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**Living in concentrated poverty**

Pinkster, F.M.

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## 6. Conclusion

It is generally acknowledged by researchers involved in studying neighborhood effects that a better understanding is needed of the specific processes within neighborhoods that, for better or worse, shape the prospects and lives of residents. The theoretical questions they raise about the role that neighborhood – and specifically the social composition of the neighborhood – plays in shaping individual opportunities and outcomes also reflect an important theme in urban policies in Europe and the United States concerning the social costs and consequences of concentration of poverty. In the case of the Netherlands, policies of social mixing not only aim to increase the level of social control and social cohesion in these neighborhoods (Uitermark, Duyvendak, et al., 2007) but also to enhance the prospects of its disadvantaged residents (Andersson and Musterd, 2005; Ostendorf, Musterd, et al., 2001). The aim of this research was to contribute to the academic and political discussion about the negative relationship between living in a disadvantaged neighborhood context and the socio-economic prospects of residents.

### 6.1 Endogenous mechanisms behind neighborhood effects

In order to understand the causal pathways behind neighborhood effects on socio-economic outcomes the study focused on social processes related to the specific social composition of low-income neighborhoods that shape the job search strategies and work ethics of residents. The findings show that such economic actions are influenced by the actions and social position of other residents through mechanisms of social isolation, mechanisms of socialization, mechanisms of social disorganization and mechanisms relating to the formal social infrastructure in the area.

#### 6.1.1 Social networks and informal job search strategies

A first hypothesis in the research literature about the way that living in a low-income neighborhood context might negatively influence residents' socio-economic outcomes focuses on residents' social networks. It is hypothesized that the social networks of disadvantaged residents in low-income neighborhoods do not provide the necessary resources and support to 'get ahead' in life and improve one's social position. The argument is that disadvantaged residents tend to have a local orientation in their social life and that, consequently, living in a neighborhood context characterized by a disadvantaged population composition results in resource-poor social networks. With respect to work, it is assumed that residents' job search strategies are less effective because their social networks lack relevant job-related information and support.

The social isolation hypothesis was addressed by studying the job search strategies of social housing residents in the low-income neighborhood of Transvaal-Noord and the mixed neighborhood of Regentesse and by comparing the locality of, and resources in, their social networks. The findings show that social housing residents in Transvaal more frequently use informal contacts to find work than residents in Regentesse and that these contacts more often live in the neighborhood.



This finding is interesting because it is usually assumed that the neighborhood is not the relevant scale for studying integration or exclusion from the labor market. However, informal job networks in Transvaal – sometimes formalized in private job agencies - are essential when it comes to linking residents to unskilled or low-skilled jobs throughout the region: while employment opportunities themselves are not local, the information about work and the social connections which help people to find jobs are. The locality of, and the resources present in, residents' social networks therefore become relevant.

The survey results indicate that local social contacts make up a substantial proportion of the personal networks of social housing residents in both neighborhoods. When comparing the two neighborhood groups, local social contacts are more important in terms of social support than for residents in the low-income neighborhood than in the mixed neighborhood. Nevertheless, residential context does not influence the overall availability of social support in people's daily lives. What differs, is who residents turn to for help or information: Social housing residents in Transvaal more frequently turn to someone in the neighborhood than social housing residents in Regentesse. This difference in neighborhood orientation is greatest in relation to work-related support such as information and advice about finding a job.

A relevant question in this context is whether the support provided by local social contacts is equally effective in both neighborhoods. One indication of the 'usefulness' of available support is the socio-economic status of support-givers in respondents' personal networks. In terms of access to socio-economic prestige the survey results indicate that the respondents score much lower than the Dutch population (Völker, Pinkster, et al., 2008). A comparison of the two neighbourhood groups reveals that social housing residents in Regentesse have more diverse networks than social housing residents in Transvaal, although the higher socio-economic diversity of residents' networks in the mixed neighborhood relates mainly to having acquaintances, friends or family with a wider variety of low status jobs rather than higher status jobs. This suggests that social housing residents in the mixed neighborhood do not benefit from the proximity of more affluent neighbors. Nonetheless, a more diverse network at the lower end of the job market provides more effective support when looking for a job: it makes it easier for residents in Regentesse to maintain their labor market position. In short, social networks of residents in the low-income neighborhood restrict economic opportunities, because they are more constricted in terms of socio-economic prestige.

The fieldwork provides a greater insight into to the largely neighborhood-based social networks of residents in Transvaal. The majority of local contacts are based on existing family relations or shared cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds rather than simply on living in the same apartment building or in the same street. Some of these ties existed even before residents moved to the neighborhood and they help to incorporate new residents into existing informal social structures of people with similar background. Proximity subsequently plays a role in creating new ties amongst residents with similar (marginalized) social positions and strengthening existing social relations: people meet each other in the streets or in shared private spaces in the neighborhood such as religious institutions, coffee houses or grocery stores. For many residents, these ties also form an important reason to stay in the area.

