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From Public Familiarity to Comfort Zone: The Relevance of Absent Ties for Belonging in Berlin's Mixed Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

Segregation along lines of race/ethnicity and class has created multi-ethnic and rather class-homogeneous neighbourhoods in various European cities, commonly labelled as 'disadvantaged'. Such neighbourhoods are often seen as 'lacking' community, as local networks are crucial for belonging and mixed neighbourhoods are too diverse to provide homogeneous identifications. However, in contrast to the understandings of the sociology of community, people might still experience 'belonging', yet in different ways. This article argues that we have to focus on the under-researched 'time in-between' (Byrne, 1978), the absent ties that Granovetter (1973) pointed to, to understand belonging, while moving away from a conception of the anonymous city and from the urban village. This article explores how absent ties affect belonging by empirically sustaining the notion of public familiarity: both recognizing and being recognized in local spaces. Using regression models on survey data from two mixed neighbourhoods in Berlin, Germany, we analyse the importance of neighbourhood use for public familiarity as well as how it relates to residents' comfort zone: people's feeling of belonging and their sense that others would intervene on their behalf. Our findings indicate that research on neighbourhoods could benefit greatly from a careful consideration of the 'time in-between'.

Introduction

Urban segregation in Europe along lines of race, ethnicity and class has produced rather class-homogeneous neighbourhoods housing multiple ethnic groups. Such areas are often labelled as disadvantaged areas in which social problems accumulate. This has encouraged social mixing policies that often understood 'social' as 'class' (for a discussion of such policies, see Galster, 2007). As class and ethnicity tend to intersect in many European cities, aiming for a mixture of social classes often implies a mixture of a dominant white with minority ethnic groups. In the areas we studied — two mixed neighbourhoods in Berlin, Germany, which we here call Deerfield and Broker Square — diverse groups have found ways to co-exist.

Some have argued that for cities to be just, access to infrastructures of similar quality such as schools is important, and that this can be achieved in mixed neighbourhoods, as class mixture will improve the social capital of a 'community' (Blokland, 2008a). For neighbourhoods to provide a sense of community, with all the beneficial outcomes attached thereto, sociologists have long presumed the necessity for local networks (Bott, 1957; Young and Willmott, 1957; Gans, 1962; Bell and Newby, 1974; Stack, 1975).

When local networks are limited, neighbourhoods are thought to 'lack' community, and various policy programmes have been developed to repair this (Blokland, 2003). Drawing on such understandings of local community, urban policies aimed at strengthening local community presume that personal networks are a necessary condition for well-functioning neighbourhoods. They also presume that mixture may help overcome disadvantage because the networks that are expected to develop between different people becoming neighbours should provide socialization models (as in role-model theories) and social capital for getting ahead for those in disadvantaged positions now (Brooks-Gunn *et al*., 1993; Briggs, 1997).

Yet there is accumulating evidence that residents of diverse backgrounds do not form such networks (May, 1996; Butler, 2003; Slater, 2006; Blokland, 2008a; Lees, 2008; Blokland and van Eijk, 2010). Scholars have been particularly critical of the engagement of middle-class residents in the local community (Blokland, 2008a; Lees, 2008; Watt, 2009; van Eijk, 2010). Often, these middle classes come in with an appreciation of diversity, as shown by Tissot (2014, this issue). Yet, at the same time they often want cleaner, safer neighbourhoods so that some groups become unwanted (Slater, 2006; Holm, 2010) and they create demand that pushes up housing prices. Once they have moved in, they prefer to engage in community actions that protect their property values (Mesch and Schwirian, 1996) or speak to their own needs and desires (Filion, 1991; Blokland, 2009). Even those who say they move to a diverse area because they love diversity do not manage to develop diverse networks (Blokland and Van Eijk, 2010; see also Jackson and Benson, 2014, this issue). So if people tend to connect to people like themselves, then neighbourhood diversity may impede strong, inclusive communities. From a policy perspective, this is then seen as problematic, because neighbours should feel a sense of belonging where they live, and once they do they will engage, or so the argument goes; once they engage, the neighbourhood will be on its way up.

However, people living in mixed neighbourhoods develop forms of belonging, but in different ways. Whether it is selective belonging (Watt, 2009), elective belonging (Savage *et al*., 2005) or mostly place consumption (May, 1996), the absence of local communities, imagined and in terms of networks (*cf.* Blokland, 2003) does *not* imply that the local has lost its meaning. That communities do not match geographical areas (Blokland, 2003) and that the relevance of local ties has decreased (Wellman, 1979; Völker, 1995; Wellman, 1996) *only* contradicts with continued neighbourhood belonging if belonging is seen as necessarily connected to the idea of *one* singular community or of personal local networks. While Savage *et al*. (2005) and Watt (2009) all show what belonging can mean and how it can be classified, they do little to explain how individuals develop a sense of belonging through their practices, in order to produce the social space for their feeling to move around there comfortably in the first place. To find out how this works, we ought to look at the 'time in-between' (Byrne, 1978), during which people are on their way to live the rest of their lives, or focus on the absent ties that Granovetter (1973) pointed to (see also Soenen, 2006). While the meaning of such ties has long remained under-researched, they are crucial for understanding belonging, while moving away from both a Simmelian (2002) conception of the anonymous city *and* from the urban village (Gans, 1962) in which neighbourhood life is mainly experienced through local social networks. People may construct belonging through their daily routines in their neighbourhoods in different ways from those that sociology of community and neighbourhood policy has generally assumed.

