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Ju¨rgen Friedrichs , George Galster & Sako Musterd

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Editorial

Neighbourhood Effects on Social Opportunities: The European and American Research and Policy Context

JÜRGEN FRIEDRICHS, GEORGE GALSTER & SAKO MUSTERD

In contemporary European and American urban policy and politics and in academic research it is typically assumed that spatial concentrations of poor households and/or ethnic minority households will have negative effects upon the opportunities to improve the social conditions of those who are living in these concentrations. Since the level of concentration tends to be correlated with the level of spatial segregation the 'debate on segregation' is also linked to the social opportunity discussion. The central question is "Do poor neighbourhoods make their residents poorer?" (Friedrichs, 1998), i.e. does the neighbourhood structure exert an effect on the residents (behavioural, attitudinal or psychological) even when controlling for individual characteristics of the residents?

The issue of neighbourhood effects on social opportunities of residents possesses rich geographical, sociological, economic and psychological dimensions, and as such has offered a locus for multi-disciplinary investigations on both sides of the Atlantic. Such diversity is amply demonstrated in this Special Issue of *Housing Studies*, with economists, geographers, planners and sociologists, hailing from Germany, the Netherlands, UK and USA, represented among the contributors. These diverse perspectives often intersect in two realms: spatial relationships and selective household mobility.

The spatial focus of neighbourhood effect studies is clear, for example, in economic geographical studies about the spatial mismatch between demand and supply on the labour market (Kasarda *et al.*, 1992). The thesis here is that economic restructuring has led to a situation in which the peripheral locations of suitable jobs for unskilled workers and inner-city residential locations of these potential workers have grown too far from each other to enable matching on a daily basis; this would aggravate the social conditions of those who live in inner-city areas. The spatial element is also evident in the research underpinnings of American housing policy aimed at changing the locations of low-income or minority households (Briggs, 1997; Del Conte & Kling, 2001; Katz *et al.*, 2001; Ludwig *et al.*, 2001; Rosenbaum, 1995; Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2002). These American policies for changing the spatial distribution of the disadvantaged are related to European ideas about 'mixed neighbourhood policies' that nowadays receive considerable attention and critiques (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001; Kearns,

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2002; Musterd *et al*., 1999, Musterd *et al*., this issue; Ostendorf *et al*., 2001). As an illustration, in this issue van Beckhoven & Van Kempen address the urban restructuring effects in two Dutch cities, focusing on the social relations and interactions of residents. They conclude that the neighbourhood restructuring plays only a limited part in the life of most of the residents.

Urban researchers from multiple disciplines also intersect each other when they pay attention to selective residential migration processes in relation to neighbourhood effects. One of the crucial issues in this regard is the increasing concentration of poverty in certain areas, which is exacerbated by middle-class households moving out to more affluent neighbourhoods. In many American cities the flight of these households towards suburban neighbourhoods expresses a process of 'leaving the cities behind' (cf. Thomas, 1991; Wilson, 1987). As an effect, the service structure in poor inner-city neighbourhoods declines as the local tax base erodes. Vicious circles are expected to develop in extreme cases, implying a clear, pernicious neighbourhood effect. For example, one might start with the development of concentrations of poor inhabitants (frequently poor immigrants or ethnic minorities), followed by an erosion of public facilities and services, residential abandonment and rising crime, lack of opportunities and therefore again the attraction of those with the weakest positions. Racial factors may overlay class factors in creating a dual-feature segregation that intensifies poverty and constrains outward opportunity (Massey & Denton, 1993).

However, the fact that these kinds of mobility processes are encountered in American cities does not imply there are necessarily special neighbourhood effects. In their paper Kearns & Parkes pay attention to mobility in relation to neighbourhoods in the UK context. Their focus is on home and neighbourhood perceptions and residential mobility behaviour. They include poverty, anti-social behaviour and crime as key variables affecting perceptions and mobility. Nevertheless, their conclusion is that there is "no evidence to support the notion of a distinctive culture in deprived UK areas", rather, "residents in poor areas were responding to negative residential conditions in the same way as the rest of the population". It is also interesting to see that in several European cities the levels of segregation and separation are much lower compared to American experiences. This may imply that neighbourhood effects are less significant in Europe.