With respect to work, local social relations in Transvaal form an important source of job information and job opportunities through informal job networks. For many residents the (initial) use of informal contacts to find work is a logical job search strategy. As Waldinger and Lichter (2003) have shown, in segmented labor markets employers tend to prefer network hiring as a recruitment mechanism which makes social networks essential when it comes to providing access to entry-level jobs for low-skilled workers. However, over time such informal job search strategies can have unforeseen negative implications because the informal job networks are limited in scope: they only provide access to a limited segment of the labor market. As a result, residents tend to spend their entire life working in the same economic sectors alongside their neighbors. They do not develop the language, communication and work skills and social contacts outside their 'own' group which would allow them to become independent of these job networks. Consequently, the dependence on informal neighborhood contacts to find work leads to a constriction of personal social networks which, over time, narrows residents' access to employment opportunities.

To summarize, localized social networks of social housing residents in low-income neighborhoods influence individual employment opportunities in two contradictory ways: in the short term they provide access to work, but job opportunities through informal contacts are limited in scope and reinforce residents' dependence on their own constricted social networks. In the long run this limits their chance to improve their employment situation. Processes of social isolation thus occur, but not to the degree that it leads to exclusion from the labor market altogether. The paradox is that residents consciously choose the short term benefits of informal job networks but rarely foresee the long-term drawbacks of such actions.

### 6.1.2 Negative socialization

A second hypothesis in the research literature about the way that living in a low-income neighborhood context might negatively influence residents' socio-economic outcomes places the emphasis on their work ethics and expectations. The argument is that people develop norms and values about what is 'right' or 'appropriate behavior' through interaction with others. Specifically, disadvantaged residents in low-income neighborhoods characterized by numerous social problems such as unemployment, teenage pregnancies, high school drop-out rates and crime might adopt similar deviant behavior because they have come to view such behaviors as normal through their interaction with neighbors.

The present study uncovered various forms of socialization amongst residents in the low-income neighborhood of Transvaal. Some occur within residents' personal social networks, while others are associated with the public domain either through concrete interactions with residents who are not acquaintances, friends or family and who are viewed as strangers, or through indirect interaction whereby people see certain behavior in the street and emulate it without actually knowing the 'other'.

#### Socialization in localized social networks

A first example of negative socialization within residents' personal social networks concerns their

attitudes to work. Unemployment rates in Transvaal are high and some residents actively try to stay on unemployment benefits based on the idea “why work for a few euros more”. They explicitly discuss this with each other and exchange information with friends and acquaintances on how to avoid current workfare programs. Nevertheless, such ‘deviant’ behavior is not necessarily reproduced in the next generation. For example, the attitudes of single mothers of Surinamese-Hindustani origin with respect to work are strongly connected to their standards of good motherhood. They stay on welfare in order to raise their children in the best possible way but apply very different standards to their children, in whom they instill a strong work ethic coupled with the expectation that they find the best possible job to improve their social standing.

These classic examples of ‘negative’ socialization explain unfavorable outcomes such as unemployment or dropping out of school for some residents, but they are not very widespread. Other indirect forms of socialization are much more important when it comes to limiting residents’ opportunities and structuring their behavior with respect to work. This includes a wide range of rules of conduct in people’s social networks and norms and values about what constitutes ‘appropriate behavior’ which limit the range of choices that people consider with respect to work without being directly related to work. These processes of socialization might therefore be described as ‘indirect’. For example, parents of conservative Muslim background might limit their daughters’ freedom when it comes to making their own choices as regards employment, not because they consider the work itself unfit, but because it might be considered inappropriate to travel by oneself at night or to work with non-Muslim men. Such rules of conduct are not just set by the parents themselves, but also by their relatives and friends who live nearby. Proximity serves to reinforce them simply because an individual’s behavior is visible to others. As a result, parents prioritize forms of ‘appropriate’ behavior over others. The unintended outcome of these social practices is that their daughters take a job that keeps them close to home and provides them with much fewer career prospects, or simply remain unemployed.

Another example of the way in which social practices amongst residents shape their employment situation and career prospects concerns the informal job networks mentioned in the previous paragraph. Shared norms about reciprocity make it difficult for individuals to refuse when they are ‘offered’ a job through a friend. For example, young adults are sometimes pressured by their family to take an unskilled summer job in a familiar context rather than to step outside their network to find work that matches their educational background and skills. The end result of such indirect socialization processes can be described as a form of underemployment rather than unemployment.