If experiencing neighbourhood belonging is determined by everyday encounters, and not by individual residential biographies and personal networks, attempts to encourage inclusive community development may also have to change, which has consequences for urban policies.

This article aims, then, to explore how absent ties may affect belonging and introduces two new theoretical notions to specify and advance our thinking about the mechanisms behind the production of everyday space as one where belonging can be 'done': *public familiarity* and *comfort zone*. Hence the question we seek to answer is: What explains

people's sense of belonging in an area where neither the localness of their social networks nor their primary identifications (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, but also habitus or lifestyle) can do this, because the local networks they have can be assumed to be (and, as indicated by rough measurement, indeed are) limited, and the area is too diverse to provide such a frame for homogeneous identification.[1]

Structure of the article

We start with the assumption that belonging consists of an experience of being expected, accepted or tolerated as present, of having a reasonable understanding of the social codes and unwritten rules of the public space, of knowing enough about the street grid and built environment to find one's way easily, and of being able to assess what to expect from others. Yet this understanding of belonging does not assume that people *like* these others, the shared roles or even the architecture. All it does is to ease sociality, to reduce the alertness and blasé attitude required in unknown and anonymous urban settings (Simmel, 2002). Therefore this set of experiences can be seen as producing a social space that we call 'comfort zone'. We then argue, using survey data from two mixed neighbourhoods in Berlin, Germany, which we name Deerfield and Broker Square here, that indeed, people in these mixed neighbourhoods tend to live in tectonic co-existence (Butler and Robson, 2001). But passing each other — and acknowledging each other in Goffman's (1963) terms — without social ties is important to the experience of mixture, and impacts on people's belonging, as it creates such a 'comfort zone'.

This social space is produced through neighbourhood use: the *local* daily routines. We discuss neighbourhood use by examining the use of the local shopping street, and what we call 'contact assets'. As Blokland (2009) argued elsewhere, people with small children or dogs use local places such as playgrounds and parks more intensively than others. Moreover, the nature of supervising children or walking a dog increases meeting chances with others doing the same at the same time, so that they can recognize immediate similarity. This, then, makes children and dogs 'contact assets', which may affect residents' experience of a comfort zone. Sociological research has often pointed to the relevance of family and friends for various forms of neighbourhood attachment; such ties make people feel at home (see, for example, Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Austin and Baba, 1990; Ringel and Finkelstein, 1991). We look at shopping streets because areas with functional diversity enable everyday interactions more than do mono-functional areas (Jacobs, 1961) so that we can assume that the more often people use such facilities, the more likely they will be to have encounters with other residents beyond their immediate neighbours.

But why, precisely, do we expect neighbourhood use to produce this 'comfort zone'? We argue that this is not a direct effect but that such uses, as well as personal characteristics, length of residence and a general attitude of trust towards others, impacts on a perceived 'atmosphere' (Löw, 2001) or 'realm' (Lofland, 1998) of *public familiarity*, to be defined below. This familiarity in streets and squares in turn, we show, produces social space as a comfort zone.

We empirically substantiate this statement by means of a quantitative analysis of a set of variables of contact assets and shopping-street use, a set of variables measuring public

1 We are aware of the fact that we have not conducted a full network analysis and therefore one may question the correctness of our position that local networks are limited. However, studies in similar neighbourhoods elsewhere have demonstrated that the relevance of local ties in people's personal networks is limited indeed (van Eijk, 2010). Based on studies such as those by Wellman (1996), Völker (1995) and others we think there is enough evidence to assume that roughly the same may apply to the residents in our study. The crude indicators of the relevance of local ties for people's social networks that we have here are families and friends in the area.

familiarity, and a set of variables measuring the experience of comfort zone. These analyses indicate that the debate on mixed neighbourhoods and belonging so far may have overlooked the importance of fluid, brief, incidental encounters.

In the section that follows we introduce the research site and methods. Next, we discuss our main theoretical concepts and the operationalization thereof, followed by the regression models that form the core of our analyses. We then statistically explore the relations that we hypothesize. Finally, we reflect on what we have learnt from the models, and discuss what they mean for theory development and urban policy.

