

# Researching Neighbourhood Effects on Youth: The Interplay between the Neighbourhood, Parenting and Personal Agency

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Version June 8, 2011

**Work in progress, please do not quote**

## Abstract

In the last decades increasingly attention is paid to the effects of growing up in a disadvantaged neighbourhood on social outcomes of youth. In most of these studies, however, the focus is on statistical relations between neighbourhood characteristics and social outcomes. Little attention is paid to processes such as the interplay between neighbourhood settings, parenting styles and strategies and personal agency of youth. In this paper I will argue that neighbourhood effect research on youth can be enriched in three ways. First, relating to the ideas of 'children's geographies', an argument is made for looking at the use and interpretation of neighbourhood settings by *youth themselves*. Second, parental styles and strategies as both mediating and moderating factors between neighbourhood characteristics and social outcomes should be included. And finally, youth should be seen as active agents in shaping their encounters with different neighbourhood settings and in forming social networks.

## Introduction

In the last couple of years a growing body of research has emerged on the effects of the neighbourhood on social outcomes of children and youth. Neighbourhoods are believed to be particularly relevant for young people, as most of them spend a considerable amount of their time in the neighbourhood: meeting with friends, participating in local activities, and often attending local schools. The neighbourhood is therefore also considered an important factor influencing social outcomes of young people. Most existing scientific studies on the topic of neighbourhood effects focus on the impact of growing up in a *deprived* neighbourhood: this is assumed to have a negative influence on several social outcomes such as education, social networks and job opportunities (see Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Duncan and Raudenbush, 1999; Rankin and Quane, 2002; Jencks and Mayer, 1990; Ainsworth, 2002; Galster and Santiago, 2006). On the other hand, there is a number of scholars that conclude that neighbourhood effects on young people are rather limited when controlling for individual and household characteristics (see Rankin and Quane, 2002; Elliot et al., 1996; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Jencks and Mayer, 1990; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Especially European studies have identified only minor effects of the neighbourhood on child and adolescent social outcomes (see Andersson, 2004; Kauppinen, 2007; Garner and Raudenbush, 1991). Moreover, young people living in the same neighbourhood can differ in their social outcomes (Furstenberg et al., 1999), which means that the effect of the neighbourhood on youth' social outcomes is not as straightforward as often assumed. In this paper, I will argue for more emphasis on *how* neighbourhoods play a role in the lives of young people and how parenting and the personal agency of youth can influence the impact of the neighbourhood on their social outcomes.

The neighbourhood is just one of the social contexts that influence child and adolescents outcomes; there are other social contexts which are equally – if not more – important. In the last decades, researchers have increasingly attempted to incorporate the different social contexts that influence the development of young people, such as families, schools, peer groups and, again, neighbourhoods, in their research (see for example, Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Especially the family context is considered of crucial importance for the development of children and adolescents. In existing neighbourhood effect research on youth, however, there are relatively few studies that take the iterative relations between youth, the neighbourhood, and parents into account. Young people are generally seen as passive ‘victims’ of the neighbourhood context and of parenting, whereas, in fact, they can be active agents in choosing and shaping the neighbourhood settings in which they participate. Moreover, youth can negotiate the impact their parents have on the places they can visit and the times they can visit these places, or, in other words, the impact parents have on their temporal-spatial behaviour. This is of crucial importance as the interaction between youth, other people and (neighbourhood) structures is embedded in these daily ‘time-space settings’ (Giddens, 1984).

In this paper, the international literature on the interplay between youth, their parents and the neighbourhood will be reviewed. The first aim is to provide insight into the role parents play in mediating and moderating neighbourhood effects. The argument will be put forward that parenting styles are influenced by the neighbourhood context and that the temporal-spatial activities of youth - and hence the effect of the neighbourhood - is partly dependent on ‘authority constraints’ as well as opportunities in the form of parental strategies. In the second part of this paper, insight will be provided in the agency of young people themselves, how they use their neighbourhood, form social networks, and construct neighbourhood settings as ‘meaningful’ places. I will pay attention to how the ‘sense of place’ of young people plays a role in shaping their behaviour and how this ‘sense of place’ might differ from those of their parents. Finally, some implications of these insights for neighbourhood effect research on youth will be discussed, and it will be argued that we should not only research the *extent* in which the neighbourhood influences (young) people, but that we also should pay attention to the complex processes through which neighbourhood effects work and to how (young) people influence, choose and interact with their neighbourhood and the people in it. To my opinion this is a necessary condition for finding out how exactly neighbourhood effects work; without these additions, research into neighbourhood effects remains only superficial.

