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## **Confronting the explanatory framework for neighborhood effects with everyday life in a disadvantaged neighborhood**

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One of the important challenges in the study of neighborhood effects is to understand how spatial inequalities come into being in the daily lives of residents of disadvantaged urban areas. The current explanatory framework for neighborhood effects describes a number of separate and unrelated processes of which residents fall victim. However, when confronting this framework with everyday life in disadvantaged neighborhoods, two problems emerge. The first is how to understand the relationship between neighborhood effects and concrete, spatially bounded actions by residents. Second, delineating explanatory mechanisms is complicated by the fact that these mechanisms are related and work selectively. The issues are illustrated in a case study in a disadvantaged neighborhood in the Netherlands on mechanisms behind neighborhood effects with respect to labor market participation.

### **Introduction**

Concerns about the negative consequences of concentration of poverty are a driving force behind urban policy throughout Europe. Although the specific socio-spatial configuration of neighborhoods of concentrated poverty varies from country to country and city to city, the shared response has been to restructure low income neighborhoods through area-based programs of social mixing (Andersson and Musterd, 2005). A key concern of these programs is that being poor in a disadvantaged neighborhood context is worse than being poor elsewhere. This is not only related to the day-to-day livability problems and relatively high crime rates in these areas (Uitermark, 2003), but also to the relatively unfavorable prospects of residents in terms of social mobility (Andersson and Musterd, 2005). Such negative neighborhood effects have been the focus of much academic research. The neighborhood effect thesis assumes that our direct social and physical surroundings contribute to individual outcomes such as our cognitive and moral development as a child or our mental health and employment situation as adults. Where we live influences whom we might meet, where our children go to school and play, and how we view the world. As such, our residential context structures the resources and opportunities that are available to us and the choices that we make to shape our lives. Of course, this relationship between residential context and individual outcomes should not be reduced to a deterministic

relationship, i.e. living a disadvantaged neighborhood ‘causes’ unemployment. Rather, the hypothesis is that existing social inequalities resulting from macroeconomic, social and political configurations at a higher scale can be exacerbated at the neighborhood level as a result of unequal neighborhood conditions and resources (Musterd, Murie, et al., 2006), which themselves are influenced by these same macro-structural processes.

While there is substantial evidence that a negative relationship exists between neighborhood poverty on the one hand and individual development outcomes on the other hand, it is generally acknowledged that a better understanding is needed of the specific processes that, for better or worse, shape the prospects and lives of residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods (Buck and Gordon, 2004; Galster, 2003). A number of hypotheses has been developed to explain why living in a disadvantaged neighborhood context over time limits social mobility (see for example Ellen and Turner, 1997, Sampson, Morenoff et al 2002, Small and Newman 2001). Generally, a distinction is made between explanations that focus on processes that occur ‘outside’ the neighborhood (also referred to as correlated neighborhood effect mechanisms) and processes that occur within the neighborhood (endogenous mechanisms). For example, in the case of employment outcomes, unemployment or low income levels amongst residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods might result from external stigmatization by employers, a spatial mismatch between neighborhood and work locations or inferior local public services such as public transportation or vocational training as a result of political arrangements at a higher scale. All of these processes constrain the opportunities that residents have to improve or maintain their position in the labor market and are viewed to be (largely) out of residents’ control. In contrast, endogenous explanations for unfavorable socio-economic outcomes focus on ‘internal’ processes amongst residents and on the way in which the behavior or social position of one resident might affect the behavior or social position of other residents. For example, unemployment might reflect locally shared deviant work ethics and aspirations (a process called negative socialization). Unemployment might also be related to the fact that residents have little access to information about job vacancies as a result of their contacts with their disadvantaged neighbors (referred to as social isolation). As Galster (2007) has shown, these different explanatory mechanisms for neighborhood effects demand different types of policy solutions in terms of the most beneficial form of mix of households across neighborhoods. [insert example] He therefore concludes that – if the goal of policy is to minimize negative neighborhood effects – it is important to delineate which mechanisms are operative.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the causal pathways behind neighborhood effects on employment opportunities. Empirical evidence comes from a case study in a low income neighborhood in the Netherlands on the way in which living in such residential environment has shaped the individual economic behavior of residents. In view of the emphasis in Dutch urban policy on changing the population composition of disadvantaged urban areas, the study focused specifically on way in which economic actions of residents in such neighborhoods are embedded in the informal local social context. The findings provide an interesting opportunity to confront the current explanatory framework for neighborhood effects with everyday life in a disadvantaged neighborhood. In doing so, two important issues are raised. First, the study shows that a better understanding is needed of the relationship between socio-economic outcomes (i.e. unemployment, income, job status) on the one