Research site and methods

We use data of two neighbourhoods that lie in close proximity to each other in an inner-city borough of West Berlin, which we call Deerfield and Broker Square here. These consist mostly of buildings from the nineteenth century, some buildings from the 1920s and 1930s, and social housing from the 1970s and 1980s. Both areas are adjacent to a major shopping street. Before the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, the street was one of three of West Berlin's major shopping streets, independent merchants and larger chain stores lining its four lanes. It is well connected to the public transport grid by means of three underground stations and attracts visitors from the immediate area and beyond. As the major shopping hubs have changed since the end of the Berlin divide, the street primarily serves a local clientele. A typically working-class neighbourhood, the area was hit severely by deindustrialization, especially after the fall of the Berlin wall, when the state abolished subsidies that used to support West Berlin industries for political reasons. As a result of immigration from the 1970s onwards the borough had, by then, become ethnically diverse. Today 40.6% to 56.4% of residents in the areas we studied have a migration background.[2] Moreover, the borough is seen as one in which problems accumulate (Häussermann *et al*., 2007: 79). For example, in 2009, 12–13% of the 33,650 residents in the areas we studied were unemployed. However, the area is also home to a substantial number of students and middle-class residents and, with a rent increase of on average 10% over the past 2 years, it is slowly upgrading, thus creating a very mixed current population (Häussermann *et al*., 2010). Yet Deerfield and Broker Square are certainly no showcases for gentrification: there is some mixture in terms of social class, and a lot of mixture in terms of race and ethnicity. This is reflected in the shopping street, where Turkish grocers, kebab restaurants, internet and mobile-phone repair shops, and cheap 1€ stores and discount stores now dominate over the various hip coffee shops, vintage clothing stores and the occasional delicatessen shop. The turnover rate of shops is high, and many shopkeepers struggle to keep their business going (Blokland, 2009).

From 2010 to 2011 we conducted 281 face-to-face interviews with residents, selected by means of a probability sample of individuals over 18 years old provided by the Berlin registration office. After sending an introductory letter, we went to every sampled person at home, returning twice if no one was there. We collected data on the everyday experiences of residents and their patterns of neighbourhood use, such as use of schools,

2 In terms of the Berlin-Brandenburg Office for Statistics, 'persons with a migration background' are defined as: (1) non-Germans; (2) Germans with a migration background who are *either* 'Germans born abroad or identified as naturalized citizens or with optional nationality (children born in Germany to non-German parents first received German nationality from 1 January 2000 under the provisions specified in Section 4 Paragraph 3 of the Nationality Law (StAG), option regulation)'; *or* 'Germans under 18 years without their own migration features born abroad or identified as naturalized on the side of at least one parent if the person is registered at the address of the parent(s)' (*cf*. Häussermann *et al*., 2010: 6).

Table 1 Demographics of interviewees (*N* = 281)

	% in Sample
Men	50
Women	50
Age: <31 years	34
31–40 years	16
41–50 years	22
51–60 years	11
>60 years	17
Migration background	42
Paid job	51

Source: Deerfield/Broker Square survey 2010/2011

public transport and shopping streets, political and social participation and local experiences of safety and trust. Table 1 shows the demographics of the interviewees.

From theoretical concepts to measurement

As suggested above, we hypothesize that whether people experience their neighbourhood as a comfort zone depends on their experiences in the 'time in-between'. We take neighbourhood as a space produced through residents own interactions but also through those of others, especially people whom they do *not* know. This means that not only the direct interactions of one person with another matter, but also those experiences of others interacting that we observe without participating. This then results in a spatially delineated entity, or zone, in which we feel more or less comfortable. Such zones are slightly different from what has been discussed in the literature as 'realms' (Lofland, 1998). People arguably know that the sites of their daily routines are not the same all the time, and that different events and situations, producing realms that come and go, depend on what is happening and who is there (Blokland, 2003). But people also develop a more stable interpretation of the social spaces and their representations based on previous experiences, memories, tales told by others and comparisons with other places they know. In their perception of and dealings with this social space, residents reinforce its characteristics. While realms thus come and go, residents are still able to read the signs from encounters with (interactions of) others and make sense of those (Blokland, 2003).

We prefer to talk of the zone that comes into existence in this way as a comfort zone and refrain from concepts that are generally associated with, in our opinion, more positive emotions. Comfort is associated with ease, the lack of need to make an effort (in this case, efforts to understand the social), the absence of the necessity to actively work things out. In a comfort zone we move with relative ease. We know the rules of conduct because the setting occurs predictably and is understandable to us. However, the comfort zone does not need to be a site that we like, nor one that we can identify with. For example, the group of alcohol and drug consumers on a square in the shopping street was known to residents; they were used to their presence and even though they would neither approve of nor like them being there, they had developed ways of co-existence that made passing by predictable and the behaviour of the drinkers understandable. Similarly, residents got used to teenage boys using a football cage as a hang-out: they would not approve of the boys' behaviour nor find their presence pleasant, but they certainly developed a sense of what to expect from them. Even in very violent neighbourhoods run

Table 2 Measurement of belonging

Items	Factor Loadings
I feel at home in this neighbourhood*	0.81
Mostly, I feel like a stranger in this neighbourhood*	–0.83
I am rooted in this neighbourhood*	0.75
Proportion	0.64
Cronbach's α	0.71
N	275

*Five-point Likert scale: completely agree/completely disagree
Source: Deerfield/Broker Square Survey 2010/2011

by drug dealers, people develop such a sense of comfort zone (see Blokland, 2008b). The comfort zone contributes to belonging, but does not determine it, although belonging without a comfort zone is hard to imagine. Thus, there where people feel they belong for other reasons, they are likely to produce a social space for themselves and others that is a comfort zone. This is not limited to people's 'own group', based on class, ethnicity, gender or time of residence; in mixed neighbourhoods, the everyday routes of residents invariably bring about encounters with others who differ from themselves, and whilst people come with their own cultural baggage, the inevitability of passing each other produces codes of conduct in the street that repeat and conform with expectations of the next encounter. For each different aspect of the neighbourhood people produce such spaces in which they know others and are known by them, and in which they understand the local customs, expectations and ways of conduct.