## **Explanations for neighbourhood effects**

The mechanisms through which neighbourhoods affect the social outcomes of individuals have been reviewed extensively by many authors (see Ingoldsby and Shaw 2002; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson et al. 2002; Small and Newman 2001, Galster 2010). In this section I will summarize the most important hypothesized mechanisms behind neighbourhood effects and elaborate on how these mechanisms might work for young people.

A first mechanism that is mentioned in the research literature about the way in which living in a deprived neighbourhood might negatively influence social outcomes is through *social networks* (Wilson, 1987, 1996). It is hypothesized that individuals in more affluent neighbourhoods are more likely to have access to beneficial social networks that can provide access to social capital, information, and educational and occupational opportunities, than people living in deprived neighbourhoods (Wacquant and Wilson, 1989; Sampson and Groves, 1989). Traditionally, the quantity and quality of youth’ social contacts are seen as the result of the social networks of adults, and most notably their parents (Ambert, 1986). Hence much research into youth focuses on contexts where they interact with adults, such as within the family and at school. Little attention is paid to the choice and agency of young people in forming their own social networks.

The limited social networks of individuals in deprived neighbourhoods are not only assumed to result in less access to resources, information and opportunities, but can also lead to the reproduction of certain *norms and values*. It is argued that (young) people develop norms and values about what is appropriate behaviour through interaction with others. Neighbourhood characteristics can influence the type of role models youth are exposed to (Wilson, 1996). Young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods characterized by numerous social problems such as unemployment, high levels of school drop-out and crime might adopt similar deviant behaviour because they have come to view such behaviours as normal through their interaction with neighbours. Since youth in deprived neighbourhoods are less likely to come into contact with adults that finished higher education and have steady jobs, they do not develop behaviours and attitudes that are contributing to success in both school and work. This socialization can occur within young peoples personal social networks, but can also take place in the public domain.

A third explanation focuses on *neighbourhood disorder and the lack of informal social control* in public space (Ainsworth, 2002). Neighbourhood levels of social control — or the monitoring and sanctioning of deviant behaviour — is assumed to influence the social outcomes of neighbourhood youth. It is hypothesized that in neighbourhoods with limited adult supervision, the social influences of peers may become stronger than parental influences. In other words, youth that is monitored less is likely to be to a larger extent subject to (negative) peer influences and hence may be more likely to develop deviant norms, values and behaviours. High levels of neighbourhood disorder and lower levels of informal social control are especially common in deprived neighbourhoods.

A fourth way in which living in a deprived neighbourhood can influence social outcomes of youth is related to the *institutional resources* in the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood institutions can form a resource for residents in terms of support, education and training and can facilitate the formation of social networks. The quality of these institutions can vary with neighbourhood context. In the case of adolescents, the quality of schools is particularly important. Existing research shows that neighbourhoods may affect school quality through the inability of schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to recruit and retain good teachers (Jencks and Mayer, 1990). Similarly, Wacquant (1996) argues that students from deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to attend lower quality schools. In support of this, Sykes and Musterd (2010) show that in the Dutch context, neighbourhood effects on educational outcomes are for a large share mediated through the school context, which means that schools can be seen as a pathway through which the influence of the neighbourhood may be transmitted. Besides researching the role of schools, many studies also pay attention to other institutional resources and public services in the neighbourhood, such as community centres, welfare organizations and youth centres. In the American context, the focus generally is on the absence of (good quality) institutional resources in disadvantaged neighbourhoods due to low investments in these institutions. By contrast, in countries with a more extensive welfare system there is generally an abundance of institutional resources in deprived neighbourhoods. One can question, however, whether the presence of many neighbourhood institutions is exclusively beneficial, as they can also keep residents within the neighbourhood and their own social networks, which again can reinforce the negative socialization effects (Pinkster, 2009).