hand and concrete actions of residents on the other hand. Second, the findings show that delineating explanatory mechanisms for neighborhood effects is complicated by the fact that they influence each other and work selectively. The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, the case study and research area are introduced. The study uncovered evidence for three explanatory mechanisms for neighborhood effects with respect to labor market participation. These mechanisms are summarized below as they have been described separately in more detail in previous publications (Pinkster 2007; Pinkster & Volker 2009; Pinkster 2009; Pinkster & Droogleever Fortuijn 2009). This is followed by a discussion of .  
[...]

### **Research design**

Empirical evidence comes from an exploratory case study in the Netherlands. Case studies can be particularly valuable for studying the causal pathways behind systematic social phenomena – such as neighborhood effects - and developing new ideas or adapt existing theories about these social phenomena (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2003). The neighborhood of Transvaal-Noord in The Hague was selected as an extreme case to study local social processes that negatively influence individual employment prospects. Transvaal-Noord is one of the most marginalized areas in the Netherlands in terms of concentration of low income and ethnic minority households (see Table 1). The expectation was that if neighborhood effects and their underlying social mechanisms occur anywhere in The Netherlands, this neighborhood might be a likely candidate. At the same time it is a ‘mild’ case from an international perspective. As Table 1 shows, the population composition is quite heterogeneous and local 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. Life in the streets is characterized by anonymity and residents are confronted with substantial social and physical disorder in the public domain. There are considerable crime problems in the area in the form of drug dealing and prostitution, petty crime and intimidation by groups of young male residents. The largely social housing stock is of low quality and the apartments are small. Open staircases in apartment buildings are a hang-out for local youths, junkies and prostitutes. Maintenance in the area is also a problem. Streets are often littered with trash, old newspapers and plastic bags, and there are problems relating to vandalism and graffiti. This combination of neighborhood disorder and a (relatively) marginalized population composition have contributed to the area’s bad reputation.

With the social isolation and negative socialization hypotheses in mind, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to study socio-spatial embeddedness of residents’ job search strategies and work ethics. A survey was carried out on the spatiality of and resources in the social networks of social housing residents. For this part of the research, the neighborhood of Transvaal-Noord was compared to the adjacent socio-economically mixed neighborhood of Regentesse. In addition, intensive qualitative fieldwork was conducted in Transvaal-Noord over a period of nine months to study local job search strategies and work ethics.

*Insert table 1 comparing population statistics from two neighborhoods here*

### **Job search strategies and processes of social isolation**

First, the findings indicate that processes of social isolation can shape the employment prospects of residents in the low income neighborhood of Transvaal-Noord. The social isolation hypothesis states that the social networks of disadvantaged residents in disadvantaged urban areas do not provide the necessary resources and support to ‘get ahead’ in life and improve one’s social position (Elliott 1999, Tigges 1998, Wilson 1987). Because disadvantaged residents tend to be locally oriented in their social lives, their social networks are expected to reflect the population composition of their neighborhoods. In the case of residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods the assumption is that interaction with fellow residents limits their access to (useful) social resources (Granovetter 1995; Lin 1999). With respect to work, local social relations do not provide relevant job-related information and work-related support. As a result, the use of informal job search strategies reduces the chance to find a job.