The first operationalization, then — a way of moving from a theoretical notion to asking people questions — is a scale of 'belonging'. This is an additive index constructed from three items (mean: 10.42, standard deviation: 3.37, range: 3–15). Residents indicated whether they agreed with the statements that they felt at home in the neighbourhood, that they did not feel like strangers, and that they felt rooted in the neighbourhood (see Table 2). The higher the score on the scale, the higher the experienced sense of belonging.

Secondly, a zone of comfort is where people have trust in others. Based on Sztompka's theory (1999), we assume that trust can be measured through the reaction that people expect from others when something happens to their fellow residents, measured here through the expectation of help by others. Respondents were asked: 'Imagine someone would threaten you here in the streets, and other residents see that, do you think that they would help you? [Yes/No]'. A principal component factor analysis[3] indicates that such feelings of trust do indeed measure a different dimension of 'comfort zone' than items of belonging.[4]

We argue that we expect public familiarity to influence the experience of someone's residential area as a comfort zone. The public-familiarity concept moves away from the Simmelian conception of the city as an anonymous sphere where a blasé attitude prevails (Simmel, 2002), *as well as* from the urban village argument (Gans, 1962) that our neighbourhood life experiences depend heavily on local social networks. Public familiarity, then, is a social space constructed in physical space through interactions in which we take part and those which we observe. As Fisher argued:

3 Analysis based on a polychoric correlation matrix, varimax rotation.

4 Included in the items measuring a sense of belonging, the expectation that others will help shows a very low factor loading (0.37) and a high uniqueness (0.86) and thus seems to measure a distinct factor.

> Public familiarity is often taken . . . for private intimacy, and public impersonality for private estrangement . . . But such public familiarity has nothing to do with people's private lives. The friendly greeter on the streets may have few friends, while the reserved subway rider may have a thriving social life (Fischer, 1982: 61–62).

We hence focus on the greeters on the street and operationalize public familiarity for our shopping street through two items: the frequency with which respondents encounter people whom they know from someplace else on the shopping street [never/rarely/sometimes/usually/always] (which could be neighbourhood societies and institutions, friends of friends, work, or any other sphere of their lives) and whether they engage in conversations with people whom they do not know [yes/no]. While the first item may simply reflect to what extent an urban village can be found that constitutes public familiarity, the second helps us to measure the 'time in-between': it is through conversations with people whom we do not know that public familiarity develops and brings about a comfort zone: here we learn to deal with differences, here we acquire new information about unknown others, and in such conversations we learn what to expect. A low Kuder-Richardson coefficient (0.21) of reliability for the two dichotomously recoded variables indicates that these do not form a common scale but rather capture two separate dimensions of public familiarity. We therefore include them in the analysis separately.

Analysis: approaching public familiarity and what it can 'do'

In the analyses that follow we try to answer two questions using ordinary least-square and logistic regression models.

First, we assess what impacts on people's public familiarity. Based on our argument that public familiarity is related to local daily routines, we investigate the association between neighbourhood use and contact assets and public familiarity. Moreover, as we argue that public familiarity is indeed something more than having friends and family in the neighbourhood, we also try to empirically establish that this is the case.

Thereafter, we focus on the question of how public familiarity is related to the described comfort zone. Are indicators of public familiarity positively associated with people's experiences of trust and belonging? Some methodological comments are in order here. We are well aware that our analysis is based on a rather narrow set of *observational* data. Thus the use of regression models to estimate causal effects is limited (see Pearl, 2000; Rubin, 2006). Accordingly, we do not aim to establish robust causal inference or to interpret substantial effects but rather try to use an explorative quantitative analysis to give more leverage to our argument that the debate on mixed neighbourhoods so far may have overlooked the importance of fluid, brief, incidental encounters.

Public familiarity and daily neighbourhood routines

In the first models we assess how daily routines of neighbourhood use relate to experienced public familiarity as measured through two indicators of public familiarity (see Table 3).[5] As argued above, daily routines can matter in terms of public familiarity, and more so than having friends and family in the neighbourhood. We thus include whether people go to the shopping street regularly [yes/no] and the kind of use (leisure use indicating that people also go to the shopping street to eat or drink something [yes/no]). Moreover, what we call 'contact assets' may make interactions with unknown people more likely, as argued above. We include whether people indicated that they have a dog [yes/no] or children under 10 years of age [yes/no]. In order to capture the role of local networks too, we include whether people have local friends or family [none/less

5 As both are binary variables, we estimated logistic regression models.

Table 3 Logistic regression on two indicators of public familiarity, odds ratios

Variables	Talking to People you Don't Know Exp(B)	Encounter People Known from Someplace Else Exp(B)
Contact assets		
Children <10 years	0.90	1.52
Dog (ref=no dog)	0.76	1.09
Use of shopping street		
Leisure (ref = no shopping for leisure)	2.82**	1.53
Regularly use	0.72	2.21+
Family in Neighbourhood (ref = no family)		
<10	0.59	2.16+
≥10	0.79	2.42
Friends in Neighbourhood (ref = no friends)		
<10	0.72	1.57
≥10	1.29	3.02*
Length of residence (ref = medium)		
Short	0.55	0.61
Long	1.36	2.12
Attitude towards strangers (ref = depends)		
Negative	3.00	1.06
Positive	3.32***	0.96
Demographics		
Male (ref = female)	0.87	0.68
Migration background (ref = no migration background)	0.75	1.83+
University degree (ref = no university degree)	1.36	0.70
Age	0.99	1.01
Income	0.86+	0.96
N	220	222
Pseudo R^2	0.121	0.151