Finally, neighbourhood effects can work through negative stereotyping of deprived neighbourhoods and of the people living there (Bauder, 2001, 2002). Institutions as well as employers may associate living in a certain neighbourhood with social and cultural pathology, and consider people from these neighbourhoods as unfit for educational and labour market achievement (Bauder, 2001). These ideas may impact on the hiring decisions of employers (Holzer, 1996; Moss and Tilly, 1996), may guide institutional practices and discourage (young) people from doing well at school or at work (Bauder, 2001).

## **The role of parents**

The neighbourhood, however, does not simply ‘imprint’ itself on youth, but can be moderated or mediated by the family context. One shortcoming of the extant literature on neighbourhood effects is that limited attention is paid to the diversity and complexity of family life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the mutual interaction between the neighbourhood, parents and youth. On the one hand, the neighbourhood can have an impact on parenting styles; on the other hand, parents can play a moderating role by actively adopting certain parenting strategies as a reaction to (perceived) neighbourhood threats.

### *The mediating role of parents: the influence of the neighbourhood on parenting styles*

Parents, like their children, are embedded in different neighbourhood settings. These neighbourhood settings are believed to affect parenting behaviours, which in turn influence child outcomes (Collins et al., 2000; Stern and Smith, 1995). More specifically, studies have found that parenting behaviours, such as parental coping skills, aspirations and sense of efficacy, are influenced by structural neighbourhood conditions, such as poverty as well as by (locally-based) social networks (Beyers, et.al., 2003; Chung and Steinberg, 2006; Klebanov et al. 1994; Griffin et al. 1999; Rankin and Quane 2002; Elder et al., 1995; MacLeod, 1995).

There are a number of mechanisms through which the neighbourhood context is assumed to influence parenting styles. First of all, the low levels of social organization in distressed neighbourhood might have an important impact on the way parents raise their children. Parenting styles are generally characterized along two dimensions – warmth and harshness (Baumrind, 1972; Conger et al., 1994). Parental warmth involves the support children receive from their parents and their levels of emotional responsiveness. Parental harshness entails unresponsive behaviour towards their children, such as scolding, derogating, or criticizing them (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2005). Typically, studies show that neighbourhood conditions do not have much impact on parental warmth, but that living in a deprived neighbourhood leads to more harsh parenting styles (Furstenberg, 1993). This is assumed to be related to the stressful circumstances under which parents have to raise their children in deprived neighbourhoods that generally have low levels of institutional resources, low levels of social organization and high levels of crime and violence (Earls et al., 1994; Klebanov et al., 1994, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2005). Moreover, living in a deprived neighbourhood may affect parent’s physical and mental health. This, in turn, is assumed to lead to more negative parenting practices (Sampson et al., 1997; Simons et al., 2002).

Moreover, parenting styles might be influenced by the norms and values that are common in the (neighbourhood) settings in which parents participate. Parents in deprived neighbourhoods, characterized by numerous social problems, might transmit certain deviant norms and values and behaviour to their children because they have come to view such behaviours as normal through their interaction with neighbours.

Finally, the effect of living in a deprived neighbourhood on parenting practices can be mediated by the social networks of parents. When parents in poor neighbourhood have less access to resource-rich social networks they will lack a source of social support and social leverage. This may exacerbate parental stress of living in a distressed neighbourhood and lead to more negative parenting (Simons et al., 2002). Institutional resources in the neighbourhood can have a similar function. Poor neighbourhoods are likely to have fewer institutional resources for families to draw upon for their children than more affluent neighbourhoods. This is assumed to lead to parents having fewer opportunities to provide developmentally enriching experiences for their children, which in turn can lead to more stress among parents and more harsh parenting practices (Jencks and Mayer, 1990; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn, 2000, 2005). On the other hand, strong social networks and neighbourhood-based institutional resources, might, again, also function to keep people in their familiar, disadvantaged environments and hence might lead to the reproduction to certain (deviant) behaviours and ideas on parenting.

Taken together, these theoretical models reveal that neighbourhood poverty is likely to affect parenting styles, which, in turn may affect the home environment in which children are raised and consequently their social outcomes (Steinberg, 2001).

