



Governing Urban Diversity:

Creating Social Cohesion, Social Mobility and Economic Performance in Today's Hyper-diversified Cities

Report 2b

Fieldwork inhabitants, Antwerp (Belgium)

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1. Introduction

There is a growing conventional wisdom in writings on European cities that presents them as centres of ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007). This refers specifically to their increasing ethnic diversity and to the demographic diversity between and within such ethnic groups. However, cities are becoming increasingly diverse, not only in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities. To indicate this enormous diversity, we proposed to use the term hyper-diversity (Tasan-Kok, van Kempen, Raco, & Bolt, 2013).

Within cities, groups can live segregated or rather mixed. Urban neighbourhoods may be fairly homogeneous residential areas in terms of housing and population, but they may also be heavily mixed with respect to types of housing (tenure, type, price) and population categories (income, ethnicity, household composition, age). In addition, individuals who belong to the same ‘official’ demographic category may possess quite different lifestyles and attitudes and involve themselves in a wide range of activities. Some, for example, have a very neighbourhood-oriented life, with all their friends and activities in a very small area, while others have their social activities stretched over the whole city or even beyond. Residents of mixed urban neighbourhoods can happily live together, live parallel lives, or be in open conflict with each other (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013).

This report is written as part of the EU-FP7 DIVERCITIES project. In this project we aim to find out how urban hyper-diversity affects social cohesion and social mobility of residents of deprived and dynamic urban areas and the economic performance of entrepreneurs with their enterprise in such areas. In this report we focus on the findings from our interviews with residents in which we explored their experiences of living with hyper-diversity and how it affects their lives.

This general aim can be broken down into more detailed and concrete research questions. They are central in the chapters of this report:

1. Why did people move to the diverse area they live in now? To what extent has the diversity of the area been a pull-factor? Or were other aspects (such as the availability of inexpensive dwellings) a much stronger motive to settle in the present area? (Chapter 3)
2. How do residents think about the area they live in? Do residents see their neighbourhood’s diversity as an asset or a liability? (Chapter 4)
3. How do residents make use of the diversified areas they live in? Do they actively engage in diversified relations and activities in their neighbourhood? To what extent is the area they live in more important than other areas in terms of activities? (Chapter 5)
4. To what extent is the diversity of the residential area important for social cohesion? Which elements foster social cohesion, which elements hinder the development of social cohesion in the area? (Chapter 6)
5. To what extent is the diversity of the neighbourhood important for social mobility? Which elements foster social mobility and which elements hinder social mobility? (Chapter 7)
6. How are diversity-related policies perceived by the inhabitants of the area? (Chapter 8)

The research in this report focuses on the city of Antwerp. This city currently has 516.009 inhabitants and is the second biggest Belgian city. It is a highly diverse city in terms of population, amongst others because of its economic importance. Antwerp is a thriving economic centre and has the second largest seaport in Europe after Rotterdam. In addition, Antwerp is home to one of the largest diamond trade centres in the world. The Antwerp diamond trade was dominated by the Jewish community, although nowadays the majority of people working in the diamond trade are Indian dealers. Antwerp is home to one of the largest communities of

orthodox Jews in the world outside Israel. Due to recent (and less recent) migration flows, Antwerp's districts have become increasingly diversified. Nowadays, 36% of the people living in Antwerp are of foreign origin (based on their first nationality). The people living in Antwerp come from all over the world. Most foreigners are originally from North-Africa (9%), but there are also a lot of people from East and West-Europe (7% and 6%) and West-Asia (5%) living in the diverse city of Antwerp.

Within Antwerp the research takes place in the areas Antwerp Noord, Deurne Noord and Borgerhout Intramuros. All together this area has 95.642 inhabitants and can be considered as one of the most diversified areas in the city. Although all these areas are highly diverse in terms of population there are some differences. Antwerp Noord is the most ethnically diverse area. More than 60% of the people living here are from foreign origin. The diversity of the population is also reflected in the diversity of shops. Walking through this area you will find Portuguese cafes, African hairdressers, Moroccan Butchers and there is even a little China Town located in Antwerp Noord. Borgerhout Intramuros is located south of Antwerp Noord, and also on the city centre side of the urban ringway. Borgerhout is also known as Borgerocco, referring to the high amount of Moroccan people living in this area. Based on the first nationality almost 30% of the people living here are from North-African origin and almost 55% is of foreign origin, which is a bit lower than in Antwerp Noord (61%). Although this amount is decreasing (in 2007 32% of the people were from North-African origin), people still associate this area with the presence of Moroccans. The third and last neighbourhood of the case study area is Deurne Noord. This neighbourhood has become more ethnically diverse in the last ten years. In 2005 71% of the people living here were from Belgian origin. Nowadays, only 55% of the inhabitants are from Belgian origin. Deurne Noord is located at the other side of the urban ringway and was an independent suburban municipality until 1983. Nowadays it can be seen as an urbanized suburb.