Notes: +p < .1, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Source: Deerfield/Broker Square Survey 2010/2011

than 10/10 or more]. This may not directly affect whether people talk to others whom they do not know, but if someone has many personal ties that are local, they may be more likely to meet friends and family in company of others whom they do not know, and hence the chance of talking to strangers may increase. This may also work the other way around: if someone lives a peer-group life in their own circle in the area, then they may be so focused on their own group that, while they use the public space intensely for peer-group routines, they are less likely to engage with strangers than if they were there alone (*cf.* Blokland, 2003).

Finally, we control for respondents' gender [male/female], migration background [yes/no], income [categorical], age, length of residence [short/medium/long], and general attitudes towards strangers. Some people might generally be more open to contacts with unknown people than others ('How do you react if a stranger approaches

you?' [Always positive/depends/always negative]). In addition, we control for having a university degree as a proxy, as differences in cultural capital vary more than income in the neighbourhoods we researched.

Table 3 shows the odds ratios of the estimated logistic regression model, with the probability of talking to unknown people as dependent variable. Values below 1 indicate less likelihood of people talking to others whom they do not know, while values greater than 1 indicate higher probabilities of doing so. The logistic model shows that use of the nearby shopping street for eating and drinking in restaurants, coffee houses and the like — the famous 'third spaces' (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982) — is indeed significantly ($p < 0.01$) and positively associated with respondents' public familiarity: it increases respondents' probability of talking to someone they do not know. Interestingly, whether a person goes to the shopping street regularly or not is not related to his or her odds of talking to unknown people. This indicates that, even if people go to the shopping street every day, the crucial question is for what *reasons* they go there and how they use the street. Moreover, children and dogs, in contrast to what we thought, do not work as contact assets.[6]

Importantly, the fact that having family and friends in the neighbourhood is *not* significantly related to the probability of talking to unknown people on the shopping street demonstrates that we are, indeed, talking about a very different dimension of neighbourhood life than the one captured through community and social network research.

The relation between daily routines and public familiarity, however, works somewhat differently for our second indicator of public familiarity: the frequency with which people encounter other people whom they know from someplace else on the shopping street.[7] Again, we focus on the relation between public familiarity and neighbourhood use and contact assets. In contrast to the previous model, for respondents' probability of meeting people known from someplace else the frequency of visiting the shopping street seems to be of importance. Respondents who go to the street regularly have a significantly higher chance of meeting people they know ($p < 0.1$). While this effect is only significant on a 10% level, given the small N we still consider it relevant. Yet, the *kind* of use is not significantly associated with the indicator of public familiarity and neither are contact assets (a dog or children younger than 10). However, having family (less than 10, $p < 0.1$) and friends (10 or more, $p < 0.05$) locally significantly increases people's chances of meeting people they know from someplace else. While for talking to unknown people the use of the shopping street is important, for meeting people a person knows from someplace else the question is rather how *often* someone goes there. Moreover, having family and friends in the neighbourhood is positively related to a person's likelihood of meeting known others — probably because these residents know people in the neighbourhood to begin with.

These findings indicate that, among others factors, neighbourhood use is indeed positively associated with people's public familiarity. Unexpectedly, contact assets such as a dog or children under 10 years old do not significantly decrease or increase the probability of talking to unknown people or meeting known people. This could be attributed to the fact that we have investigated public familiarity on a shopping street (rather than in other parts of the neighbourhood such as parks or playgrounds). Moreover, the partly different effects of the included variables on the two public familiarity indicators suggest that these do indeed measure different dimensions of

6 A possible reason for this is that our indicators of public familiarity focus on the shopping street, and shopping is exactly what you do not want to do with either small children or dogs.

7 For the analysis that follows, this indicator is recoded dichotomously as regularly meeting people you know from someplace else (1 = yes, combining the categories [sometimes/usually/always]; and 0 = no, including [never/rarely]).

public familiarity: while the first seems to better capture the idea of 'in-between', the second reflects that while local ties do not seem to be a precondition for public familiarity, they do contribute to it.

To what is public familiarity linked?

In the next models we analyse whether public familiarity is indeed, as expected, positively linked to people's sense of home and their belief that others would interfere on their behalf (trust). For these analyses, the fact that we only have observational data is once again problematic. Clearly we are not able to establish causal effects here. Moreover, endogeneity might be a problem, as dependent and independent variables might be correlated. People who have more trust in others helping them might also talk to unknown people more often, as do people who strongly feel that they belong in a neighbourhood. Yet it seems likely that, once people start to talk to unknown people, this will in turn influence their trust and their feeling of belonging. Trust, after all, develops on the basis of experiences. As we are looking at a circular relation here, we understand these models as a way of looking at a correlation under control of other variables rather than as a form of establishing causality. While our models are thus methodologically limited and therefore to be interpreted with due caution, we nevertheless believe that theoretically this correlation is most significant and should make us question some of the assumptions present in the current debate on social mix.

