Spatial order and social position: Neighbourhoods, schools and educational inequality

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INTRODUCTION

There is a common notion that growing up in a poor neighbourhood presents a number of challenges that individuals in economically better-off areas are less likely to encounter. This belief influences social policymaking, families’ residential decisions and social science research. In recent years, the notion of a ‘neighbourhood effect’ has received significant attention in the academic and policy world. Scholars examining neighbourhood effects investigate the links between place of residence and individual outcomes and trajectories, such as labour market status, health and wellbeing, and educational career. This field of research recognizes that resources and opportunities are not distributed evenly across geographic space and that these spatial inequalities may be implicated in the reproduction and reinforcement of social inequalities.

Residential patterns of poverty, affluence and socioeconomic status are often discussed in terms of the level of segregation. At the most general level, segregation refers to the degree to which two or more groups who differ across certain criteria (e.g. social class, ethnicity) are separated from each other across spatial or organizational units (e.g. neighbourhoods). Patterns of neighbourhood segregation, as well as other social differences between groups and individuals, are reflected in the school system; thus, people also speak of ‘segregated schools’. Intersecting questions about the effects of neighbourhood and school composition, particularly social and ethnic segregation in these settings, are important and recurring topics in political and academic discussions (Furstenberg and Hughes, 1997; Karsten et al., 2006; Latten, 2005; Musterd, 2003). This dissertation sheds light on these questions by examining the educational outcomes of youth in the Netherlands in relation to their neighbourhood and school contexts.

This book consists of five separate studies that deal with different facets of the broader academic and political debate on the implications of neighbourhood and school composition. Bringing together bodies of literature on neighbourhood effects, school effects, residential and school segregation, and youth education, this book aims to contribute to the debate on the role of the neighbourhood in shaping individual outcomes, and particularly to the understanding of the interplay between youth, neighbourhoods and schools. While there is widespread agreement that geography is relevant for understanding social relations and inequalities, just how important one’s residential context is for shaping their opportunities and life chances, understanding through which mechanisms the neighbourhood matters, and deciding upon how to conceptualize and measure ‘neighbourhood effects’, are subjects of ongoing debate. Although the notion
of neighbourhood effects appeals to our common sense understanding that places offer different social opportunities, the story is more complex than often assumed and adapting the framework of neighbourhood effects to policy is a contentious matter.

In the remainder of this chapter, I introduce the theoretical framework and conceptual model underpinning this book. I first outline the thesis of neighbourhood effects and juxtapose it with broader geographical theory on socio-spatial relations. I then connect the notions of neighbourhood effects and school effects, and consider the theoretical and conceptual links between neighbourhoods, schools and youth. Following this, I discuss the research design and research questions addressed in this study and introduce the content of the following chapters.

1.1 CONCEPTUALIZING ‘NEIGHBOURHOOD’ AND ‘NEIGHBOURHOOD EFFECTS’

What is a neighbourhood? What are ‘neighbourhood effects’? These two questions are not as straightforward as they might seem and are not always elaborated in studies of neighbourhood effects, so it is worth examining them closely here. Neighbourhoods are at once spatially and socially constituted areas, embedded in city, metropolitan and (inter)national contexts. Neighbourhoods are ‘multiply constructed’ – they may be defined and named by officials, but are also defined, interpreted and imagined in multiple ways by different groups and individuals (cf. Gieryn, 2000; Martin, 2003). Thus, the precise definition of a neighbourhood is not self-evident, nor is there one way that it can be defined or operationalized in research. Two people living on the same block or even in the same house can have a different view of what constitutes their neighbourhood (e.g. Burton and Price-Spratlen, 1999; Lee and Campbell, 1997). Moreover, peoples’ spatial sense of neighbourhood is likely to vary depending on the activity in question (e.g. using local facilities versus greeting neighbours), and to expand and contract over time (e.g. over age and life stage). Likewise, the neighbourhood of interest to researchers also varies depending on the research questions and topic of investigation. Those examining the outcomes of neighbourhood regeneration programmes are apt to focus on the neighbourhoods officially designated as regeneration areas, while those investigating local interpersonal relations may focus on much smaller, subjective neighbourhood spaces.