### **Socialization in the public domain**

Socialization not only occurs amongst relatives, friends and acquaintances, but also outside informal social structures in the public domain. The interviews in Transvaal revealed that a lot of parents are concerned about the people and behavior that their children are exposed to in public space. Parents express concerns that their children will adopt attitudes and behavior that deviate from the norms and values that are upheld within their own social network through interaction with ‘strangers’ in the streets. These strangers may be undisciplined peers, who are at best a nuisance to other

residents and at worst a danger to public order and whose friendships can cause their children to drop out of school and/or become involved in anti-social behavior and criminal activities. They may also be older role models. According to parents, such processes of negative socialization are facilitated by neighborhood disorder and a lack of social control in public space. This issue is discussed in more detail in the following section.

In short, evidence was found for various processes of socialization amongst residents of Transvaal that might limit their prospects for social mobility in the long run. Interestingly, within local social networks such mechanisms of negative and indirect socialization are reinforced by high levels of social control, while negative socialization in the public domain is reinforced by low levels of social control. In some cases, processes of socialization are directly related to work and induce residents to turn their backs on the labor market. In most cases, however, unemployment or underemployment might be the indirect result of socialization within residents’ personal networks with respect to other domains of life such as family life, gender roles, mutual support networks.

### **6.1.3 Social disorganization and neighborhood disorder**

A third explanation in the research literature for neighborhood effects focuses on neighborhood disorder and the lack of informal social control in public space. The social disorganization hypothesis assumes that residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods lack the willingness or capacity to develop and enforce shared norms and values in the public domain. In the research literature no explicit link is established between processes of social disorganization and residents’ economic behavior and labor market prospects.

A lot of residents in Transvaal referred explicitly to the lack of mutual trust and willingness to intervene in or correct other people’s and children’s behavior in public space for fear of conflict or retribution. For similar reasons, residents indicate that they are scared to phone the police. For example, one resident explained that the last time he notified the police about a fight between local youths in the square in front of his house he called anonymously and did not turn on the lights so that the youths wouldn’t be able to see that his family was awake. Such a lack of willingness to intervene also applies to less serious forms of deviant behavior such as children throwing thrash around or kicking a soccer ball against houses. The combination of social disorder and lack of collective monitoring causes a lot of parents to worry about their children’s moral and social development. Yet their own withdrawal from the public domain has an impact on the range of behaviors that other residents and particularly children are exposed to. This indirectly contributes to the previously described process of negative socialization amongst local youths.

The present study suggests that there is an indirect relationship between social disorganization and long-term socio-economic prospects of individual residents. First, social disorganization is associated with higher levels of neighborhood disorder, including crime and violence (Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999). Many parents in Transvaal worry about the short-term effects of exposure to violence and other dangers in public space on educational attainment, for example as a result of stress or lack of sleep. Moreover, as mentioned previously, parents in Transvaal link the phenome-

non of social disorganization to negative socialization of their children with respect to educational and work ethics. To study such effects directly one would need a different, longitudinal research approach than the approach used here. Another finding is that neighborhood disorder brought about by low levels of collective efficacy also contributes to residents' tendency to retreat within their own networks. Such forms of interaction between endogenous mechanisms behind neighborhood effects are discussed in more detail below (paragraph 6.2).

#### 6.1.4 Employment opportunities through formal social infrastructure

Another way in which living in a low-income neighborhood context can influence residents' socio-economic prospects is related to the formal social infrastructure. Transvaal is characterized by a dense web of public institutions such as community centers, welfare organizations and youth centers as well as private, subsidized institutions such as cultural and religious centers. Formal social institutions can be a resource for residents in terms of support, education and training and they facilitate social interaction amongst residents. In addition, they form a familiar and accessible entrance to the labor market through various (un)skilled jobs, volunteer jobs and internships. Paradoxically, these jobs might have few long-term prospects and also function to keep residents within the neighborhood and their own social networks. Thus, similarly to the previously described informal job networks, the formal social infrastructure provides employment opportunities which might have unintended, negative consequences for residents' social mobility in the long run.

The role that local social institutions in Transvaal play in shaping employment opportunities is very much context-dependent and related to the specific configuration of the Dutch welfare state, its strong presence at the local level and its long history of intervention in low-income neighborhoods. In the American context explanations for neighborhood effects focusing on institutional resources and public services generally address their lack of quality or absence in disadvantaged neighborhoods due to structural forces outside of the neighborhood such as the local tax base system. By contrast, in Dutch low-income neighborhoods there is generally an abundance of formal resources and public services. However, as mentioned above, their contribution to residents' employment opportunity structures is not exclusively beneficial.