Moreover, unlike the American experience, usually it is not the inner city that collects the largest problems. Instead it is the outer areas, such as the *banlieue* in Paris (cf. Wacquant, 1993) and other large French cities, or post-war social housing complexes on the fringes in cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin, Glasgow, Stockholm and Naples, which are characterised by serious concentrations of social problems. One factor contributing to such concentrations is the social housing allocation policy in many European cities. In Germany, for example, poor or 'problematic' families are allocated to social housing dwellings by non-profit housing associations. These dwellings are predominantly located in the peripheral housing estates, thereby increasing the spatial concentration of distressed households.

In sum, the field of neighbourhood effects and social opportunities is currently an exciting one, characterised by spirited, multi-disciplinary debates. Unfortunately, one set of debates has been conducted within North America and another within Europe, often with little commonality. It is the goal of this Special Issue to bridge this gap, and offer ways of thinking about this issue that will help advance the discussion in both regions. This issue offers four illustrations of exemplary recent European research on neighbourhood effects, followed by two

American-authored papers, one by Galster, offering a new methodological strategy and the other by Briggs, who both offers comments on the European papers by putting the neighbourhood effect debate into a dynamic city-wide, nation-wide and global nested framework; and links the European papers to potential policy arenas.

The Editorial now proceeds by providing a Trans-Atlantic overview of the neighbourhood effects debates. Specifically, the review is organised around the questions: How large are neighbourhood effects? How can these effects be measured precisely? How do these effects transpire? Directions for future research on the topic are then suggested.

How Much, How, and How do we Know? A Trans-Atlantic Overview

Neighbourhood effects have been the source of American scholarly enquiries for over half a century. An early manifestation was the discussion on the proper 'social mix' of a neighbourhood (e.g. Gans, 1961; Sarkissian, 1976), but in this literature the effect was assumed to exist but not specified nor explored empirically. American empirical interest in the issue arguably was kindled by the seminal work of William Julius Wilson (1987), who claimed that the socially isolated environments of concentrated poverty neighbourhoods encouraged 'underclass' behaviours in US cities. Since then there has been a dramatic increase in the number of scholarly studies produced in the USA that investigate the impact of the residential neighbourhood on a variety of outcomes for youth and adults. The burgeoning findings of this multidisciplinary literature have spawned several comprehensive review articles (see especially Briggs, 1997; Ellen & Turner, 1997; Galster, 2002; Galster & Killen, 1995; Gephardt, 1997; Johnson *et al*., 2001; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson *et al*., 2002).

Geographers are among the first who should pay attention to the study of neighbourhood effects. However, as the dissertation of De Vos (1997) shows, it was only some three decades ago when geographical neighbourhood effect studies first emerged in Europe. Most of these studies addressed voting behaviour and only some dealt with other issues. Kevin Cox, Ron Johnston and Kelvin Jones were among the most active European researchers to address the neighbourhood effects. Only recently geographers started to pay attention to the impact of the social environment on social mobility in particular. Andersson (2001) and Musterd *et al*. (2001), for example, carried out large-scale longitudinal empirical research in Sweden and the Netherlands. They used datasets consisting of several millions of individuals and households who could be followed in their social career and in various socio-spatial settings, controlling for other influences on social careers. They found some independent but not very strong neighbourhood effects and had to conclude that additional research should be carried out before stronger answers can be provided. The review by Friedrichs (1998) also suggests that relatively few European sociologists have focused on this issue.

The vast majority of work in both the US and Europe has addressed the question, 'How much independent effect do neighbourhoods have?' Multiple methods have been employed to answer this 'How much?' question, and a healthy ferment is bubbling about which are most appropriate and where the most fertile advancements might lie, as will be seen below. Relatively few studies have addressed the question, "How does this neighbourhood effect occur?", one of the first being the methodological analysis by Erbring & Young (1979).

How Much Neighbourhood Effect?

The American literature on size of impact generally has concluded that the neighbourhood environment makes a non-trivial, independent difference for a variety of outcomes, although the impact is not nearly as decisive as parental or individual characteristics, or macro-economic conditions (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 1997; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Jargowsky, 1997). The measured impact clearly varies according to what sort of outcome is being considered, the age of the person being affected and how neighbourhood is measured. In Europe it appears that neighbourhood effects may be comparatively muted because of significantly different housing supply and social welfare systems that jointly limit the variation of neighbourhood conditions and ameliorate or compensate for these differences through other support programs (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001; Musterd, 2002). Even this most general consensus is hardly unanimous, however, with some arguing the measured impacts are over-stated and other claiming just the opposite.