The slipperiness of the neighbourhood concept and the constraints in defining and operationalizing it for empirical research have been widely recognized (e.g.
Andersson and Musterd, 2010; Chaskin, 1997; Kearns and Parkinson, 2001; Martin, 2003; Lee and Campbell, 1997; Lupton, 2003; Pebley and Sastry, 2004). Martin (2003: 362) writes, “we do not know neighborhoods when we see them; we construct them, for purposes of our research or social lives... The neighborhoods that we define through research or social exchange are always subject to redefinition and contention; they are not self-evident”. Many qualitative studies apply a fluid definition of neighbourhood; however, larger-scale quantitative studies are more restricted in their operational definitions and usually adopt administratively delineated (or other predefined) areas as neighbourhood proxies. While these areas might resonate with what some inhabitants perceive to be their neighbourhood, and may correspond to ‘official’ (e.g. municipal government-defined) neighbourhoods, they are understood to be proxies for a persons’ residential context. In contrast to communities, neighbourhoods are necessarily geographical (i.e. spatial) areas; thus, a neighbourhood is, broadly speaking, a geographical area in which residents share proximity and the circumstances that come with that proximity (Chaskin, 1997; Martin, 2003).

Many ‘places’ are nestled within a neighbourhood (Reay and Lucey, 2000); thus a neighbourhood can be seen as a set of places, each of which has linkages to other places. In neighbourhood effects research, the neighbourhood is often viewed as a mediating link between the macro and the micro (Gotham, 2003). It is these macro-to-micro relationships which Wilson (1987, 1996) sought to document in his well-known work on the south side of Chicago: economic restructuring, deindustrialization and middle-class suburbanization resulted in the departure of low-skilled jobs and middle-class families from the inner-city (for him, a protective ‘social buffer’ for the urban poor), bringing about, he argued, worsening conditions for those living in poor urban neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods have material (e.g. streets, buildings, physical space) and social (e.g. social and cultural milieu) elements, although it is mainly, but not exclusively, the social that is of interest to neighbourhood effects researchers. It is recognized, however, that the social and material are related (e.g. physical features, such as shared housing entryways, dense high rises or the presence of parks, could facilitate or hinder social interaction).

The notion of neighbourhood effects draws on the idea that where we live influences who we meet, how we view the world (and how the world views us), the resources and opportunities available to us, and ultimately, our chances in life. Whether neighbourhoods matter in general (or whether ‘place matters’) is not really at stake. As geographers frequently point out, social life necessarily occurs in certain spaces and places, and space is “one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world” (Massey, 1994: 251). The
neighbourhood, as one such social and material space, can thus have salience for how we experience, understand and perceive the world. Neighbourhoods matter for young people because, for many, they will be where their first friendships are formed and where they attend primary school. For some, they will be sources of identification and social belonging (e.g. Wridt, 2004). Even as children grow up and eventually move away from home, their childhood neighbourhoods may remain strongly implanted in their memories (L. Karsten, 2010; Valentine, 2003).

The issue, rather, is that residence in certain neighbourhoods – as areas with differing population constellations, reputations, and allocations of institutional resources, services and facilities – might promote or undermine one’s wellbeing and life chances. The question, as it is often expressed in the literature, is whether neighbourhoods matter for one’s life chances over and above other factors known to be important for individual outcomes, such as social class, family circumstances and gender. Referring to neighbourhood and school contexts, Duncan and Raudenbush (1999: 29) write that “context can be said to matter if differences among social contexts are found to be important in explaining individual differences in achieving ends most of us value – mental health, literacy, intellectual growth, educational attainment, occupational status, and the like”.

Some researchers have formulated the question of neighbourhood effects as “do poor neighbourhoods make their residents poorer?” (Friedrichs and Blasius, 2003: 808), or by the argument that “it is worse to be poor in a poor area than one that is socially mixed” (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2004: 438). Other scholars have pointed out that these types of notions do not adequately capture the interconnectedness between people and place – the fact that ‘people make places, just as places make people’ (e.g. Burton and Price-Spratlen, 1999; Furstenberg and Hughes, 1997; Smith and Easterlow, 2005). Social class and family circumstances may also be related to neighbourhood conditions, and people do not come to live in neighbourhoods through random processes. If people and place are intertwined, can we determine the ‘effects of neighbourhoods’?

Thinking about the connections between space and society from a causal perspective, Gans (2002: 330) poses two questions: “[f]irst, do both natural and social space have causal power, creating social effects, and if so when, how, and why? The second question reverses the causal arrow: Do individuals and collectivities exert causal power, creating effects on both kinds of space, and if so, when, how, and why?” He writes that the answer to both questions is yes – “individuals and collectivities shape natural and social space by how they use these, although each kind of space, and particularly the social, will also have effects on them” (ibid.) – but that the effects of space are not automatic and usually work indirectly. He is essentially describing the mutual constitution of
space and society: a continuous two-way relationship between social processes and spatial form (and between spatial processes and social form) (cf. Massey, 1984; Soja, 1980). Individuals imprint themselves on and modify their spatial world, while their (socio-)spatial surroundings also influence them. The thesis of neighbourhood effects draws mainly on this latter idea: that where we live helps to shape our attitudes, activities, behaviour and opportunities. A child’s behaviour, worldview, aspirations and life chances will in part be shaped by the places they live, by the structures, friends, schoolmates, adults, institutions and agencies they encounter in their everyday surroundings. In terms of the reciprocal relationships between people and space/place, neighbourhood effects research is most directly concerned with the neighbourhood → individual relationship. The fact that social forces produce and reproduce uneven geographies is implicit in neighbourhood effects research; the main goal of which is to determine how much (and how) these (unequal) residential environments bear upon individuals (and their behaviour, opportunities and life chances).