The Dutch case study provides evidence for processes of social isolation, but the outcome of these processes is not necessarily unemployment. Social housing residents in Transvaal-Noord use informal contacts more frequently to find work than residents in the mixed neighborhood of Regentesse and these contacts more often live in the neighborhood. Particularly in Transvaal, informal job networks form an essential link between residents looking for work and unskilled or low-skilled jobs throughout the region. In other words, while employment opportunities themselves are not local, the information about work and the social connections which help people to find jobs are. The question can be raised whether the work-related information and support provided by fellow residents 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 et al. 2008). A comparison of the two neighborhood 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.

Qualitative fieldwork provides further insight into the largely neighborhood-based social networks of residents in Transvaal. The majority of local contacts are existing family relations or relations based on 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 helped 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. 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. 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 labour market. As a result, residents tend to spend their entire life working in the same economic sectors alongside their neighbours. 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 without foreseeing the long-term drawbacks of such actions.

Moreover, the use of localized social networks to find work is a reflection of the importance of local social relations in general. The results of the survey on social networks indicate that residents depend on fellow residents to provide with a wide variety of informal social support, including support in the personal or home domain, support in dealing with (public) institutions and financial support (Pinkster & Völker 2009a). In other words, the process of social isolation is just one aspect of the localized social networks, which are otherwise an important source of informal support to deal with their marginalized social position.

### **Choices with respect to work and processes of socialization**

Second, the findings from the case study indicate that residents' choices with respect to their employment situation are also influenced by opinion and actions of fellow residents. In the research literature this process is referred to as negative socialization (Briggs 1997, Wilson 1996). The assumption is that people develop norms and values about what is 'right' or 'appropriate behavior' through interaction with others. Specifically, 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. With respect to work this takes the form of lower aspirations and expectations about one's career opportunities or deviant work ethics that

have elsewhere been described as cultures of poverty or cultures of unemployment (Engbersen et al. 1993, Lewis 1968).

The case study in Transvaal-Noord shows that socialization occurs both within residents' personal social networks and in the public domain. A first example of negative socialization within residents' personal social networks can be described as classic examples of 'cultures of unemployment'. Some residents indicate that they prefer to stay on unemployment benefits rather than "work for a few euro's more". They explicitly exchange information with friends and acquaintances who live in the area on how to avoid current workfare programs. It should be noted, however, that such 'deviant' work ethics are not always reproduced in the next generation. For example, amongst single mothers of Surinamese-Hindustani origin welfare-dependency seems to be the norm rather than the exception, but this is strongly related to their standards of good motherhood: staying at home enables them to actively monitor their children to whom they apply very different standards: their children are expected to find the best possible job to improve their social standing. Moreover, such 'classic' examples of deviant work ethics are not very widespread. Other forms of 'indirect' socialization are much more important when it comes to limiting residents' job choices 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'. While these unwritten rules limit the range of choices that people consider with respect to work, they do not concern work directly.

For example, parents of conservative Muslim background might pressure their daughters to decline certain jobs or internships, not because they disapprove of the work itself, but because they don't want their daughters to travel by themselves at night or to work with non-Muslim men. Parents thus prioritize some forms of behavior over others. Such rules of conduct are reinforced by the fact that individual behavior is very visible to relatives and friends who live close by and will disapprove. The unintended outcome of these rules of conduct 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 localized informal job networks mentioned in the previous paragraph. Collective expectations about reciprocity make it difficult for individuals to refuse when they are 'offered' a job through a friend. For example, young adults are expected 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.

In short, evidence was found for various processes of socialization amongst residents of Transvaal that might limit their employment prospects in the long run. In some cases, processes of socialization are directly related to work and induce residents to disengage from the labor market. In many cases, however, unemployment or underemployment can be the indirect and unintended result of socialization within residents' personal networks with respect to other domains of life such as family life, gender roles and mutual support networks. [...]

### **The role of social disorganization in the public domain**

Socialization not only occurs amongst relatives, friends and acquaintances, but also in the public domain (Lofland 1973) by seeing how familiar strangers – that is, other residents that are not part of one's network but that one might recognize by face - behave. The fieldwork in Transvaal-Noord revealed that many residents are concerned about processes of negative socialization that causes youths and children to adopt attitudes that deviate from the norms and values that are upheld within their own social network. Indeed, evidence was found that interaction with undisciplined peers or older role models, who hang out in the street and are involved in illegal activities, can result in dropping out of school or exchanging legal jobs for a criminal career.

