower end of the neighbourhood ladder, the Indische Buurt, and at the upper end, the Museumkwartier. Parents either direct their children to stay indoors or take them to specific places of 'people like us'. Both strategies do not provide their children with much opportunity to build crossing social relationships.

In relation to the urban policies on mixing residential groups it would be particularly interesting to return to the Indische Buurt with its newly created apartment blocks in the higher segments of the market. Will there

be a growth in the number of middle-class children? And if so, what does that mean for children's outdoor play and their abilities to develop crossing relationships? Some studies in the Netherlands show that, under certain conditions, there is a willingness on the part of middle-class families to invest in neighbourhood contacts with migrant families and children (Veldboer *et al.*, 2008; Karsten, 2007); other studies report a more pessimistic view (Smith, 1996; Atkinson, 2006). An avenue opens here for further research.

Mixing policies are not confined to neighbourhoods alone, as the policies to prevent the existence of the 'Black' and 'White' schools reveal (Butler and Hamnett, 2007). There is often an implicit complaint that parents do not choose the nearest school. This paper reveals that there is nothing new under the sun: parents have always chosen schools with which they could identify. The problem of children's segregated lives has something to do with parental school choices, but also with the disappearance of a children's street culture that enables them to bridge differences on their own. This aspect deserves more attention in discussions about resolving the problems of the segregated city. And it is not only migrant children, but also autochthonous children whose horizons are restricted. Both groups share a poor preparation for the multicultural society of the future.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is the result of a robust research project with much help from others. The author would like to thank all the participants and particularly Carolien Bouw for her invaluable contributions to this study.

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