Thus, the ‘neighbourhood’ may have effects – or more concretely, the social relations and processes, institutions and agencies related to it or embedded in it – may have effects, but the social actions of entities such as individuals and groups also shape what the neighbourhood is and what goes on in and around it. The thoughts of geographer Doreen Massey (1984: 4-5; emphasis in original) are helpful:

What does it mean to say that space has effects? One thing it does not mean is that ‘space itself’, or particular spatial forms, themselves have effects… It is not spatial form in itself (nor distance, nor movement) that has effects, but the spatial form of particular and specified social processes and social relationships.

One of the main reasons why researchers investigate neighbourhood effects is the concern that inequalities across neighbourhoods may perpetuate social inequalities. Processes of social and spatial inequality are generally understood to be causally intertwined (Soja, 1980; Massey, 1984). Social inequality refers to the disproportionate allocation of resources and the unequal access to opportunities among different individuals or groups in society. The study of spatial inequalities recognizes that geography can be a salient source of social inequality: where people are located in geographic space matters. Social inequalities may be articulated spatially; for example, in residential patterns marked by divisions in income, class and race. Residential segregation may be a spatial expression of
social inequality, although it need not be\textsuperscript{1}. At the same time, spatial patterns help to reproduce or exacerbate social differences. Thus, spatial patterns, created through social processes and unequal power relations, may simultaneously or in turn contribute to unequal social outcomes.

Massey (1984: 4) argues that if spatial patterns (e.g. of poverty, privilege, unemployment, deprived or affluent neighbourhoods) are seen only as a reflection or outcome of social processes, this presents an important conceptual problem, for “[t]here is more to it than that. Spatial distributions and geographical differentiation may be the result of social processes, but they also affect how those processes work. ‘The spatial’ is not just an outcome; it is also part of the explanation”. Thus, there may be explanatory power in the ‘neighbourhood’, but it is, obviously, only part of the explanation. This is an important point, because the causes of social problems are increasingly traced back to local characteristics (cf. Amin, 2007; Fallov, 2010; Goetz, 2010; Lupton and Tunstall, 2008). Amin (2007: 105) argues that “social inequality has come to be re-cast as a defect of place, a deficiency of the capacity of local residents to participate and connect, resulting in social breakdown, de-motivation and isolation”. Commenting on current neighbourhood regeneration policies, he remarks, “[o]vercoming inequality has become a matter of community mobilization and bridging social difference (e.g. through mixed housing, ethnic dialogue, multicultural spaces) rather than one of tackling systemic and trans-local sources of injustice”. Fallov (2010) makes a similar point in her analysis of Danish and British neighbourhood and social exclusion policies that aim to cultivate local ‘community capacities’ and ‘neighbourhood-wide social capital’, which are presented as effective means of tackling social exclusion. The danger of this kind of discourse is that individual social problems become rendered as neighbourhood phenomena, and the underlying causes of the problems are lost. This perspective can thus obscure the wider structural forces that help to create and perpetuate neighbourhood inequalities, and shape the social circumstances of the people living in the neighbourhood. As Musterd (2002: 140) remarks, although social problems may become manifest in a neighbourhood, this does not imply that they are caused by the neighbourhood or its population composition. Thus, while processes and conditions associated with a neighbourhood may help to aggravate or reinforce social problems (though also conversely, to reduce, alleviate and reshape them), the underlying sources of social problems such as poverty and ethnic inequality

\textsuperscript{1} Residential segregation can also occur, for example, when groups segregate for reasons such as solidarity and maintaining cultural identity and community (Peach, 1996; Musterd, 2003).
1.2 LITERATURE AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Over the past two decades, the study of neighbourhood effects has generated a vast and interdisciplinary interest, with studies spanning the disciplines from sociology (Ainsworth, 2002; Small and Newman, 2001), criminology (Oberwittler, 2004; Sampson et al., 2002), geography (Musterd and Andersson, 2005; Pinkster, 2007; Smith and Easterlow, 2005), health studies (Diez Roux, 2004; Macintyre et al., 2002), economics (Oreopoulus, 2003), family and child studies (Burton and Price-Spratlen, 1999), to psychology (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). This research has examined the associations between neighbourhood conditions and individual outcomes such as educational career and school aspirations, youth delinquency and crime, family management and parenting strategies, stress and mental health, and labour market outcomes. Much of the impetus behind this work has been the notion that to understand how people and their social circumstances are shaped and conditioned necessitates consideration of their spatial contexts. Without taking features of both people and the places they inhabit into account, we have only a partial account of their experiences; for instance, the risks and opportunities they encounter, and how their wellbeing may be promoted or constrained. From the side of policymaking, knowledge about residential inequalities and the effects of neighbourhood conditions is presumed to aid in the development of geographically-targeted policies and programmes (cf. Forrest and Kearns, 2001).