Various residents describe how this process of 'moral corruption' in public space is related to a lack of social control in the streets. In the research literature this has been described as a process of social disorganization (Sampson & Raudenbusch 1999). This refers to a lack willingness or capacity amongst residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods to develop and enforce shared norms and values in the public domain<sup>1</sup>. In the case of Transvaal-Noord residents explicitly refer to the lack of mutual trust amongst neighbors and their own restraint to correct other people's behavior in public space for fear of conflict or retribution. Many are scared to phone the police when they are confronted with violence, vandalism or other criminal activities. Residents also turn a blind eye to less serious forms of deviant behavior by children, such as kicking a soccer ball against houses or throwing trash on the ground, because they are worried about a confrontation with the children's parents. These low levels of collective efficacy thus contributes to physical and social disorder in the neighborhood, which causes residents to retreat from public space into their own networks. Paradoxically, their withdrawal from the public domain has an unintended consequence for the range of behaviors that are 'visible' there.

### **Interaction between mechanisms**

The described relationship between social disorganization in the public domain and negative socialization through interaction with (familiar) strangers in the streets indicates that different neighborhood effect mechanisms are not entirely independent. Indeed, the case study in Transvaal-Noord provides several examples of the way in which processes of social isolation, socialization and social disorganization interact.

First, the findings show that processes of negative or indirect socialization within residents' networks and processes of social isolation reinforce each other. As mentioned previously, the social networks of residents in the low-income neighborhood of Transvaal-Noord are constricted in terms of socio-economic diversity and thereby limit residents' access to work-related information and support. This process of social isolation cannot simply be explained by the high degree of neighborhood orientation of their networks. After all, from an international perspective the population composition of Transvaal-Noord is quite heterogeneous and local social relations might potentially include residents with diverse social positions. This, however, is not the case. Residents interact almost exclusively with neighbors of similar social backgrounds. As described previously, whether by choice or the fact that they are excluded by others, residents 'sort' into different local

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<sup>1</sup> In the research literature this is also referred to as a lack of collective efficacy, social cohesion or structural social capital.

social structures on the basis of multiple social distinctions such as socio-economic or educational background, ethnicity, gender, religious differences and differences in geographical background. Geographical proximity facilitates a high level of social control within these social structures, which limits residents' opportunities (and in some cases willingness) to interact with people outside their 'own' group. To illustrate, several respondents explained that they had a number of 'white' friends in high school outside their neighborhoods, but that these friendships disintegrated after leaving school. They describe how their social networks 'shrank' as they became more involved in the local social life with its mutual social obligations amongst relatives, friends and acquaintances. For several residents, the deterioration over the years of their Dutch language skills has become a symbol of the constriction of their social network. As a resident of Surinamese-Hindustani origin explains: "I don't really have time [for friendships with 'other' residents]: there's always a family event to go to.... a distant cousin getting married... or a religious holiday like Diwali last week. We went to my brother's house and everyone brings food and there are like 60 friends and family there. So I just don't have time, you know...". In such a way, social practices and expectations within informal social structures limit their contact with 'outsiders'. [insert another example, check Atlas.ti for quote]

Second, a relationship exists between on the one hand neighborhood disorder and the associated processes of social disorganization in the public domain and on the other hand processes of social isolation and socialization within residents' social networks. Many residents deal with social problems and physical disorder in public space by retreating into their own communities. 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 out on my own". This protective role of local social relations becomes most explicit with respect to the monitoring of children [insert example, check Atlas.ti for quote.]. Social and physical disorder in the streets thus strengthen residents' dependence on their local social contacts and limit the opportunities to build new relations with 'other' residents. However, resulting closed informal social structures include the above described processes of negative / indirect socialization and social isolation. Strong ties in the neighborhood thus have a contradictory meaning, providing useful support with potential negative side effects in terms of employment opportunities.