*The moderating role of parents: promotive and protective strategies*

In addition to the possibility that parenting *mediates* the effect of neighbourhoods on youth - that is that neighbourhoods affect children by influencing parenting styles - parents can have an important role *moderating* the impact of the neighbourhood on youth social outcomes. Parents might adopt certain parenting strategies as reaction to (perceived) neighbourhood threats and opportunities (Jarrett, 1997; Furstenberg, 1993; Furstenberg et al. 1999). A study by Galster and Santiago (2006) shows that a majority of parents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods feels that the neighbourhood has a negative influence on the social outcomes of their children, and that a large share of this group tries to protect their children from these negative influences.

First of all, moving to another neighbourhood can be seen as a rational parental strategy to protect children from negative neighbourhood influences and to achieve the best possible social outcomes for them. Given the available resources, parents are likely to choose a neighbourhood which they perceive as safe and having a positive influence on their children. Parents, however, are not always in a position to live where they desire and may adopt other strategies to shield their children from (perceived) threats in the neighbourhood and connect them to sources of human and social capital. In the extant literature on parenting and the neighbourhood generally the distinction is made between protective and promotive parenting strategies (Furstenberg, 1993; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Jarrett, 2003). Promotive strategies are aimed at promoting educational, cultural and social skills of children. This can be done through in-home learning activities, resource brokering or placing children in settings where they come into contact with positive role models. Protective strategies, on the other hand, include monitoring, cautionary warnings, danger management, chaperonage, and keeping children at home to protect them from physical dangers, negative role models and peers (Ibid.).

Empirical research shows that living in a more deprived neighbourhood generally results in parents adopting more protective parenting strategies as they try to shield their children from negative neighbourhood influences (Furstenberg 1993; Furstenberg et al., 1999; O'Neil et al. 2001; Earls et al., 1994). Ethnographic research of Jarrett (1997), for example, shows that parents in more deprived neighbourhoods tend to adopt 'bounding' strategies that restrict youth to the home and limit their access to neighbourhood influences, such as peers. These protective strategies turned out to be especially strong in neighbourhoods where there were limited institutional resources, such as community centres. Furstenberg (1993) shows that parents in deprived Philadelphia neighbourhoods also adopt promotive strategies such as encouraging and working with their children to develop their personal talents and skills, enrolling them in after-school programs and involving them in other organized activities both inside and outside of the neighbourhood.

Similar conclusions were found in two Dutch studies. A study on the changes in children's use of space over the last decades (Karsten, 2005) shows that parents increasingly have restricted the opportunities for their children to play on the street, because the streets are seen as unsafe. At the same time, the acquisition of cultural capital through formal leisure activities has become a promotive strategy which is increasingly being adopted by (middle-class) parents (Karsten, 2005; Pinkster, 2009). Furthermore, research of Emmelkamp (2004) shows how parents use protective strategies to create a 'safe adventure' in public space for their children. It turns out that, even in relatively problem-free neighbourhoods, parents try to protect their children from perceived threats in public space by setting spatial boundaries for them and by regulating who they interact with. .

It has to be noted, however, that the ways in which promotive and protective strategies are adopted by parents can be rather complex. It is, for example, possible that parents adopt a protective strategy by moving to a better neighbourhood, but that within this new neighbourhood they are monitoring the child less, and thus are less protective. The other way around, parents can decide to stay in the deprived neighbourhood but try to compensate for the negative influences of the neighbourhood by keeping their children in their home, or send them to a school outside the neighbourhood.

Finally, while parental styles and strategies have an important impact on the activities, social contacts and hence the well-being of youth, it has to be noted that the regulation of parents is gender, age and context specific (Valentine, 1997). Moreover, when children are getting older, they will increasingly negotiate with their parents about their temporal-spatial behaviour (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001; Matthews et al., 1999; Sibley, 1995; Valentine, 1996a; 1996b; 1997; Emmelkamp, 2004).

To summarize, the review of the literature on parenting in disadvantaged neighbourhoods shows that the parenting styles and strategies cannot be seen as independent from the neighbourhood context. On the one hand, parenting styles can be influenced by neighbourhood characteristics, in particular the degree of social organization in the neighbourhood. Indirectly, a neighbourhood might therefore negatively influence youth outcomes through parenting behaviours. On the other hand, parents can buffer or moderate neighbourhood effects by adopting protective and promotive strategies.