Widespread interest in the neighbourhood resurged across the social sciences in the late 1980s, due in large part to the work of Wilson (1987) on the causes and consequences of concentrated inner-city poverty. In the late 1980s, there was a recognition that poverty in the US had become much more spatially concentrated, and a perception that social problems in poor neighbourhoods had worsened. Wilson argued that in addition to institutional and geographical constraints, such as the ‘spatial mismatch’ between low-income individuals and employment and educational opportunities, processes such as role modelling, shared values and social norms made living in a neighbourhood with many

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2 These points are elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6.
3 And indeed, many studies cut across several of these disciplines (e.g. Furstenberg et al., 2000).
disadvantaged people more challenging than elsewhere. His work prompted a ‘rediscovery of the neighbourhood’ (Small and Newman, 2001) across the social sciences – in the US and abroad – and turned scholarly, media and political attention towards the dynamics of neighbourhood poverty.

A second theoretical framework that helped to turn attention towards the neighbourhood, particularly in research concerned with children and youth, stems from developmental psychology. Bronfenbrenner’s (1981, 1989) ‘ecological systems theory’ (or ‘development in context’) advocated a better appreciation of the role of context in development. A fact that had gone unrecognized in much of the literature on development was simply that development could not occur without a context. In addition to the family, Bronfenbrenner outlined how extrafamilial contexts, including the school and neighbourhood, were important settings for understanding individual wellbeing and trajectories. His model of ecological systems describes the individual as a member of a series of interconnected and overlapping contexts, from the proximal family context to the more distal city and national contexts. While individual and family characteristics (e.g. social class, access to economic, cultural and social capital, and family structure) are important for understanding individual outcomes, he stressed that families and individuals are also situated in, and react to, the wider neighbourhood and community settings.

Research findings, based on both quantitative and qualitative methods, have resulted in a substantial base of evidence underlining the role of the neighbourhood in various facets of individuals’ lives. This research has elucidated both the complex and subtle ways in which place of residence may be important for individual decisions and life chances. Studies have documented the uneven ‘geography of opportunity’ and its relationship to youths’ perceptions and choices about work and education (Galster and Killen, 1995), and the ways in which families manage risks in their local environments while raising children (Furstenberg et al., 2000). Quantitative studies have documented the long-term implications of childhood neighbourhood segregation for future educational outcomes (Andersson and Subramanian, 2006; Massey and Fischer, 2006) and earnings (Galster et al., 2007). Qualitative research and neighbourhood case studies have delved more deeply into the specific processes and pathways that may link one’s behaviour and outcomes to their residential surroundings, including local social networks and prevailing norms about work (Pinkster, 2007), school ‘gatekeeping’ practices.

Despite a different disciplinary tradition than Wilson and the other urban scholars usually associated with the study of neighbourhood effects, Bronfenbrenner’s ideas have been highly influential in neighbourhood effects research on children and youth (e.g. Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Chase-Lansdale et al., 1997; Furstenberg et al., 2000; Rankin and Quane, 2002; Galster and Santiago, 2006; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Leventhal et al., 2009).
that work to limit the school choices of youth from certain stigmatized areas (Warrington, 2005), and neighbourhood-contingent institutional practices that affect youths’ career development (Bauder, 2002).

1.3 THE SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD EFFECTS

Two of the major tasks of neighbourhood effects research have been determining the nature and relative importance of neighbourhood effects (i.e. how much does residential location matter?), and explaining how these effects come about (i.e. untangling the processes or mechanisms driving neighbourhood effects). The intervening processes posited to connect children, youth and adults’ behaviour and outcomes to their residential contexts have been linked to a number of social-interactional and institutional mechanisms, including institutional resources (e.g. the presence, quality and diversity of public services, local schools, health facilities), local social relations, collective socialization (e.g. adult monitoring and supervision), peer relations, parenting and family functioning, social norms and collective efficacy (i.e. conditions of mutual trust, shared expectations among residents), and stigmatization (e.g. negative stereotyping of neighbourhoods) (Jencks and Mayer, 1990; Sampson et al., 2002; Galster et al., 2007).