### **Selective mechanisms**

These findings show how neighborhood effects result from layered and complex processes in the day-to-day lives of disadvantaged residents in low-income neighborhoods. Social relations amongst residents can have positive and negative meanings *at the same time*. Often, neighborhood effects are a side-effect of social practices that are designed to deal with the residents' marginalized social position and with the substantial problems in their socio-spatial surroundings. This makes it difficult to clearly delineate the causal pathways behind negative outcomes. Moreover, this is further hampered by the fact that processes of social isolation, negative and indirect socialization and social disorganization are selective rather than generic. For example, while processes of social isolation might be appropriate to understand the employment trajectories of some residents, processes of indirect



socialization might be more relevant to understand the choices with respect to work of other residents. This finding is supported by the finding in European studies on neighborhood effects that 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 fieldwork in Transvaal-Noord provides some explanations for the differential character of neighborhood effects. First, the different informal local social structures operate on the basis of different sets of norms, values and rules of conduct and contain different types of social resources. This can be illustrated by comparing the stories of a number of Transvaal residents of Turkish background. Although informal job networks of Turkish communities (note the plural) are particularly well developed in the area, not every resident is able to access these networks. For most men the informal job networks provide an opportunity to find work, although it can hamper their opportunities to improve their employment situation in the long run. The experience for women differs, however, depending on their religious orientation: women from more liberal Muslim communities use the same job search strategies and their employment prospects can thus become limited by processes of social isolation. In contrast, women with a more conservative Muslim background are not expected to work and are thus excluded from the informal job networks. For them, norms and values with respect to work are more relevant in explaining their (lack of) employment status. Processes of social isolation and socialization with respect to work thus differentially affect different groups of residents. Clearly, the occurrence of such processes is not necessarily related to the size of a social group or their dominance within the neighborhood. Rather, it 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.

Differentiation amongst residents does not only apply to within-group processes, but also to processes of social disorganization and negative socialization in the public domain. Although intuitively one might expect that processes in the public domain equally affect all residents, this is not the case. Residents in Transvaal-Noord develop a variety of strategies to distance themselves and in particular their children from what they consider to be negative influences in the public domain (refs, Pinkster & Droogleever Fortuijn 2009). These strategies might be spatial, whereby they avoid specific places within the neighborhood, and/or social, whereby they avoid contact with specific people in the neighborhood. [insert example, check Atlas.ti for quote.] However, residents respond differently to social and physical disorder in the public domain, because they differ in terms of their own time and resources and the support of others. For example, larger families and single mothers find it more difficult to monitor their children and protect them from harmful elements in the street than couples with fewer children. In other words, neighborhood does not simply imprint itself on residents, but is mediated or moderated to different degrees by residents' own actions.

Differentiation amongst residents in their experiences with processes of social isolation, socialization and social disorganization occurs along multiple social dimensions. Above all, residents' level of education is an important indicator of the degree to which they are potentially exposed to these various mechanisms. As known from the research

literature (Fisher 1982, other refs), residents' who are better educated<sup>2</sup> are less likely to be locally oriented in their social network and their employment situation is thus less likely to be negatively influenced by the previously described local processes of socialization or social isolation. However, having a high level of education cannot simply be equated with better social resources. This can be illustrated by the story of a single mother of Turkish background. Originally from Istanbul she moved to The Netherlands to marry, just after having finished professional training as a social worker. With limited Dutch language skills and a diploma that is not recognized, she is currently unemployed. Struggling to take care of her children and make ends meet, she has few opportunities to socialize outside of the neighborhood. She feels she doesn't belong amongst the other Turkish residents: "Most of them are Kurdish. They could never be my friends... [When asked why not:] You know, they're uneducated. Backward. The women are all covered and they gossip about me, because I am divorced, you know.... And I wear t-shirts and show my hair. I always do something wrong in their eyes, but they are the ones who are backwards. They live as if it is still the sixties." Being bound to the neighborhood, her number of friends can thus be counted on one hand. Paradoxically, her avoidance of and rejection by fellow residents of Turkish background means she also does not have access to the local informal job networks that might otherwise have helped her find a job. Some other relatively well educated respondents were unexpectedly locally oriented in their social networks. [insert other example, check Atlas.ti for quote.] These stories illustrate the way in which educational differences interact with other background characteristics - such as ethnic, cultural, religious background, geographical origin and household composition - to explain the degree to which residents are exposed to different mechanism of neighborhood effects.