### **The use of space by youth, personal agency and the importance of meaning**

Most extant – mostly quantitative - studies on neighbourhood effects on youth view them as ‘victims’ of the resource-poor social networks and negative socialization in distressed neighbourhoods and do not pay attention to the fact that youth can be active agents in shaping their environment and forming social networks. Moreover, little attention is paid to how youth can negotiate the rules and strategies adopted by their parents.

To date, the limited number of studies that have discussed ‘agency’ have focused on the notions of ‘adaptation’ and ‘resistance’ to explain the variety of actions of individuals living in deprived neighbourhoods. The studies on adaption primarily focus on the ways in which residents adjust to the social and spatial constraints of poor neighbourhoods. On the other hand resistance research has focused on the creative and oppositional ways in which residents deal with living in poverty (Gotham and Brumley, 2002). However, there has been quite some criticism on these models: neither of the models provides sufficient insight into the complexity of the agency of people living in deprived neighbourhoods. One criticism on the adaption model is that it does not sufficiently pay attention to the reflective nature of human action, and instead focuses too much on routines (Gotham, 2003; Wacquant, 1997; Wright, 1997). Moreover, what is lacking in studies on adaptation as well as on resistance is the meaning residents attach to places, such as their home and their neighbourhood, and how that meaning influences their temporal-spatial behaviour. Finally, these accounts of adaption and resistance only focus on adults, little is known about the agency of youth, while this is crucial in understanding the connections between neighbourhood-level processes and individual outcomes.

Therefore, a new perspective on neighbourhood effect research should be adopted, which allows more room for the ways in which youth react on neighbourhood settings in a reflexive way; and which pays more attention to the possibilities for young people to be active agents in constructing their environments and negotiating the impact of the neighbourhood and their parents. The development of youth should be seen as the result of an iterative and continuing process between youth and the settings in which they participate, such as the neighbourhood and the family. This means that we be careful with using the term ‘neighbourhood effect’, as this implies a one-way relationship from neighbourhood to youth social outcomes.

### *Social networks, foci of activity and the importance of choice*

Many authors argue that one of the most important mechanisms through which neighbourhood effects work is the social networks of people. Social networks are assumed to form a source of information and social capital, but can also transfer deviant norms and values. In extant neighbourhood effect research, little attention is paid, however, to how and where social networks are constructed. According to Feld (1981) social relations are formed in so called ‘foci of activity’. When people organize their activities around the same focus, this is assumed to increase the likelihood that they will interact with each other and form relationships. The neighbourhood can be seen as a combination of different settings which serve as foci of activity, such as the micro-neighbourhood, a community centre, the school, the basketball or soccer court or the park (see also Fischer et al., 1977, Feld, 1981, Van Eijk, 2010). In order to provide insight in the effect of the neighbourhood on individuals – and in the case of this paper, on youth – it is crucial to have knowledge about the extent and how social networks are formed in these neighbourhood settings. Therefore, drawing on the ideas of time-geography (Hägerstrand, 1970), I argue that it is important to map the activity patterns of youth, since the interactions between youth and other individuals in the neighbourhood are embedded in daily ‘time-space settings’ (see also Cloke et al., 1991; Droogleever Fortuijn, 1993; Giddens, 1984; Hägerstrand, 1970; Karsten, 1992, Emmelkamp, 2004). Time-geographical thinking makes it clear that the extent to which youth (and their parents) are limited in their temporal-spatial activities – and hence in the formation of their social networks - differs between individuals, groups and the contexts in which they reside.

However, to attribute the differences in the development of youth solely to their differences in temporal-spatial behaviour seems insufficient. In time-geographical thinking too much emphasis is placed on constraints (Giddens, 1984; Emmelkamp, 2004). Drawing on the choice-constraint model of Fischer and colleagues (1977) it can be argued the social contacts of youth are indeed influenced by the social contexts in which they reside and the activities they undertake, but that youth and their families also make choices, independent from the constraints they are facing (Furstenberg et al., 1999). Young people choose in which activities to participate and which friendships to form. Such choices impact on their access to social capital, information and incentives which can influence their life pathways, and which in turn offer new opportunities and constraints.