It should be noted that neighborhood effects attributed to local institutional resources have generally been described in the research literature as 'correlated' neighborhood effects rather than endogenous neighborhood effects, because these effects are thought to be generated by processes outside the neighborhood and are thought to affect all residents equally (Dietz, 2002). However, this line of reasoning does not quite apply to the case of Transvaal. The local social infrastructure is shaped by policies of the municipal and national government, but many of these policies are place-specific rather than generic and are developed directly in response to the local population composition. The formal social infrastructure is also shaped by local power dynamics as some groups of residents are more effective than others in influencing the local policy agendas and service provision of welfare institutions. In addition, some public services target specific disadvantaged groups within the neighborhood and not all residents are equally connected to formal social institutions.

## 6.2 The relationship between mechanisms

The described causal pathways through which living in a disadvantaged neighborhood context impacts residents' economic prospects are related in significant ways. On the one hand, processes relating to social disorganization, socialization, social isolation and the formal social infrastructure might interact and cumulatively contribute to negative outcomes. On the other hand, certain mechanisms might operate alongside each other but have contradictory results. Several examples help to clarify this point.

A first example of the way in which neighborhood effect mechanisms might reinforce each other concerns the relationship between processes of socialization and processes of social isolation. As mentioned previously, the social networks of residents in the low-income neighborhood of Transvaal are more constricted in terms of socio-economic diversity than the social networks of residents in the mixed neighborhood of Regentesse. This is not related to the degree of neighborhood orientation of one's networks (see also Chapter 2). Rather, the limited scope of residents' social networks results from the nature or quality of neighborhood contacts: processes of indirect socialization amongst residents limit their willingness and possibilities to interact with people outside their 'own' group and to venture outside their own social network. Geographical proximity strengthens the ties and facilitates high levels of social control in these networks, which restricts residents' relationships to others in the neighborhood whom are either unemployed or only work in a specific sector and/or in particular types of unskilled jobs. This, in turn, reduces their job search opportunities.

Similarly, processes of social disorganization in the public domain reinforce processes of socialization and social isolation within existing social structures. For example, one way that parents deal with the negative influences in public space is to retreat into one's own communities and depend on the support from friends and relatives to raise and socialize their children (see Chapter 5). Processes of social disorganization in public space thus increase residents' dependence on existing relations with residents of similar social backgrounds and limit the chances of building new relations with 'others'. The effect of this is twofold. On the one hand, meaningful local social relations form an important resource when it comes to protecting residents from harmful elements in the public domain. As a 27-year old woman of Moroccan origin once said: "*for you [the researcher], Transvaal is not really a safe place in the evenings, but for me... I live here and I know a lot of people and they keep an eye out for me. So I'm quite safe on my own*". This protective role of local social relations was also illustrated in Chapter 5 with respect to the role that relatives and friends play in monitoring and socializing children to keep them in school and away from criminal activities. At the same time, these same social relations can limit opportunities on the labor market through processes of direct or indirect socialization and informal job networks. This shows how local social relations have contradictory implications for individual residents.

In short, the magnitude of neighborhood effects measured in quantitative studies results from layered and complex processes in the day-to-day lives of disadvantaged residents in low-income neighborhoods. The examples above illustrate how the mechanisms behind neighborhood effects sometimes reinforce and sometimes compensate each other. The research literature has paid

little attention to the way in which social processes in low-income neighborhoods interact to reproduce social inequalities. Further qualitative, longitudinal research would increase our understanding of the way in which these mechanisms are related and of the sometimes contradictory meaning of local social relations and local social institutions in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

### 6.3 Differential effects and selective mechanisms

The processes described above are not as pervasive as is sometimes suggested in the literature on neighborhood effects. They are selective rather than generic. As a number of European, quantitative studies on neighborhood effects have shown, living in a low-income neighborhood does not affect all residents to the same degree (Andersson, Musterd, et al., 2007; Galster, Andersson, et al., 2007; Klaauw and Ours, 2003; Musterd, Vos, et al., 2003; Musterd, Andersson, et al., 2008). The present study illustrates how these differential effects are explained by the selectivity of the negative mechanisms within the neighborhood.

First, mechanisms of socialization and social isolation do not affect all residents in the same way because they are part of different informal social structures based on social distinctions such as socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity, gender, religious differences and differences in geographical background. These informal social structures operate on the basis of different sets of norms, values and rules of conduct and contain different types of informal social resources. As a result, residents are affected differently by previously described processes: for some residents deviant social norms with respect to work are helpful in understanding their employment situation (or lack thereof), while other residents are hampered more by mechanisms of social isolation when it comes to finding work. By way of an illustration, different mechanisms in Transvaal contribute to the employment situation of residents of Turkish background. Turkish informal job networks (note the plural) are particularly well developed. While male residents seem to benefit equally from associated short term employment opportunities (and are hampered by long-term processes of social isolation), the informal job networks differentially affect women depending on their religious orientation: in more liberal Muslim communities, the described processes are relevant for women, while women in more conservative Muslim communities are not expected to work and are thus excluded from these job networks. For them, socialization processes with respect to work are more relevant in explaining their (lack of) employment status.