It is also important to note that not all of these mechanisms depend on residents having face-to-face contact or even being aware of each other. While neighbourhood youth may communicate with each other directly and interact in that manner (i.e. peer relations), the processes driving neighbourhood effects could also be a function of external factors, for example, the government or market allocation of institutions, facilities and other resources based on composition of the neighbourhood, which in turn bear upon individual residents. Some residents, for instance, might be more likely or better equipped to advocate for the neighbourhood and its institutions and services (e.g. schools and school quality, parks, public infrastructure, safety and policing) and to command the attention of government or political actors (Joseph et al., 2007). These residents are usually thought to be those with more financial or social investments in the neighbourhood (e.g. through home ownership or longer term residence) and with access to relatively more resources (e.g. resourceful social networks, time, cultural capital). Thus, through both internal (e.g. collective social functioning) and external (e.g. stigmatization, public service allocation) processes, neighbourhood conditions are thought to have an effect on individual wellbeing and opportunities. As mentioned above, these are not simply deterministic or
One-way effects; people are in constant dialogue with their surroundings and the effects of the neighbourhood are moderated by personal characteristics and circumstances.

Many of the ideas about the mechanisms of neighbourhood effects are apparent in policy documents. For instance, a recent large-scale, area-based programme of the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration aims to improve the social conditions in what it deems the 40 most socially troubled districts in the country. The policy text links multiple social problems to neighbourhood composition (VROM, 2007: 4):

Many neighbourhoods have an overrepresentation of socially disadvantaged households. For the most part, these neighbourhoods also have a disproportionately high proportion of non-Western immigrants. The lack of relevant skills and poor prospects for employment ensures that these groups in these neighbourhoods take part less and less in Dutch society, which in some cases is coupled with resentment towards society... Middle-income groups move away to other, better districts or neighbouring municipalities, while, at the same time, lower-income and underprivileged groups move in or stay behind... The function of the city as an emancipation machine for low-income groups and immigrants therefore comes under pressure. It is not uncommon that the best teachers, who are precisely needed at schools in these districts, leave for schools in better neighbourhoods, because the working circumstances there are less difficult (ibid.)

Middle- or higher-income residents are often (implicitly or explicitly) presumed to be a resource for the neighbourhood and its residents, as are good teachers (who may, according to the policy text, be attracted to economically better-off neighbourhoods or deterred from teaching in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods). There does appear to be some support for the notion that schools in poor districts have more difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers. Karsten et al. (2006) find indications of what they term ‘teacher flight’ in Amsterdam. Primary schools serving large shares of children from low-

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5 The ‘Actieplan Krachtwijken’ (Powerful Communities Action Plan); also called the ‘40 Districts of Vogelaar’.
6 Translated from Dutch.
7 However, this is presumably due to a more complicated set of factors – including inadequate teacher training or experience in teaching children who are not proficient in the language of instruction, or who have related learning challenges – rather than inherently difficult working circumstances (see Gewirtz, 1998; Lupton, 2005).
socioeconomic status and non-Western immigrant backgrounds had the greatest share of teacher vacancies, while secondary schools offering vocational tracks of education (which serve a disproportionate amount of students from low-socioeconomic and immigrant backgrounds) had more difficulty filling vacancies than other schools (for supportive US findings, see Clotfelter et al., 2006; Scafidi et al., 2007). This Dutch social mixing policy and similar approaches are discussed further in Chapter 5.

1.4 JOINING TWO STRANDS OF LITERATURE: THE RESIDENTIAL AND EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Children and youth have held an important place in neighbourhood studies. The residential context is thought to be particularly relevant for them, as many spend a vast amount of their time there, attending local schools, playing with friends, and using nearby parks and services. Young peoples’ spatial range is also generally more restricted than that of adults, who have easier access to transportation, money and more freedom to travel (Matthews and Limb, 1999). Moreover, studies show that adults with children tend to maintain more relationships in their neighbourhood (e.g. Henning and Lieberg, 1996), so not only will children and youth have local relationships, but so will their parents. An important neighbourhood institution for many young people is the school.