In a study of Visser et al. (forthcoming) it is researched how youth form new social contacts and change their leisure activities after a residential move. One of the main conclusions of this study is that the extent to which youth is able to make new friends and participate in new leisure activities is partly related to the availability of these leisure activities and the knowledge about them, but that also the personal agency and choice of young people are crucial factors. This is illustrated by the fact that some of the youth actively visit neighbourhood settings in the new neighbourhood and try to form new social contacts there, whereas others maintain their contacts with people in the old neighbourhood. Based on these findings, I argue for a less mechanistic view on the socialization mechanisms through which neighbourhood effects are assumed to work, since the choice of youth about in which neighbourhood settings to participate and which social contacts to form there plays an important role.

The fact that young people can make choices in which neighbourhood settings to participate also allows them to challenge the authority of adults in the public domain, for example, by hanging around on the street. Whereas the street is seen as public space, it is one of the places where young people can be without direct supervision of parents (Hazeekamp, 1985; Lieberg, 1997; Valentine, 1996b; Emmelkamp, 2004). Moreover, young people can actively privatize public space; they are looking for places where they can make their own rules, independent of adults. The getting together of young people on the street can thus be seen as a – conscious or unconscious – contestation of ‘adult space’ (Emmelkamp, 2004). These processes of negotiation are usually not visible in the models that explain the relationship between the neighbourhood, parents and youth social outcomes.

### *The importance of meaning*

We cannot explain why individuals act as they do in particular situations without understanding how meanings and interpretations of space play a role in shaping these actions. The neighbourhood does not only have a practical function for its residents, but has a symbolic meaning as well (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Blokland, 2003; Van Eijk, 2010). The meaning people attach to certain spaces – or how they consume spaces as symbols of security, safety and a host of other meanings (Gotham, 2003) – is related to (1) the temporal-spatial activities of people and (2) the social contacts people choose to form. Or, in the case of parents, how they regulate the activities and social contacts of their children. Van Eijk (2010) states that the neighbourhood can be seen as a ‘meaningful place’. The perception of certain neighbourhoods as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or certain places as ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’, can guide the actions of people, and can offer a frame of reference for categorization and identification and hence the formation of social contacts (Ibid.). Gotham and Brumley (2002), for example, discuss how residents use symbols, such as “hot spaces” and “hot streets,” to demarcate areas they perceive as unsafe. In these ways, the image of a place and of its residents – which can be either positive or negative – can have an impact on the choice to participate in these places and whether or not to interact with individuals residing there (Van Eijk, 2010). This, in turn, can influence the ways in which the neighbourhood has an impact on social outcomes.

The meaning and interpretations of place, however, can differ between people – for example, between youth and their parents. This is partly related to the knowledge of a specific place (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Lynch, 1960). The behaviour of people within space can be seen as bounded rational, which means that individuals tend to behave rational based on the (incomplete) knowledge they have of a place. Knowledge of certain places can be transferred through actually visiting these places but also through media or stories of others, which results in mental maps being formed by both the youth and their parents (Ibid.). In this context, a growing number of scholars argue for a separate agenda for so-called ‘Children’s Geographies’ (see Matthews and Limb, 1999) in which the focus is on the relationship of children with the different environments in which they reside and their interpretation of these environments. Matthews and Limb (1999) note, for example, that a park or a square can have a different meaning for a young person than for adults: for adults it may be a place to pass through, while for a young person such a place is a space for meeting and contact. Similarly, Emmelkamp (2004) states that certain places – such as places to go out – can be perceived by parents as unsafe, whereas youth experience them as adventurous or even safe places. These meanings can also differ between categories of youth, for example between boys and girls and between different age groups (Karsten, 2003). The mental maps of different places influence the daily practices of youth as well as the strategies parents adopt.

Furthermore, the mental maps of youth can also differ from those of institutional actors. Koster and Mulderij (2011) have done research in a Dutch neighbourhood which is generally seen as one of the worst neighbourhoods in the country. They studied how youth used, perceived and interpreted their neighbourhood. Whereas the neighbourhood was generally seen as disadvantaged by institutional actors and outsiders, the general feeling among the youth was that the neighbourhood was ‘cosy’ and that they were used to living there. This study shows how young people in disadvantaged neighbourhood construct a meaningful attachment to place and challenge the negative perceptions and stereotypes associated with this neighbourhood.