Second, residents are also differentially affected by the resources, opportunities and restrictions associated with the formal social infrastructure. For example, local employment, volunteer and internship opportunities in welfare institutions seem to be more attractive to women than men, specifically to first generation female residents of Hindustani-Surinamese descent and second generation female residents of Moroccan and Turkish descent. These jobs are attractive to the first group because they want to work close to their children's school and to the second group because, as women, they are generally excluded from local informal job networks, because they grew up in the area and these institutions are familiar to them or because some of them have difficulties finding alternatives outside the neighborhood. Thus, not all residents benefit to the same degree from the resources or employment opportunities provided through local social institutions. This

depends on factors such as the length of residence, residents' Dutch language skills, the amount of alternative social support and opportunities provided by their own network and other background characteristics such as ethnicity or gender.

Third, differential neighborhood effects can also be explained by the fact that neighborhood does not simply imprint itself on residents. As was shown in Chapter 5 with respect to the effects of social disorganization in the public domain, parents develop a variety of strategies to distance themselves and their children from what they consider to be negative social influences at the neighborhood level. However, there is considerable variation in the type of strategy that parents might use and the degree to which they are effective in shielding themselves and their children from other 'undisciplined' or 'dangerous' residents. For example, larger families and single mothers find it more difficult to monitor their children than couples with fewer children. As parents' responses to the neighborhood context vary depending on their perceptions of neighborhood risks, their own time and resources and the support of others in monitoring their children, some families moderate and others mediate the role that neighborhood processes play in shaping individual opportunities.

In short, living in a low-income neighborhood such as Transvaal has a very different meaning for and therefore impacts low-income residents differently depending on their social identity and family context. As illustrated in a number of examples above, differentiation occurs along multiple social dimensions. Above all, residents' level of education seems to be an important indicator of the degree to which local social processes contribute to labor market participation and social mobility. Residents' who are better educated<sup>15</sup> are less likely to be locally oriented in their social network and are thus less likely to be influenced by processes of negative socialization, less likely to turn to local social institutions for formal support or job opportunities and more likely to develop parental strategies to protect their children from negative neighborhood influences<sup>16</sup>. These findings suggest that socio-economic differences between residents in poor neighborhoods are an important determinant for the degree to which residents' lives are spatially bounded to the neighborhood (Fischer, 1982) and for the degree to which residents' are potentially exposed to negative influences at the neighborhood level. In other words, there is inequality in the degree to which neighborhood effects apply, not just between neighborhoods but also within neighborhoods. For those residents who are more locally oriented in their social lives other background characteristics - such as ethnic, cultural, religious background, geographical origin and household composition - are important when it comes to differentiating which processes contribute to limited employment opportunities and social mobility.

<sup>15</sup> which in the case of the respondents in Transvaal should be understood in relative terms, i.e. having a low level or medium level high school degree and possibly some type of professional training;

<sup>16</sup> At the same time, this also means they are disconnected from informal job networks and other forms of social support. It can be hypothesized that this creates new difficulties in finding a job, specifically for those whose educational background, work experience or career history is not sufficient to ensure a job directly through the formal job market. This particularly seems to be the case for the downwardly mobile, who have lost a 'proper' job as a result of health problems or who have moved to the neighbourhood as a result of financial problems related to divorce.

#### 6.4 The research findings in a comparative perspective

An important question with respect to generalizing the findings described above is to what degree they are unique to the specific research context. In other words, to what extent are the findings in the current study exceptional and place-specific?<sup>17</sup> How are the findings influenced by choosing the particular case of Transvaal? A recent European study provides an interesting opportunity to reflect on these questions. A comparative, qualitative study in 22 neighborhoods in eleven cities in six countries (Murie and Musterd, 2004; Musterd, Murie, et al., 2006) questioned the role that the neighborhood context plays in reproducing social exclusion with specific attention for the way in which this is influenced by the type of welfare states and different types of labor markets and social networks. The study concluded that distinctive resources at the neighborhood level that affect the experience of social exclusion are not systematically related to the type of welfare regime, regional economic circumstances or location (peripheral-central) of the neighborhood. Rather, they suggest that neighborhood resources for economic integration will differ based on intrinsic spatial characteristics, the composition of the material and social infrastructure and local histories of settlement and reputation.