### **Rethinking the causal pathways behind neighborhood effects**

To summarize, the findings in Transvaal-Noord to a certain degree support and elaborate on existing hypotheses in the research literature: in some cases unfavorable socio-economic outcomes result from informal job search strategies, whereby the dependence of local job networks cause residents to get 'stuck' in unskilled jobs with few career prospects. In other cases, deviant work ethics as a result of negative socialization in the public domain or in residents' own social networks can account for the fact that they are unemployed. Moreover, the case study provides a number of insights about the relationship between the neighborhood effects mechanisms and about their selective character.

Nevertheless, this theoretical framework does not offer a complete picture about the causal pathways behind neighborhood effects with respect to employment trajectories of residents in Transvaal. Indeed, more often than not unfavorable socio-economic outcomes are a side-effect of residents' actions and choices with respect to other life domains rather than the result of actions and choice that directly concern work. This was demonstrated in the way that local social practices amongst friends and relatives about appropriate behavior for women lead them to make suboptimal choices with respect to income level and career development. Above, this has been described as indirect socialization [...]. Moreover, despite the fact that individual actions and choices might have 'detrimental' long term

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<sup>2</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;

consequences, they 'make sense' from the perspective of residents' daily lives. For example, for many residents looking for a job through local social contacts is the quickest and easiest entrance to the labor market considering their lack of education, job experience and language skills (ref Waldinger). Similarly, unemployment might be an unintended outcome of the lack of work-related information in one's social network, that otherwise forms an important source of informal social support to deal with day-to-day problems associated with their marginalized social position and the substantial problems of social and physical disorder in their direct surroundings. While such a consequence or outcome (unemployment) might be construed as 'negative', it does not necessarily mean that the underlying behavior itself (developing meaningful relationships with neighbors) is 'bad'. Unfortunately, such a distinction between social practices amongst residents and the possible consequences of these practices is missing from the current political and academic debates about social life in disadvantaged neighborhood. The tendency is to emphasize the social pathologies of these neighborhoods in the form of negative socialization and social isolation and there is little recognition for the way in which concrete actions by residents (re)produce and transform such processes (Gotham, 2003). This negative representation of social life in disadvantaged neighborhoods disregards the fact that a lot of residents form a meaningful attachment to their residential surroundings through diverse social activities such as the creation of local social networks and the construction of 'safe' places in the neighborhood (Gotham and Brumley, 2002; Manzo, Kleit, et al., 2008).

## **Conclusion**

The case study in Transvaal-Noord shows that living in a disadvantaged neighborhood context differentially influences residents' employment prospects in sometimes contradictory ways. The case study shows how - even in relatively fragmented and heterogeneous low-income neighborhoods - mechanisms of socialization, social isolation and social disorganization can restrict residents' long-term economic opportunities by influencing their job search strategies and their choices with respect to work. However, living in a low-income neighborhood context is rarely the *cause* of unemployment or limited social mobility. Rather, it reproduces already existing inequalities that result from macro structural processes relating the labor market and the welfare state (Wacquant, 2008). Residents differ in the degree to which they want and are able to distance themselves from negative influences at the neighborhood level. They can thus not simply be viewed 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. However, the social practices that help them to deal with their marginalized social position and the social problems in their direct surroundings sometimes have unintended effects for their employment prospects. Indeed, the case study shows how neighborhood effects are often a side-effect of choices and actions with respect to other domains in life rather than the intended outcome of economic actions. 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. [add policy perspective]

In a way, they both emphasize the need for an explanatory framework for neighborhood effects that better reflects the empirical reality and complexity of social life in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Such a nuanced view is also particularly relevant from a policy perspective because it can help to provide new insights about the effectiveness and consequences of the uniform and far-reaching social mix programs currently employed throughout Europe.

**To be added: Bibliography**