Let us look at belonging first (see Table 4). Belonging, as discussed above, is an additive index in which a higher score on the scale indicates a higher experience of belonging (on a scale from 0 to 15). We use this index as a dependent variable in a multivariate OLS regression model to estimate the effect of public familiarity on belonging. A regression model that only includes the public familiarity indicator of whether respondents talk to unknown people indicates a substantial, highly significant ($p < 0.01$) positive relation between people's sense of home and public familiarity. Yet, in this simple regression model the estimated effects might be biased, owing to relevant third variables that had not been included in the model so far. We thus introduce controlling variables stepwise. First, we included demographic information such as gender, age, income, migration background [yes/no] and having a university degree [yes/no]. In addition, we included variables that might also be important for respondents' sense of home as well as public familiarity: length of residence [short/medium/long] (see Hunter, 1974; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Sampson, 1988), having family and friends in the neighbourhood [none/less than 10/10 or more], as well as respondents' overall trust, measured by the simple question that is often used in political science: 'Do you think in general people can be trusted or you cannot be too careful with them?' [yes/depends/no]'. The results of the multivariate regression models (see Table 4, model 2) show that talking to unknown people remains significant also under control of other variables. Having family (less than 10) in the neighbourhood is significantly ($p < 0.05$) and positively associated with respondents' sense of home. The same is true for having friends in the neighbourhood (less than 10, $p < 0.01$, more than 10, $p < 0.05$). As expected, those who have local ties also have a stronger sense of home. Public familiarity measured through talking to unknown people, however, still has a significant effect *of its own*. While whether we feel we belong in our neighbourhood does not depend *only* on public familiarity, we should also not ignore its role, and we should certainly not presume that only those with local ties can feel they belong, which is what those who lament the lost community of the neighbourhood suggest (*cf.* Wellman and Leighton, 1979), so that lack of neighbourhood ties becomes a 'problem' in need of policies. Public familiarity may complement personal local networks and create various strengths and dimensions of belonging. But whereas local ties between neighbours are often, as in the New Deal for Communities (UK), *Quartiersmanagement* (Germany) or social innovation (Netherlands), celebrated as the ideal for every neighbourhood, for feelings of safety and feeling at home in a neighbourhood, public familiarity is a much more important issue.

Table 4 OLS regression analysis on sense of belonging

Variables	Model 1 B	Model 2 B
Public familiarity		
Talking to unknown people	1.47**	0.96*
Length of residence (Ref = medium)		
Short		–1.23*
Long		0.94
Family in Neighbourhood (ref = no family)		
<10		1.38*
≥10		0.09
Friends in Neighbourhood (ref = no friends)		
<10		1.69**
≥10		1.02*
General Trust (Ref = depends)		
General trust		1.02*
No general trust		0.31
Demographics		
Male (ref = female)		–0.02
Age		–0.00
Migration background (ref = no migration background)		0.39
University degree (ref = no university degree)		–1.08*
Income		0.08
Constant	9.93***	9.19***
N	213	213
Adj. R^2	0.040	0.187

Notes: $+p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$
Source: Deerfield/Broker Square survey 2010/2011

We then re-estimate these models and include the second indicator of public familiarity: the quasi-metric frequency with which people encounter people whom they know from someplace else on the shopping street [never/rarely/sometimes/usually/always]. Table 5 shows the *b* coefficients of the regression model. The estimated models reveal a similar pattern as the previous models that included the meeting of unknown persons.

Meeting people known from someplace else remains significant for both models. Yet, the effect of public familiarity on the sense of belonging decreases after controlling for demographic variables (model 2) and is only significant on a 10% level, but given the small *N* we still consider it relevant. The positive association between meeting people known from someplace else and belonging remains significant even if we include whether respondents have family or friends in the neighbourhood. This, again, indicates that public familiarity does not relate directly to having friends or family in the area. Yet, as in the previous models, having family in the neighbourhood (less than 10) has a significant ($p < 0.05$) positive effect on respondents' belonging. While other variables are therefore also important for understanding people's sense of belonging, the role of public familiarity seems to be of importance too.

Table 5 OLS regression analysis on sense of belonging

Variables	Model 1 B	Model 2 B
Public familiarity		
Frequency of meeting known people	0.81***	0.36+
Length of residence (ref = medium)		
Short		–1.22*
Long		0.91
Family in Neighbourhood (ref = no family)		
<10		1.31*
≥10		–0.04
Friends in Neighbourhood (ref = no friends)		
<10		–0.00
≥10		1.48*
General Trust (Ref = depends)		
General trust		1.31**
No general trust		0.44
Demographics		
Male (ref = female)		0.04
Age		–0.00
Migration background (ref = no migration background)		0.29
University degree (ref = no university degree)		–0.96+
Income		0.05
Constant	9.08***	9.16***
N	215	215
Adj. R^2	0.078	0.223

Notes: $+p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$
Source: Deerfield/Broker Square survey 2010/2011

In our final model, then, we ask how public familiarity relates to what we have briefly, based on Sztompka (1999), discussed as trust in others: whether we expect people whom we do not know to be there for us when we are being threatened. For this model, what is problematic is that it is difficult to establish whether public familiarity comes first or whether people who are trusting are more likely to talk to unknown people in the neighbourhood. Theoretically, we would argue that it makes sense that public familiarity comes first and influences *this particular* form of trust and not the other way around; as Sztompka has argued, we develop trust based on knowledge about others. Public familiarity contributes to the development of this knowledge. Nevertheless, methodologically, here too we understand the following models rather as correlations under control of other variables than as a way of establishing causality. Table 6 shows the odds ratios of the estimated logistic regression models, with the probability of expecting others to help as the dependent variable.