Some have argued that most measured neighbourhood effects are biased upward because of selection effects (Evans *et al*., 1992; Plotnick & Hoffman, 1999; Tienda, 1991). They argue that parents will self-select certain kinds of neighbourhood environments with the intent of bettering themselves and their families. Yet, because typically the variables that measure such motivations are absent from the non-experimental, longitudinal databases analysed, a substantial degree of the apparent statistical association between neighbourhood conditions and various outcomes is, in fact, due to these unmeasured parental characteristics that led to the differential selection of the observed neighbourhood characteristics. Analogous forms of selection biases plague neighbourhood impacts measured from evaluations of US poverty deconcentration programmes, both quasi-experimental designs, as in the Gautreaux and Yonkers programs (e.g. Briggs, 1998; Rosenbaum, 1995), or random-experimental designs, as in the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration (Del Conte & Kling, 2001; Katz *et al*., 2001; Ludwig *et al*., 2001).

On the other hand, it has been argued that previous studies create downward biases in the measured neighbourhood effect (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 1997). First, they note that implicit in the selection argument above is the notion that a large number of parents *believe* that neighbourhood is important and act accordingly, thus belying the conclusion of no impact. Second, 'neighbourhood' is typically measured in US studies at the census tract, a relatively homogeneous area of 4000 inhabitants, on average. Such tracts might be too large in scale to measure accurately the variables of 'local neighbourhood' that actually are affecting residents. Third, readily available demographic and socio-economic data typically employed as indicators may serve as poor proxies for the essence of 'neighbourhood' that may crucially affect outcomes, and may evince limited variation in the databases conventionally analysed (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 1997). Finally, as argued by Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn (2000) and Sampson *et al*. (2002), past studies have typically focused on the direct effects of neighbourhood only, not how neighbourhood might also influence outcomes through intervening variables that conventionally are treated as controls. Galster in this issue, for example, suggests that neighbourhood may influence outcomes through related choices of tenure and mobility, and through longer-run changes in household income and wealth.

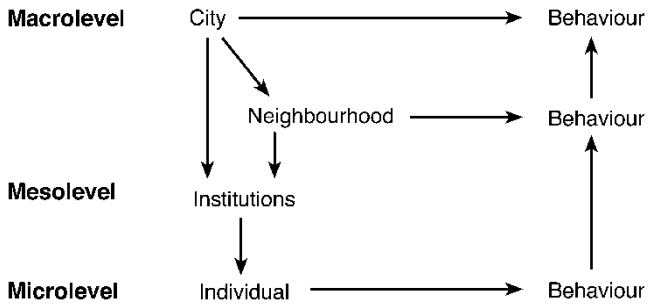

Figure 1. A multi-level model of neighbourhood effects.

The difficulties to specify neighbourhood effects on individuals arise from the complex structure in which the individual is embedded. This structure can be formalised in a multi-level model, shown in Figure 1. Neighbourhoods may be influenced by macro-level (city) changes, such as the aforementioned de-industrialisation. This will not only change the opportunities for residents to find a job, but as well result in the perception that many households in the neighbourhood are unemployed or eventually living from transfer payments only. Furthermore, the impact of the neighbourhood on the residents is not only direct, but also indirect via social institutions, such as the quality of schools, police and peer groups, further by the public and private facilities like shops and for recreation available in the area. It is, therefore, difficult to account for a neighbourhood effect on, say, the school drop out rate, if we do not control for both individual and school variables.

How do we Know?

There are two basic methodological approaches to the measurement of neighbourhood effects. Although these are described and critiqued in fuller detail in Haveman & Wolff (1995), Gephardt (1997), Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn (2000), Sampson *et al*. (2002) and Galster (this issue), in brief they are:

- Neighbourhood Case Study: individuals' attitudes, behaviours, life trajectories and social interrelationships are examined through archival, survey and/or ethnographic methods in one or more neighbourhoods with notable characteristics (typically associated with extreme deprivation and social exclusion); sometimes results are contrasted to those in other types of neighbourhoods; Van Beckhoven & Van Kempen (this issue) and Friedrichs & Blasius (this issue) are illustrative.
- Statistical Analysis of Non-Experimental, Longitudinal Databases: individuals are observed over time in different residential contexts, and multivariate statistical techniques are used to uncover correlations between these contexts and behaviours or outcomes for these individuals, controlling for background and other individual characteristics; Musterd *et al*. (this issue) and Kearns & Parkes (this issue) are illustrative.