In the case of Transvaal, several such intrinsic spatial characteristics have contributed over time to the local informal and formal social context that now forms a resource for, as well as an obstacle to, the employment opportunities of individual residents. As is common in Dutch pre-war neighborhoods Transvaal is quite mixed in terms of economic activities and this has facilitated the emergence of local (ethnic) businesses including the job agencies described in Chapter 4 that link residents to large employment centers throughout the region. The neighborhood is centrally located and easily accessible by public transportation, which means that jobs outside the neighborhood are also physically accessible. The neighborhood has a long history of migration which has contributed to the strong informal social structures described above. It also has a long history of government interventions starting from the early 1970s, which explains the dense web of public services and social institutions in the area. Finally, in terms of public meeting places, the presence of a large open air market as well as numerous squares and playgrounds contribute to public life in Transvaal. Thus, while Transvaal constitutes an extreme case from a Dutch perspective in terms of poverty concentration, it shares several place-specific and historic conditions for the described neighborhood effect mechanisms with other prewar, centrally located neighborhoods in Dutch cities. At the same time, while Transvaal constitutes a mild case in terms of poverty concentration from an international perspective, it is quite exceptional in terms of the high volume of resources provided through public policy intervention at the local level.

The study in Transvaal specifies and nuances the conclusions reached in the comparative European study (Musterd, Murie, et al., 2006) with respect to the type of resources for economic integration produced at the neighborhood level. The European study uses Polanyi's framework for economic integration to study the dynamics of social exclusion. This framework relates different

<sup>17</sup> In a way, this question reflects the classic struggle of geographers regarding how to reconcile context-dependence and spatial specificity with general social theory (Sayer, 2000). Thrift has called this the problem of translation (1984, p. 23): "It is very difficult to relate what are usually very abstract generalizations about social phenomena to the features of a particular place at a particular time and to the 'individuals' [...] within that place".

spheres of economic integration – through market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity – to different spatial scales. With respect to labor market participation the researchers note that "the city and urban region are the most relevant spatial scales for the functioning of the labor market and thus for labor market participation opportunities" (p. 225-226). Alternative resources and opportunities might also be provided by the welfare state through redistribution arrangements that are shaped at both the national and urban scales. The neighborhood is considered to be the relevant scale for providing resources and opportunities through mutual reciprocity. By contrast, the findings in Transvaal show how the neighborhood scale may also be relevant for the other spheres of integration. First, social support provided by co-residents is not merely a substitute for the market economy, but can also form a prerequisite for finding work. In other words, resources provided through mutual reciprocity at the neighborhood level can be directly relevant for labor market participation: local (in)formal job networks in Transvaal link residents to jobs in the formal labor market both in and outside the neighborhood. Second, in the case of Transvaal resources and opportunities also flow from redistribution arrangements at the local level in the form of employment opportunities through local welfare institutions and place-specific community projects. Again, such local resources through redistribution are not a substitute, but a condition for finding a job.

In short, both informal social resources and formal social institutions at the neighborhood level are important when it comes to linking residents to the formal labor market. At the same time, it can be hypothesized that resources through mutual reciprocity and redistribution at the neighborhood scale are less effective in terms of economic integration due to their limitations with respect to the scope of employment opportunities coupled with the fact that they further tie residents to the neighborhood. This hypothesis is supported by recent findings in quantitative studies that moving into a neighborhood with high levels of own-group concentrations initially benefits social mobility, but forms a disadvantage in the long run (Musterd, Andersson, et al., 2008).

#### 6.5 A qualitative perspective on neighborhood effects research

The previous paragraph on selective mechanism and differential effects shows how a qualitative research approach on neighborhood mechanisms might be used to interpret or reflect on findings from quantitative studies on neighborhood effects. Quantitative and qualitative studies on neighborhood effects are often presented as opposites. Qualitative case studies like this can provide an insight into causal pathways through which residential context structures individual action, although it is difficult to generalize. They cannot indicate how widespread neighborhood effects mechanism might be and how important neighborhood context is in shaping individual outcomes compared to other social contexts and individual characteristics. Quantitative studies are aimed at measuring the magnitude and significance of neighborhood effects, but are faced by numerous methodological problems due to the complexity of the relationship between neighborhood and individual action. In a minor attempt to bridge the gap between these two research domains, the present study reflects on two basic issues in quantitative neighborhood effect studies, namely the question of when mechanisms for neighborhood effects might occur and how neighborhood effects are related to selection effects.

### 6.5.1 Conditions for endogenous mechanisms and the issue of thresholds

A recurring question in the field of neighborhood effect research is under what conditions neighborhood effects and their underlying mechanisms occur. The hypothesis is that neighborhood effects might only occur after a certain degree of concentrated poverty has been reached. In relation to mechanisms of socialization, for example, it has been suggested that a critical mass or dominance of a certain type of people should be reached within a neighborhood in order to trigger such processes. In quantitative models, several techniques have been developed to measure such thresholds (Galster, 2008).