We calculate two models, with each of our two public familiarity variables built in as independent variables (Table 6, model 1 and model 2). In these models we also control for gender, age, income, migration background [yes/no], university degree [yes/no], length of residence [short/medium/long], family and friends in the neighbourhood [none/less than 10/10 or more], and for experiences of victimization of respondents or someone

Table 6 Logistic regression on trust in other residents, odds ratios

Variables	Model 1 Exp(B)	Model 2 Exp(B)
Public familiarity		
Talking to unknown people	13.54**	
Meeting known people		1.24
Length of residence (ref = medium)		
Short	0.47	0.78
Long	0.24	0.43
Family in neighbourhood (ref = no family)		
<10	1.62	1.24
≥10	5.05	0.56
Friends in neighbourhood (ref = no friends)		
<10	0.11*	0.12*
≥10	0.39	0.35
General trust (ref = depends)		
General trust	1.05	2.11
No general trust	0.44	0.73
Victim (ref = no victim)	0.88	1.22
Demographics		
Male (ref = female)	0.14**	0.13**
Age	0.98	0.98
Income	1.24	1.07
Migration background (ref = no migration background)	0.17*	0.32+
University degree (ref = no university degree)	7.02*	5.31*
N	120	121
Pseudo R^2	0.329	0.247

Notes: $+p < 0.1$; $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$
Source: Deerfield/Broker Square Survey 2010/2011

living in their household in the neighbourhood [yes/no]. In addition, we again control for respondents' overall trust, measured by the question: 'Do you think in general people can be trusted or you cannot be too careful with them?'. We do this because we acknowledge that, outside of other contexts than the neighbourhood or because of personality traits, some people may be generally more trustful than others; this may influence their trust in others being there for them in case of need in the streets and squares where they live, as well as their likelihood to develop public familiarity.

Let us look at the first indicator of public familiarity, measured as talking to strangers (Table 6, model 1). This form of public familiarity is indeed relevant: there is a significant ($p < 0.01$) positive association between people navigating their neighbourhood in a public familiar sphere and respondents' likelihood of expecting that others will interfere and help them. This relation remains significant even when controlled for the mentioned variables. Interestingly, having friends in the neighbourhood *decreases* people's likelihood of expecting that others will help them (less than 10 friends, $p < 0.05$). This points to what Blokland (2009) discusses as islands of safety in a sea of fear. She argues that close-knit groups can be found in the two

neighbourhoods that we studied here; within these groups there is a strong sense of local community with local friends (but no longer family), where local everyday practices dominate, and where the local has the most symbolic meaning. Such groups have already been discussed by Gans (1962) as peer groups. In transforming neighbourhoods, such groups increasingly become, we hypothesize, defensive towards the changes they experience, and see such changes as alienation. While these changes do not alter their everyday local routines and practices (public familiarity remains!) and do not reduce their friendships, they do affect their sense of 'ownership' and power to define the neighbourhood symbolically as well as their overall expectation of others. (For similar findings in qualitative research see Blokland, 2009.)

If we recalculate this model (Table 6, model 2), this time including the second indicator of public familiarity, namely the frequency of meeting known people, we find that this dimension of public familiarity is not significantly related to the probability of people expecting others to help them. This may be linked to the argument above, that neighbourhoods contain close-knit peer groups that, indeed, run into one another on the street and very much use the public space to 'do community' — this affects their sense of belonging, but as they live their lives as a group in a transforming environment where the symbolic meanings of place are being contested, the threat they experience of 'losing ownership' or the fear of 'not having a say anymore' is reflected in less trust. This makes sense more generally too, because the fact that someone frequently meets known people in the neighbourhood might be important for their sense of belonging but does not necessarily have an impact on their expectations towards *unknown* people.

What, then, do these findings indicate? First of all, while we have to interpret our models with caution, our data point towards a positive relation between public familiarity and belonging as well as trust. While the relation between variables might be circular — which means that trusting unknown others might positively impact on the willingness to talk to unknown others, but in turn impacts again on the ability to trust unknown others — we find a positive relation between talking to unknown people and strong feelings of belonging as well as between meeting people known from someplace else and feelings of belonging. Similarly, we find a positive relation between talking to unknown people and the expectation that others will intervene on one's behalf; the frequency of meeting known people, by contrast, does not seem to be related to the probability of people expecting others to help them.