Each approach has distinct strengths and weaknesses (Duncan *et al*., 1997; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995). Both approaches share in common the challenge of responding to the aforementioned issue of selection biases. Without a convincing methodological response, both approaches remain highly vulnerable to the charge that not only the magnitude of the measured association between

neighbourhood and individual outcomes is erroneous, but also causation itself may be absent. Finding such a convincing response has been the object of much greater attention by US than European scholars. The seminal analysis here is by Manski (1993, 1995), and the rapidly evolving literature during the subsequent decade has been summarised by Haurin *et al*. (2002). Several responses have emerged. First, instrumental variables might be substituted for the direct measures of neighbourhood found in non-experimental, longitudinal databases. In this issue Galster proposes an advance along this front based on the recognition of the simultaneity of neighbourhood and other choices affecting outcomes. Second, siblings can be studied over time in ways that fixed effects associated with common, but unobserved, parental characteristics can be differenced out, leaving the independent impacts of varying residential environments more visible. Third, if the outcomes in question involve non-linear responses to neighbourhood characteristics (such as threshold relationships or binary decisions like housing tenure or participation in the labour force), there are means of identifying unambiguously the independent neighbourhood effect (Brock & Durlauf, 2001). Fourth, social experiments might be designed whereby the allocation of subjects to neighbourhoods is done through random assignment procedures, such as the MTO demonstration in the US.

How are Neighbourhood Effects Transmitted?

Since the seminal paper by Jencks & Mayer (1990), there have been expanding theoretical discussions about the mechanisms of neighbourhood effects, in particular those related to neighbourhood institutions (such as schools), as inserted in Figure 1. However, there has been comparatively little empirical work: the paper by Friedrichs & Blasius in this issue is a welcome exception. There appears to be an emerging consensus that neighbourhood effects could transpire through one or more of the following mechanisms (Friedrichs, 1998; Gephardt, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson *et al*., 2002):

- Neighbourhood resources: reputation of place, local public services and informal organisations, accessibility to jobs, recreation, health and other key services.
- Model learning via social ties and interrelationships: nature of interpersonal networks, peer groups, etc.
- Socialisation and collective efficacy: commonality of norms, sense of control of local public space.
- Resident perceptions of deviance, such as crime, drug dealing, physical decay of buildings and general state of disorder.

The first point refers to characteristics of places that often may be defined independently of the characteristics of residents. For example, the potential role of inadequate local public services in retarding social advancement is straightforward. The aforementioned spatial mismatch theory is based on the idea that access to jobs is insufficient; accessibility also plays a key role in the idea that inner-city poor residents are being cut off from proper institutions and services. The origin and role of the reputation of a place is more complicated because stigmatisation can occur on the basis of perceptions from outside of the neighbourhood's social composition. For example, a neighbourhood might become stigmatised on the basis of the percentage of unemployed people living there, therefore making it more difficult for those residents to find jobs.

Another dimension that may help to understand neighbourhood effects is the

extent, type and quality of the social networks to which people belong. Although this is related to the socialisation dimension (see Andersson, 2001), the development of networks along certain lines (age, gender, class, ethnicity) may independently stimulate or reduce peoples' opportunities to discover new ways of life or employment options, and may or may not prevent people from becoming trapped in a weak social position. They learn by models available in the neighbourhood (cf. Thornberry *et al*., 1994).

Socialisation is a dimension that refers to the (visual or verbal) interaction between people in the neighbourhood and the idea that these people, via their interaction, adopt each other's behaviours and attitudes, for example, via the acceptance of group norms and through social contagion. In this issue, Friedrichs & Blasius address these hypothetical explanations with a focus on explaining acceptance of and tolerance towards deviant behaviour in poverty neighbourhoods.

Finally, not only effects due to interaction must be included but also the residents' perceptions of the neighbourhood, e.g. visible deviant behaviour or the extent of physical decay. Examples are the 'broken windows' proposition by Wilson & Kelling (1982) or the recent study by Ross *et al*. (2001), who show that 'perceived disorder' among persons with low personal control leads to distrust other residents.