The case study in Transvaal provides an interesting opportunity to reflect on the social conditions within neighborhoods that might result in the described mechanisms. While the neighborhood can be considered an extreme case in the Dutch context in terms of concentration of poverty, it is actually a mild case from an international perspective. The population composition in Transvaal is quite heterogeneous and social life can be described as fragmented: social distinctions on the basis of socio-economic, ethnic, cultural background, gender, religion and differences in country, region or city of origin separate residents into different, close-knit informal social structures or communities that hardly interact. Each of these communities on its own forms only a small proportion of all residents. Nevertheless, in some of these informal social structures the described social mechanisms of socialization and social isolation shape the socio-economic prospects of individual residents.

The fact that endogenous mechanisms occur in heterogeneous and socially fragmented neighborhoods such as Transvaal suggests that the occurrence of endogenous neighborhood effect mechanisms is not necessarily related to the size of a social groups or their dominance within the neighborhood. Rather, this is determined by the strength of the ties within these informal social structures and the degree to which members of these social structures are stigmatized by and marginalized from the larger society. This means that quantitative studies that try to provide an insight into thresholds for neighborhood effects might need to measure and incorporate intra-group characteristics relating to the nature and quality of local social interaction into their models.

### 6.5.2 The issue of selection versus neighborhood effects

Another much-debated issue with respect to neighborhood effect research concerns the reciprocal nature of the relationship between residential context and individual characteristics. The question is to what extent spatial variations in individual outcomes can really be attributed to processes within the neighborhood context rather than to unmeasured differences in background characteristics between residents. In quantitative studies this is referred to as the problem of selection bias. Various techniques have been developed to measure appropriate individual characteristics (see for an overview Galster, 2008) in order to isolate neighborhood effects from selection effects and properly estimate the magnitude of neighborhood effects, but the issue of selection remains a problem.

The issue of neighborhood effects versus selection effects is less relevant in qualitative studies which focus on the mechanisms behind neighborhood effect because their aim is to study causal pathways directly. As the present study shows, even though people with inherently different char-

acteristics sort into different neighborhoods, the resulting residential situation nevertheless limits residents' economic opportunity structures through the described mechanisms relating to social isolation, socialization and the formal social infrastructure. In fact, the case study in Transvaal suggests that selection mechanisms and neighborhood processes are related: selection mechanisms through which people filter into the neighborhood are influenced by the same social distinctions that determine their social lives once they have settled there. In other words, residents' background characteristics influence both the process of selection and the degree of incorporation into the neighborhood in different informal social structures.

In addition, the survey findings in Transvaal show that the local social context, consisting of informal social structures as well as formal social institutions, is one reason why some people settle in the area. For example, one third of social housing residents in Transvaal already knew people in the area before they moved there and for many it was an important reason to settle and stay in the area (see Chapter 3 and 4). These initial contacts in turn form a bridge to other local social contacts of similar social backgrounds which strengthens their attachment to the area and gives them further access to informal social support and job connections. Local social relations can thus play the role of pull factor in explaining why people move into specific disadvantaged neighborhoods in the first place. This suggests that, for some residents, selection into neighborhoods like Transvaal is in itself influenced by the social characteristics of such neighborhoods.

### 6.6 Suggestions for future research and reflection on urban policy

The research findings provide numerous ideas for future research, some of which have already been mentioned above and in previous chapters in relation to specific findings. A first line of research relates to the fact that the occurrence of the described mechanisms behind neighborhood effects are very much context dependent. The case study in Transvaal shows that endogenous mechanisms for neighborhood effects on social mobility cannot be explained by the degree of poverty concentration alone. Other neighborhood characteristics also play a role (in addition to differences in terms of welfare state regime and regional economic prosperity, see Musterd, Murie, et al., 2006; Wacquant, 2008). A systematic comparison between different types of low-income neighborhoods would increase our understanding of place-specific conditions for neighborhood effects and the local social, economic and spatial conditions that contribute to or facilitate the described informal social structures and local social infrastructure. These might include factors such as the local history of immigration, the economic structure of the neighborhood, the history of government intervention in the area and the presence of public meeting places. From a Dutch policy perspective, for example, a relevant question would be whether the described positive and negative consequences of local social processes also occur in the mono-functional postwar Dutch neighborhoods that are currently at the center of the attention of urban restructuring programs.