Figure 1: The map shows case study area, Antwerp Noord is located north-west, Borgerhout Intramuros is located to the south of Antwerp Noord. Deurne Noord is located at the east side of the urban ringway. (www.antwerpen.be/stadsplan)

We conducted 51 interviews with residents of Antwerp Noord, Deurne Noord and Borgerhout. These interviews were held between September 2014 and May 2015. In the next chapter we first give some more information on the methodology that was adopted. This is then followed by six chapters in which we answer the research questions above. In the conclusions we summarise the

main results and address our main questions. We will also give some broader guidance for policy-making.

2. The interviewees

2.1 Selection procedure: how did we select our interviewees?

We aimed to interview 15 people in Antwerp Noord, 15 in Borgerhout and 20 in Deurne Noord. In the latter area, we decided to conduct 20 instead of 15 interviews because of the more recent inflow of people of foreign origin in this area. Earlier research indeed showed that perceptions of diversity change over time and that the negative impact of diversity on social cohesion decreases when time proceeds (Downey & Smith, 2011; Thijssen & Dierckx, 2011). Deurne Noord is an electoral stronghold of the extreme right, reflecting the conflictual nature of increased ethnic-cultural diversity, which allows us to contrast this area with the other two areas, which have a longer history of ethnic and cultural diversity. Besides this, Deurne Noord is an urbanised suburb. Its post-war growth as a suburb was stimulated by ‘white flight’¹ (Loots & Van Hove, 1986) and the negative image of the city. Its more suburban character compared to Antwerp Noord and Borgerhout will allow us to contrast perceptions of diversity in areas with a different gradient of urbanisation.

To gain access to residents in these areas, we started with contacting people we already met in an earlier stage of this research project. More specifically, we asked Opsinjoren, Neighbourhood Treasures (Buurtschatten), Language*eaR (Taal*ooR) and City Talk (Stadklap)² whether they knew people that we could interview (Saeys, Albeda, Oosterlynck, Verschraegen, & Dierck, 2014). Most projects helped us to find around two interviewees each. We also went to two community centres, one located in Antwerp Noord and related to Neighbourhood Treasures and one located in Deurne Noord, related to Language*eaR. These community centres work across neighbourhood borders. In Deurne Noord, for example, we found people living in Borgerhout and through the community centre in Antwerp Noord, we met a person living in Deurne Noord.

After conducting several interviews, we observed that we did not speak many people of foreign origin. Using the snowball method, we therefore asked interviewees specifically if they knew people of foreign origin. We also went to language schools to get in touch with people who arrived more recently in Antwerp. Because it was difficult to find interviewees in Deurne Noord we asked a poverty organisation to help us contact residents. We also asked a place which offers ‘assistance housing’ for elderly people.

When we finished half of the interviews we critically reviewed the profile of the people we spoke to. We observed a lack of male interviewees and families with children. The latter was very problematic, because a lot of interviewees indicated that more and more young families came to live in the case study area. To find young families we firstly contacted people through our own network and used the snowball method to come in contact with more people. Again, it was easier to reach families of Belgian origin and therefore we asked them specifically if they knew families of non-Belgian origin. Because we did not manage to talk to families living in Deurne Noord

¹ The term ‘white flight’ refers to the process of the white middle classes moving out of the inner city that is increasingly becoming racially diverse.

² The project Opsinjoren offers financial and organizational support to residents who want to organize street festivities. The project Neighbourhood Treasures offers funding for neighbourhood activities. Both Language*eaR and City Talk help newcomers to improve their Dutch language skills.

through this method, we asked schools, youth organisations and the public service ‘House of the child’ if they could help us to get in touch with families living in Deurne Noord. Unfortunately most schools mentioned that they had problems themselves to reach parents of foreign origin. They tried to get them involved, but had little success because of cultural and linguistic barriers. Therefore, they also could not help us to find parents who could participate. Other organisations like the ‘house of the child’ did not want to help to find families, because this research does not directly help their organisation.