The relationships among these types of causal connections are difficult to decipher since the corresponding 'variables' are of different types and may require separate research projects to be measured adequately. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the relative weight of these explanations, especially given the scant amount of empirical work. The review by Sampson *et al*. (2002) finds that all have been linked in one study or another to criminal activity, often as mediating factors between neighbourhood structural characteristics like concentrated poverty. Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn's review (2000) finds that the strongest evidence regarding child and youth outcomes relates to norms and collective efficacy, especially peers who serve as mediators of neighbourhood effects. A similar institutional effect (cf. Figure 1) was reported by Haynie (2001) who found strong effects of the density of the peer network structure on peer delinquency.

Considerations in Framing a Research Agenda

Knowledge about the size and mechanism of the impact of the neighbourhood is rapidly growing. However, crucial questions remain unanswered. These questions require a research agenda. This final section provides some organising elements that may play a useful role in constructing such a research agenda.

Even when we focus attention on the neighbourhood environment's effects on individuals, there remains considerable latitude. Effects can be varied, individuals can be varied and environments can be varied. Effects, as 'dependent' variables, may refer to the social mobility opportunities of people, but whose social mobility? Should the attention be focused on children's progress in particular, since their steps in life may be decisive for the rest of people's lives? Or would it also make sense to investigate the effects of environments on the lives of adults, unemployed, immigrants, etc. But even then various interpretations of social mobility are possible. The focus can be on improving the labour market position (from unemployed to employed; from poor to rich; from unstable jobs to stable jobs); but can also be on the social capital dimension (the size and quality of one's social network), or on school participation (level of participation). Instead of focusing on social outcomes, we also may want to

highlight outcomes in other spheres, such as health development, deviant behaviour, criminal behaviour, and the like.

Independent variables can be distinguished at various levels, as indicated in Figure 1. It makes sense to distinguish between six types of variables, each with a different implicit spatial scale: individual characteristics; household characteristics; endogenous neighbourhood variables; exogenous neighbourhood variables; metropolitan area characteristics and welfare state regimes. Among the most important individual characteristics are variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic position and dynamics and educational attainment and dynamics. Household type in demographic and socio-economic terms is also most important. The lifestyle of these households, their urban orientations (or not) and their spatial mobility levels seem to be most relevant to understand variations in 'effects'. With regard to the neighbourhood variables, we suggest distinguishing between endogenous (factors originating within neighbourhoods) and exogenous (factors originating outside of neighbourhoods) ones. Endogenous variables are, for example, related to theories regarding socialisation and social control. They further include characteristics like the proportion of socially 'weak' households, the physical attributes and housing structure conditions, and the neighbourhood's situation (location) in the metropolitan area. Exogenous variables are, for example, related to perceptions from outside and can, thus, contribute to the ideas related to stigmatisation. Here we should think of perceptions of service levels and physical conditions and of valuation by financial institutions, for example. At the metropolitan area level of explanations the dominant economic structure or historically grown, path-dependent structure appears to be important, as well as the level of political fragmentation of the area, the area's attraction to immigrants and the overall level of segregation of the population. The state level, finally, seems relevant as well, since various levels of policy intervention and the types of intervention may have large impact upon the social arena in metropolitan areas.

The questions that may be deduced from these categories can be addressed in various ways. We may distinguish between studies that address perceptions or actual behaviour; that investigate simple cases, or multiple cases; that use self-constructed spatial units, or statistical units; that use cross-sectional or longitudinal data; small-scale or large-scale neighbourhoods; samples or populations. Wide and long and longitudinal datasets seem to offer the best opportunities to carry out innovative research projects aimed at analysing and controlling for multiple environment effects specified in our model on individual opportunities (individual, household, neighbourhood, metropolitan area and state levels simultaneously); or following certain age cohorts over time; or including the change of environments during the process of social mobility; or to allow for better tests of non-linear relations between neighbourhood compositions and social effects. There are a growing number of studies on 'neighbourhood effects', but there is still a long way to go before a sufficiently high level of knowledge is attained to fundamentally evaluate the actual impact of neighbourhoods. As long as this goal has not been reached, urban and housing policies that aim to change the neighbourhood compositions in order to gain more positive social effects, are taking the plunge into largely uncharted waters (Galster, 2002; Galster & Zobel, 1998; Ostendorf *et al.*, 2001).

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arose from the European Network for Housing Research working group on poverty neighbourhoods. That working group had organised a workshop within the larger European Network of Housing Researchers conference on Housing Cultures, Convergence and Diversity, which was held in July 2002 in Vienna. This edition of *Housing Studies* has been co-ordinated by ourselves in collaboration with the two editors of the journal. All papers have been subjected to the usual peer review processes of *Housing Studies*.

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