Conclusions

The models presented invite various conclusions. As stated above, in the discussion of social mix, scholars have argued that although various residents may live together in mixed areas, such mixture does not have much effect: diverse networks at the local scale have to develop — and many studies have shown that they do not. Like policymakers who hoped for social capital effects of mixture, they have pointed to the absence of productive, durable ties between various groups. In addition, they have been quite critical of the sense of belonging of the middle classes, pointing out their elective or selective nature, or the bubbles they create. However, what we argue here is that the absent ties of Granovetter's thesis (1973), or the casual encounters between people one may never see again, are important too for people's sense of belonging in their place of residence — an understanding of belonging that may also open up alternative ways of thinking about social capital and its spatial dimensions. Public familiarity, we argue — the recognizing and being recognized in local spaces, where one meets some people whom one knows and many whom one does not, but with whom one develops some level of acquaintance, however superficial and fluid — creates a comfort zone that allows people to feel they belong, even though they may have no local friends or family, never talk to their direct neighbours, and not even like the place where they live.

This article presents an attempt to explore this concept empirically. First, we analysed the idea that to understand the development of public familiarity, actual neighbourhood use is where we should start. Our data indeed indicate that frequency and type of use is positively associated with respondents' probability of talking to people they do not know and of meeting people known from someplace else — our indicators of public familiarity. We then asked how public familiarity relates to residents' experiences of comfort zone: people's feelings of belonging and their sense that others would be there for them were something to happen.

We saw, first, that public familiarity indeed seems to be positively related to whether people feel they belong. This supports our statement that our research on neighbourhoods and their meanings could benefit greatly from a careful consideration of the 'time in-between' and move away from a one-dimensional understanding of neighbourliness that assumes that having close friendships in the area, visiting neighbours, or having a chat on the street are all dimensions on one scale of neighbourhood attachment: we argue that they are not. Indeed, the everyday interaction through which we become known and learn to know, through which we experience difference and learn about it, creates a zone of its own. Secondly, we analysed whether public familiarity is positively associated with people's expectation that others would be there for them. This was indeed the case, thus supporting our thesis that public familiarity creates a zone of comfort in which we know what to expect. Yet, it was not the only relevant factor, and we argue that residents with strong local ties may well constitute a specific group within neighbourhoods — these are groups we may define as peer groups who display relatively strong neighbourhood use but are defensive towards sharing the local space with groups with similar lifestyles who, because of this similarity, compete with them over urban spaces. This argument goes beyond what we intended for this article and will be (and has been) explored elsewhere. For now, we conclude that, indeed, public familiarity plays a role in people's trust of fellow residents, even though we do not know them.

We acknowledge several limitations to the statistical analyses presented here. First, our data set is small and future research should try to obtain more detailed and nuanced measures of public familiarity as well as include more detailed measurements of residents' local social networks. Moreover, with such more advanced data sets it would be important and helpful to establish a clearer causal understanding of the relation of public familiarity, belonging and trust than we were able to develop with the data at hand. Secondly, what the 'time in-between' *means* and how people use daily routines and encounters to make sense of others cannot be understood only through quantitative analysis. For now, we think we have shown sufficiently that the study of neighbourhoods and what they mean will benefit from an explicit focus on absent ties and what happens in actual daily interactions in urban neighbourhoods, in order to further explore how people *then* develop interpretations of where they live that help them construct narratives of belonging. While such narratives can be fascinating, we think it is helpful to look more closely at practices: not the goal-oriented actions, but the smooth production of social space as we rub shoulders without building ties. We believe there is relevance in this, not only because belonging is interesting in itself. Instead, we think there is critical potential in the study of such practices. First, it matters in terms of boundary drawing and opportunity hoarding (Tilly, 1998), as it reveals racist, sexist and ethno-phobic practices. Facing diversity in everyday routines facilitates engaging with diversity in other contexts. We have not yet made much progress in understanding *exactly how* people form perceptions of otherness; looking at their everyday urban experiences may well further our understanding here. Secondly, it matters in terms of ideas on the value of mixture. Policymakers favour mixture because of the expected outcomes of providing socialization models and social capital to the disadvantaged. Researchers who find that mixture does not bring about the results they wish for in the sense of opening roads to resources may easily find themselves having to defend a romanticized version of deprived areas instead. Evidence suggesting that areas of multiple disadvantage do not provide individuals with favourable circumstances for getting ahead is strong (Wilson,

1987; Briggs, 2005; Sampson and Morenoff, 2006; Briggs, 2007; Curley, 2007; 2008; Wilson, 2009). It may well be that the question whether personal ties between residents of various backgrounds come into existence is less relevant for social capital. A crucial aspect of the definition of social capital by Putnam (1995) is that support occurs when one person learns *casually about* the needs of others. Social capital, such as information about opportunities for jobs, schools, housing and the like, may well be formed much more through casual conversations and the overhearing of conversations of others than simply through exchanges in strong or weak ties. Moreover, the precise ways in which neighbourhoods work as the context for socialization is hardly theorized, even though many neighbourhood-effects studies use socialization as an ad hoc explanation for the neighbourhood effects they find. Mixed neighbourhoods are then favoured as 'better' sites for socialization. As we have seen, a comfort zone in a diverse neighbourhood makes people encounter diversity in the routines of their lives in a way that segregated neighbourhoods do not. This dealing with diversity, for all groups of residents involved, may well provide a laboratory that affects their political and social attitudes towards diversity in other spheres of life. Studying everyday interactions and public familiarity (and possibilities of sharing resources as the *by-product* of such interactions) may well allow those who are critical of the overrated expectations of mixture still to find arguments why an ideal of mixture is to be preferred over a segregated dual city.

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