Neighbourhoods and schools are two interrelated spheres in the lives of young people, which often overlap as places of learning and socializing. We can think about the links between neighbourhood and school in a number of ways. The school can be seen as a local institutional resource that is, by nature of the educational quasi-market, unevenly accessible to all people and places. The geography of education provision is not equal. Some neighbourhoods have better schools, more schools, and as noted above, conditions that are more attractive to (highly qualified) teachers (Lupton, 2005; Karsten et al., 2006). As a local place frequented by many residents, the school is also a meeting place for children, youth and their parents (L. Karsten, 2007), and a place where friendship ties and social networks are formed and maintained. Especially for those children and youth who are educated locally, the school is a neighbourhood institution where they will spend a good part of their weekdays. In the neighbourhood effects literature, the school is considered to be a pathway through which the neighbourhood context may influence children and youth. Because residential patterns tend to inform local school populations, schools are places where young people come into contact with neighbourhood children and their families.
The school is also a social context in its own right and not all students attend a neighbourhood school. Conceptually similar to the notion of ‘neighbourhood effects’ is the notion of ‘school effects’. School effects (or school composition) research investigates the implications of student body composition, often in concert with other school characteristics, for such outcomes as the achievements, friendships and school careers of students (Thrupp et al., 2002). Through the interrelated channels of peer group processes, teaching and instructional processes, and school organization and management, the composition of the student body is thought to have meaning for students’ outcomes. In this book, I bring these two fields of research together. Chapter 3 delves deeper into the meaning of school segregation for youth educational outcomes and briefly discusses the (asymmetrical) relationship between school and neighbourhood segregation. Chapter 4 examines the hypothesis that schools are a pathway through which neighbourhood conditions may indirectly influence young people.

1.5 THE CURRENT STUDY: RESEARCH APPROACH AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

1.5.1. Research questions

In this book, I explore, through several avenues, the merits and limits of the neighbourhood effects approach to understanding the links between place of residence and youth educational outcomes. The questions that initiated this research are:

*Can neighbourhood effects on youths’ educational outcomes be identified, and if so, what is the nature and extent of these effects?*

*Are neighbourhood effects on youth transferred through the school context?*

The neighbourhood effects that I am mainly interested in are those related to the social milieu of the neighbourhood, thus I investigate the associations between neighbourhood socioeconomic context (proxied by indicators such as the average neighbourhood income, rate of unemployment, share of low- and high-income households, share of homeownership) and youth educational outcomes. Before examining neighbourhood effects and school effects together, it was necessary to investigate school effects; thus, the following research question was also formulated:
Does the socioeconomic or ethnic composition of the school have an effect on youths’ secondary school outcomes?

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model underpinning this research, which is inspired by Smith and Easterlow’s (2005) model of area effects on health inequalities. The distinctive feature of their approach is that it takes the understudied reciprocal relationships between people and neighbourhoods into account. Starting with the left side of the figure, the ‘neighbourhood effects’ pathway is indicated by the arrow connecting ‘neighbourhoods’ to ‘youth’ by way of the box signifying the intervening mechanisms thought to drive neighbourhood effects. The arrow running next to this one, from ‘schools’ to ‘youth’, indicates the possible effects of the school context on youth (i.e. school effects). These relationships are examined in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. The arrow running upwards from the ‘neighbourhoods’ to ‘schools’ box signifies the possible transfer of neighbourhood effects on youth through the school context, while the arrow running between the ‘neighbourhood effects’ and ‘school effects’ pathways indicates that these effects may also work mutually; these relationships are tested in Chapter 4.

On the right side of the figure an arrow runs from ‘youth’ to ‘schools’ and ‘neighbourhoods’, indicating not only that youth make up part of these contexts, but also that they choose or are selected into these contexts, for example by their (and their families’) school and residential decisions. This depicts what is often described as ‘selection effects’ – the fact that individuals are not randomly sorted into neighbourhoods and schools (Dietz, 2002; Sampson et al., 2002). While youths’ parents clearly are the primary people making residential choices, youth
typically have quite a large role in deciding which secondary schools they attend, and they can (consciously or unconsciously) shape how oriented they are towards their school and neighbourhood contexts through their decisions and actions concerning the friendships they maintain, their activities, the places they visit and hang out, whether they play indoors or outside in their neighbourhood, and, in the case of divorced or separated parents, how much time they spend living at each parents’ house, and so on. While youth and their families can and do make these kind of decisions, the other half of the relationship is also relevant, for these decisions are made within the context of a set of constraints. For example, schools and neighbourhoods are not accessible or open to everyone; school practices and access rules regarding formal and informal admissions can exclude certain youth or deter them from attending (Warrington, 2005; Karsten et al., 2003; Noreisch, 2007). As Karsten et al. (2001) note, schools can adopt strategies to improve their reputation or position in the local market, with one such strategy being to ‘regulate’ school intake. Education and housing choices are made under market or quasi-market conditions in which individuals are not equal players. Thus, the left side of this graph shows ‘context effects’ or the context → youth relationship, while the right side examines youths’ routes into and impact on contexts, which is the youth → context relationship.