A second line of research is to study how the mechanisms of negative socialization and social isolation and mechanisms relating to the formal social context in low-income neighborhoods such as Transvaal develop over time. In paragraph 6.2 it was suggested that different endogenous mechanisms sometimes reinforce and sometimes compensate each other. A longitudinal approach could



show how residents become incorporated in the neighborhood in different informal social structures and what the cumulative, long-term effects are of the described mechanisms. This specifically applies to children growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods like Transvaal. For example, how are children affected in the long run by the negative neighborhood influences in the public domain described by parents and how effective are parental strategies in countering these negative influences? To what degree do these parental strategies consciously or unwittingly reinforce mechanisms of social isolation and negative socialization within their own network? To what degree do processes of social isolation and socialization within parents' networks restrict their children's opportunities? All of these questions suggest that more insight is needed in the intergenerational aspect of the described processes behind neighborhood effects.

A third line of research is more policy oriented and concerns the question of how residents in low-income neighborhoods such as Transvaal might be affected by social mixing policies such as the restructuring program in the Netherlands. What happens to the described social processes when a large share of residents is forced to move? Clearly, geographical vicinity and place-specific characteristics play a role in reproducing the informal social structures with their informal job networks, high degree of social control and mechanisms of socialization. However, their contribution to residents' employment opportunity structures is not entirely negative, not all residents are equally (negatively) affected and the informal social structures form an important source for social support in the day-to-day life of residents. Consequently, the following hypothesis might be formulated about the consequences of restructuring for low-income residents of Transvaal. First, current relations might be replaced by new relations with more affluent neighbors, with potentially positive externalities. Yet recent research suggests that the least successful movers end up in similarly marginalized neighborhoods (Slob, Kempen, et al., 2008 have called this the 'spillover' effect), which does not increase the opportunity to develop relations with more affluent neighbors. Moreover, various studies on social cohesion in newly restructured – and thus more mixed – neighborhoods have found few ties between old low-income and new middle to high income residents (Beckhoven and Kempen, 2003; Dekker and Bolt, 2005). The present survey reaches a similar conclusion: findings in the mixed neighborhood of Regentesse show that social housing residents have few relations with their more affluent neighbors.

Obviously, geographical vicinity is not enough to close the substantial social distance between neighbors of different socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, it takes time to develop new and meaningful relations with neighbors. The effect of social mixing policies might therefore be twofold. On the one hand, the described negative mechanisms could disappear. On the other hand, the risk is that low-income residents away from their social support networks are left without the necessary contacts to find work and the accessible employment opportunities through local social institutions. Following this line of thought, it is problematic that no substantial research program has been developed to evaluate the effects of restructuring for individual residents as was done in the United States for federal housing mobility programs (Goetz, 2003). Up to now, evaluation research has been almost exclusively place-based and has addressed improvements in the restructured neighborhood. Indeed, many local and central government actors, housing corporations

and private developers have shunned for a wider perspective on housing market mechanisms such as selective residential mobility of low-income groups and the consequences of these residential changes for their opportunity structures (Volkskrant, 10/7/2008, 21/7/2008). Nevertheless, the findings in this case study add to the Dutch body of research that calls for a people-oriented focus on evaluation of social mixing policies.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Living in a disadvantaged neighborhood context differentially influences residents' socio-economic prospects in sometimes contradictory ways. The case study shows how - even in relatively fragmented and heterogeneous low-income neighborhoods such as Transvaal - mechanisms of socialization, social isolation and social disorganization, and mechanisms related to the formal social infrastructure can restrict residents' long-term economic opportunities by influencing their job search strategies and work ethics. However, living in a low-income neighborhood context is rarely the single cause of unemployment or limited social mobility. Rather, neighborhood-based processes reproduce already existing inequalities that result from macro structural processes relating the labor market and the welfare state (Wacquant, 2008). This also means that - depending on their social identity and family context - residents differ in the degree to which they want, and are able, to distance themselves from negative influences at the neighborhood level. As a result, residents cannot be viewed simply as 'victims'. They develop a variety of strategies to negotiate their way around the neighborhood and create linkages to the labor market. They build meaningful relations with other residents. Many feel at home in the neighborhood and do not want to move. Clearly, life in disadvantaged neighborhoods such as Transvaal is not all bad. Unfortunately, this complex and differentiated perspective on life in disadvantaged neighborhoods is often lost, not just in policy practice but also in academic research (Gotham, 2003; Manzo, Kleit, et al., 2008). Neighborhood effect studies generally focus on the negative implications of concentrated poverty. To be fair, many European researchers have tried to downplay the role of neighborhood and emphasize the importance of personal characteristics in perpetuating social inequalities. However, nuancing and identifying the subtleties of negative neighborhoods effects is not the same as demonstrating the potentially positive contribution that residential context, for example through local social support networks, plays in people's lives. The danger is thus that researchers may unwittingly reproduce the current negative representations in (Dutch) policy practice of low-income neighborhoods as a 'problem'. One way in which researchers might put such negative representations into perspective is by studying whether and how neighborhoods of concentrated poverty form meaningful contexts for the people who live there.

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