### **Conclusion: implications for neighbourhood effect research**

In this article an overview has been given of the scientific literature on the interplay between youth, parents and the neighbourhood, and important shortcomings of existing neighbourhood effect studies have been highlighted. The question that remains is how neighbourhood effect research can be enhanced so that it sufficiently takes into account the complex processes between these different agents and structures.



A first way in which this can be done is by keeping the different senses of places of youth and their parents in mind. It can be the case that certain places are seen by parents as unsafe whereas this is not experienced as such by youth. I would, therefore, like to make an argument for adopting a more constructivist perspective, which allows room for the idea that places can have multiple identities. More concrete, this means that when we really want to learn about the neighbourhood effects on youth, we have to step away from the hegemonic discourse of 'adult space' and instead look at the use of space by youth and the meaning they attach to this space. To this end, research on neighbourhood effects should acknowledge the idea of 'Children's Geographies', and take into consideration the complexity and diversity of the lives of young people and focus on how children and adolescents *'experience, understand, and, perhaps, resist or reshape, the complex, frequently contradictory cultural politics that inform their daily lives'* (Stephens, 1995, pp. 3, in: Matthews and Limb, 1999)

Second, in neighbourhood effect research more attention should be paid to the mediating and moderating role of parents. The family context is considered of crucial importance for the development of children and adolescents, however, ideas about what constitutes a good way of parenting as well as parenting styles and strategies cannot be seen independently from the neighbourhood context. Therefore, in neighbourhood effect research more attention should be paid to the ways in which parenting styles and strategies are related to the neighbourhood context. Moreover, I would like to make an argument for adopting a more nuanced view on what entails 'good' and 'bad' parenting. The kind of parenting styles and strategies that are best for the social outcomes of children, are to a large extent dependent on the context in which the child is raised. What works in an affluent neighbourhood, might not work in a more disadvantaged area. Therefore, we should adopt a more contextual and developmental perspective on what constitutes good parenting (Furstenberg et al., 1999). Moreover, attention should be paid to the ways in which youth can negotiate parental regulations. In the extant neighbourhood effect research on youth, however, there are relatively few studies that take the iterative and ongoing processes between youth, the neighbourhood, and parental characteristics and strategies into account.

Moreover, neighbourhood effect research should adopt a less mechanistic view on the formation of social networks of youth and their participation in neighbourhood settings, and allow more room for their personal choice. Youth should not be seen as passive victims of neighbourhood socialization processes and parental strategies, but instead it is important to pay attention to how young people actively choose to participate in neighbourhood settings and form social networks. Traditionally, neighbourhood effects research links neighbourhood-level variables with individual outcomes in a rather mechanistic way; for example, the proportion of residents with a low social-economic status is assumed to have a negative effect on educational outcomes. I would, however, argue that youth' own choice and actions can influence the ways in which the neighbourhood has an impact on their social outcomes (see also Clampet-Lundquist, 2007). Holloway and Valentine (2000) argue that we can speak of 'many childhoods'. Modernization and individualization have led to a greater diversity in youth' lifestyles and more choice in which activities to participate in, which consequently has resulted in a higher variance in the temporal-spatial behaviour of young people (Beek, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Du Bois-Reymond et al., 1998). This will influence the social networks that are formed and consequently how the neighbourhood can have a potential impact on social outcomes.

In this context, it is of crucial importance to not look at the neighbourhood at large, but at the participation in different settings within and outside the neighbourhood (Van Eijk, 2010). In other words, I want to make an argument for a more activity-based approach. What we need to know is what activities youth undertake, who they meet there, to what extent their activities are locally-based and to what extent they can derive social capital from this. By actually measuring where young people spend their time and what other persons are present in these settings, we can achieve a more complete idea of their opportunities for social contacts – and hence of the impact of the neighbourhood - than by only calculating the statistical effect of a neighbourhoods' socio-economic composition on social outcomes (Van Kempen, 2010)

Taking the above mentioned points into consideration in future research will significantly enhance our insights in how youth use and interpret the neighbourhood settings they reside in, and will allow a better understanding of how neighbourhood effects function for young people.

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