1.5.2 Data resources and methods
This research uses primarily quantitative research methods. All data analyses are based on a large-scale study in the Netherlands called the ‘Longitudinal Cohort Study in Secondary Education – Cohort 1999’ (in Dutch, the Voortgezet Onderwijs Cohort Leerlingen or, VOCL’99). Beginning in 1999, this study follows a cohort of students from their first year of secondary school (average age 13 years old) until they leave full-time education. From an initial sample of 246 schools, 126 schools participated in the study. All students who entered the first year of these schools in 1999 belong to the cohort, totalling 19,391 students; this sample represents 11 percent of the population that entered the first year of secondary school in 1999. The sample was constructed by Statistics Netherlands and has been found to be representative of schools and students in Dutch secondary education (van Berkel, 1999) and neighbourhoods in the Netherlands (Sykes and Kuyper, 2009). Kuyper et al. (2003) provide details about the sampling design and all variables in the dataset (those used in the current study are also described in more detail in the following chapters).

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8 These examples are taken from the qualitative findings of this study, reported in Chapter 6.
Using students’ postcodes, I matched each student in the VOCL’99 dataset to a neighbourhood identifier, which was then matched to a national database with neighbourhood characteristics, published by Statistics Netherlands. In this way, I could see the characteristics of both youths’ neighbourhoods and schools. Neighbourhoods in this study are operationalized as the lowest administrative spatial subunit in the Netherlands (in Dutch, buurten). These areas vary in terms of number of inhabitants and surface area and tend to reflect natural borders, such as roads, rail- and waterways, parks, and building styles and periods. Nationwide, there were 10,737 of these neighbourhoods in 1999, with a mean population of 1468. Students in the VOCL’99 sample lived in 2248 (21 percent) of these neighbourhoods.

Because of the structure of this dataset – individuals nested in neighbourhoods and schools – this study uses multilevel modelling and cross-classified modelling techniques. These techniques are a variation of standard (OLS) regression and are useful for analysing hierarchical data, as they take the non-random independence of two individuals in the same context (e.g. two students in the same school) into account and allow for estimation of variance at each level in the model. Multilevel modelling is used to estimate the associations between youth school outcomes and (separately) their neighbourhood and school contexts. Cross-classified models, which take into account the membership of individuals in two, non-nested units, are employed to test for the simultaneous associations between youth and their school and neighbourhood contexts.

In addition to these large-scale (quantitative) studies, I conducted a small-scale qualitative study, in which in-depth interviews were carried out with 16 youth who grew up in Amsterdam. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a better understanding of the interactions between youth, schools and neighbourhood contexts, youths’ routes into their educational and neighbourhood settings, and their subjective interpretations of and experiences in their neighbourhoods. In these interviews I explored the varying definitions of neighbourhood that youth offer and their views on neighbourhood structure.

1.5.3 Caveats and strengths
Specific strengths and limitations of the methodologies employed are discussed in the relevant chapters, but it is important to outline some key points here. First, the kind of modelling adopted in this study, as in all data modelling, rests on a number of assumptions and is obviously not a perfect conceptualization of the ‘real world’ or the real world relationships between youth and their school and neighbourhood settings. The effects estimated using these models must be read in the statistical sense, not the causal. Quantitative models can determine
associations between variables and these variables can register (quantifiable) change, however “[i]nfering causality is a much more complicated process and requires more than statistical models” (Diez Roux, 2004: 1954; see also Sayer, 1992: 179). Thus, the neighbourhood and school effects estimated in the models must be interpreted as predictive and suggestive, rather than causal.

While some of the data in the VOCL'99 is longitudinal (i.e. youths’ school outcomes), it was only possible to obtain cross-sectional information about youths’ neighbourhoods. Thus, the neighbourhood data represents a snapshot of youths’ residential contexts, rather than how these contexts changed over time. The operationalization that I use for youths’ neighbourhoods in Chapters 2 and 4 is based on administrative subunits, which is likely to underspecify youths’ actual neighbourhood contexts. Research suggests that different neighbourhood scales are relevant for different people, social activities and outcomes of interest, making the operationalization of ‘neighbourhood’ an ongoing complexity. The benefit of this approach is that I am able to comment on the magnitude and extent of associations between youth educational outcomes and neighbourhood conditions using a large, nationally representative dataset. While research in the Netherlands has examined neighbourhood effects on adult outcomes, such as social mobility (Musterd et al., 2003), dimensions of ethnic integration (van der Laan Bouma-Doff, 2007) and labour market behaviour (Pinkster, 2007), few studies have focused on children and youth, and no large-scale studies have examined neighbourhood effects on youth outcomes. Thus, this methodology is an important starting point. Moreover, the neighbourhood units used in this study do have political and social relevance; for example, they are often the targets of area-based initiatives and other neighbourhood policies, as well as the level at which certain public services are delivered and consumed. Defining ‘school’ and specifying it for research is more straightforward than specifying the neighbourhood context, thus the analyses of school effects have some advantages in this regard.