2.2 Which groups did we miss?

Although we tried to include more male respondents after we finished half of the interviews this remained difficult. We interviewed 38 female resident and only 16 male residents. We asked families with children if it was possible to interview the men, but we mostly had to interview the women because they had more time. Another group that was hard to reach were the people of foreign origin; we spoke 24 people of foreign origin. This group was easiest to reach in Antwerp Noord and hardest in Deurne Noord, this is not surprising because the percentage of people of foreign origin is highest in Antwerp Noord and lowest in Deurne Noord. In this last neighbourhood we expected to find more people who were very negative about immigrants, because it is an electoral stronghold of the extreme right party. However, we only spoke three residents who were very negative about people of foreign origin. They explained that their friends who had the same opinion moved out of the city.

2.3 Some general characteristics of the interviewees

We did 51 interviews in total, whereof three interviews with a couple. So, we interviewed 54 residents in total. The general characteristics of them are as follows:

- 38 interviewees were female and 16 male;
- 21 interviewees live in Deurne Noord, 16 in Antwerp Noord and 17 in Borgerhout;
- 24 people were of foreign origin and 30 of Belgian origin. The interviewees of foreign origin came from Europe (7), Asia (1), South-America (2), Africa (11) and the Middle-East (3).
- There is a mix of couples without children (12), families with children (17), people living alone (15), people who live only a part of the week with their child(ren) (3) or living alone with a child (1). The other 3 interviewees lived with family members.
- Half of the interviewees belong to the age group 31-45, 10 interviewees belong to the group 46-60 and 8 to the age group 61-75. We only spoke 2 residents older than 75 years and 5 younger than 31 years.
- The income per adult in a household of 21 interviewees is low/medium-low and 22 interviewees had a high/medium-high income. The income of 6 interviewees is unknown and 2 interviewees classified their income as medium.³
- Parts of the research areas are gentrified. We identify gentrifiers as newcomers who moved to a deprived neighbourhood maximum 10 years ago and are highly educated. In total we spoke 14 gentrifiers, based on this definition.

³ The income groups are based on the net income each month. Low income < €980; Medium-low income €981 – €1400; Medium-high income €1401- €1950; high income > €1950. When interviewees did not want to tell their income we asked them to classify themselves.

3. Housing choice and residential mobility

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we elaborate on the housing choice of inhabitants living in a diverse area of Antwerp, more specifically the neighbourhoods Antwerp Noord, Borgerhout and Deurne Noord. We address the question whether and to which extent diversity plays a role in the decision of people to move to a diverse neighbourhood and which other aspects are important. We focus mainly on ethno-cultural diversity, because interviewees themselves focus on this aspect when talking about diversity although the questions in the interview were about diversity in general.

We first argue that diversity is not a major motive to move to the case study area. The housing price and location are much more important. Because of the life stage of some newcomers, the availability of spacious, yet still affordable houses in these neighbourhoods plays an important role (see e.g. Kley, 2011; Mulder, 1996).

In the next section, we emphasise a few situations where diversity is important in the housing choice. According to the literature gentrifiers are attracted by diverse neighbourhoods and can be seen as ‘diversity-seekers’ (Blokland & van Eijk, 2010; Weck & Hanhörster, 2014). We will therefore elaborate on the question to which extent diversity is important for the highly educated newcomers of Belgian origin to move to the neighbourhood. Another group of newcomers are the newcomers of foreign origin. To which extent do they choose to live in a diverse neighbourhood? We will mainly focus on the groups of newcomers, because the neighbourhood was not yet diverse when the long-time residents moved in. So, by definition, diversity was no primary motive for them to move into the neighbourhood.

Finally, we will take a look at the diversity of shops and in schools and explore to which extent this is important in the housing choice of people living in the case study area.

3.2 Why do residents come to live here?

Diversity not a primary motive to move to the present neighbourhood

Interviewees who move to the aforementioned culturally diverse areas in Antwerp do not choose the area because of its diversity. When people were asked why they moved to the neighbourhood we got surprisingly similar answers. Affordability seems to be the most important reason. People are attracted to the neighbourhood because of the low housing prices and the dwelling is mostly more important than the neighbourhood as a criterion.