Importantly, I measure neighbourhood and school conditions with quantitative data (e.g. mean household income, mean school socioeconomic status). This does not shed light on the real processes underlying the observed relationships between youth and their schools and neighbourhoods; I touch upon these issues in Chapter 6 and also by referring to the findings of other studies and the theoretical literature. Another methodological and conceptual challenge that neighbourhood effects (and other context effects) researchers must grapple with is the issue of selection bias – i.e. the fact that people are not sorted randomly into neighbourhoods (or schools or peer groups, etc.). Although often treated as a statistical nuisance, it is increasingly acknowledged that selection processes (e.g.
how people are non-randomly and unequally sorted/selected/included/excluded into and from neighbourhoods and schools) are fundamental social processes and of substantive interest in their own right (e.g. Smith and Easterlow, 2005; Sampson and Sharkey, 2008). Indeed, this non-random sorting and selection is one of the main interests of researchers investigating school choice and admission processes (Ball et al., 1996; Saporio and Lareau, 1999) and residential choices and mobility (Croft, 2004; Mulder, 2007; Zorlu and Latten, 2009). Ultimately, neighbourhood effects research needs to better understand how and why people come to be in certain neighbourhoods, in order to understand the potential impact of these places. This issue is discussed further throughout the book.

1.5.4 Outline of the book
Each chapter in this book has been written as a separate journal article and therefore there is some overlap in the description of the dataset and the theoretical background. In Chapter 2, I use multilevel modelling to estimate neighbourhood effects on youths’ school achievement in order to assess the potential for the neighbourhood context to affect individual school outcomes in the Netherlands. This analysis forms the starting point of this study, as it gives a first indication of how much variation in young people’s educational achievement exists between neighbourhoods, as well as an indication of the magnitude of the associations between youths’ residential contexts and their educational outcomes.

Before examining neighbourhood and school effects together, Chapter 3 turns to the school context for an examination of the meaning of school segregation for youths’ educational achievement and school careers. This chapter is concerned with the relationships between school segregation and observed inequalities in educational outcomes across ethnic groups. The differentiated school performance of different (social and ethnic) groups raises questions about school conditions which might be unfavourable for students’ educational development. School segregation is seen as potentially being one of these conditions. This chapter also briefly discusses the drivers of school segregation and the relationship between neighbourhood and school segregation.

Chapter 4 tests the hypothesis that the school is a pathway of the neighbourhood’s influence. A growing number of studies recognize that examining neighbourhood and school effects together is a necessary step towards better understanding the role these contexts play in the lives of young people. The analysis in Chapter 4 aims to better understand the possible links between neighbourhood and school effects, and specifically to test whether the influence of youths’ neighbourhood environments might be confounded by or transferred through the school context, suggesting the school’s role as an institutional
mechanism of the neighbourhood effect. As the literature describes several possible relationships between neighbourhoods and schools and their potential effects on youth, I also test for moderating or interaction effects between these two contexts.

Chapter 5 examines the policy context of neighbourhood effects research – specifically, how the idea of neighbourhood effects relates to policy efforts to restructure neighbourhoods into ‘socially mixed communities’ or ‘mixed income neighbourhoods’ – and discusses some of the limitations and caveats of the neighbourhood effects framework and social mixing initiatives. Scholars point out that much of the research on neighbourhood effects and the effects of concentrated poverty has advanced the notion that living among poor people perpetuates individual poverty, whereas middle-class neighbours provide benefits. Neighbourhood effects discourse has been invoked by policymakers to both define the ‘problem’ (i.e. socially unbalanced neighbourhoods) and justify the ‘solution’ (i.e. policy efforts to intervene in the social makeup of poor neighbourhoods). These issues and their potential implications for neighbourhood effects research are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the qualitative interviews. This chapter constitutes an effort to conceptualize both parts of the individual ↔ context relationship by discussing how youth shape their relationships with and experiences in their neighbourhoods and schools. I draw on youths’ descriptive accounts to show that neighbourhoods do have meaning for their everyday lives and longer-term outcomes, but that they are also active in choosing and interacting with the places they encounter, including their secondary schools and places within and beyond their neighbourhood.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes by summarizing the key findings of this book and revisiting the main research questions. I discuss the main findings of the book and the implications of these findings for future research. Methodologically and conceptually, I reflect on the usefulness of the neighbourhood effects framework for examining the role of (young) people’s residential contexts, and offer suggestions for how the framework might broaden to better take into account the dynamic and reciprocal relations between people and place. I suggest that the neighbourhood effects framework could be complemented and enriched by considering how neighbourhood space and neighbourhood social structure are produced and maintained. I conclude by offering suggestions for future research.
REFERENCES


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