“We saw one hundred houses and finally we took this one, because we said we can make something out of it. It was within our budget and it had the opportunities to make it as we wanted.” (R1, female, 61-75, living with partner, Belgian origin)

“I did search in other places. Some places the prices were too high and so, can’t afford to, to own it. And I looked place at down floor. Is not easy to get a place down floor.” (R16, male, 46-60, living alone, West-African Origin)

Not all interviewees have clearly articulated reasons why they came to live in the neighbourhood. Overall, economic reasons dominate. The low housing prices are an important motive to move to this specific neighbourhood, not only for the people renting a house, but also for homeowners. Young couples want to buy a house, with a lot of space, and preferably with a garden. Because the case study area is relatively cheap it is possible to buy a more spacious dwelling in this area

than somewhere else in the city. Remarkably, the presence of migrant groups is seen as an explanation for the low housing price. In this sense, diversity does play a role.

“So, it is cheaper to live in this neighbourhood, because a lot of foreigners live here.” (R6, female, 31-45, living alone, West European origin)

Another important characteristic of the case study area, which influenced the respondents’ choices to go and live there, is its central location. Everything is reachable by foot, bike or public transport. Although people living in Deurne Noord have the feeling that they live outside the city, they mostly choose this location because it is very close to the city. At the same time, they prefer to live outside the city, because it is quieter. The presence of facilities such as cultural and sport centres, bars and restaurants in the neighbourhood, is a third important motive, especially in Antwerp Noord and Borgerhout.

A fourth motive is the presence of a social network in the neighbourhood. People choose the area because they already know the place, the people and therefore the neighbourhood feels familiar.

Sometimes diversity does play a role in the motives to settle in the case study area

In first instance, diversity does not seem to be an important motive to settle in the area. However, diversity does play a role when people have to choose between different parts of the case study area. We studied three different neighbourhoods with different degrees and types of ethno-cultural diversity. The amount of people of foreign origin is highest in Antwerp Noord and lowest in Deurne Noord. The neighbourhood Borgerhout is also known as Borgerocco, referring to the Moroccans living in this neighbourhood. A lot of interviewees refer to this nickname. People of Belgian and foreign origin living in other parts of the case study area argue that they rather live here than in Borgerhout, because of the domination of Moroccan people in Borgerhout. They like the diversity, without one population group being overly numerous or dominant, so everybody can feel at home.

“We don’t have ‘clan formation’ anywhere, like Borgerhout, [that is] really a concentration of Moroccans... or the side of the Nationalestraat is the Turkish community, [...] this is enormously mixed and without problems.” (R1, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

On the contrary, people of Belgian origin living in Borgerhout, say they prefer Borgerhout because there is a balance between Belgian and non-Belgian people. They argue that the Belgians have become a minority in Antwerp Noord and therefore they do not want to live there. Hence, diversity does play a role when people have to decide in which kind of ethno-cultural diversity they want to live.

Even though diversity is not mentioned immediately when talking about motives to move to the neighbourhood, a minimum amount of ethno-cultural diversity is important for some people of non-Belgian origin. They do not feel comfortable in a homogeneous Belgian neighbourhood, because they might stand out.

“I don’t want [to live] between only Belgian people, and be the only... I don’t want that either. Of course, I don’t want that, no.” (R11, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

Apart from the question whether or not people want to live in a neighbourhood with only Belgian people, they also refer to the question if they would like to live in a homogeneous neighbourhood with people from their own origin. Although the woman cited above neither

wants to live in homogeneous neighbourhood with people from her own origin, it was important for her that there lived some people from her origin in the neighbourhood.

“It seemed to be better to live in a neighbourhood where I know people, of my origin. I think so. That seemed to be the best.” (R11, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin).

The presence of people of your own origin and family members is, however, not always positive according to the interviewees. One interviewee explains that her husband did not like the social control in the previous neighbourhood, because of the Moroccan community over there.

“We do whatever we want. Well, we don’t live Moroccan Moroccan and of course there are then a lot of people who talk a lot. [...] For example during Ramadan, when he doesn’t participate and he smokes, people start to gossip a lot.” (R23, female, 31-45, Living with her partner and children, South-American origin).

We will elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of social control in chapter 6. Now it is important to mention that the presence of social control can contribute to the decision to move to another neighbourhood. In this sense diversity does also play a role in the housing choice.

Highly educated newcomers, the gentrifiers

In some parts of the case study area gentrification takes place, especially in parts of Borgerhout. The newcomers who can be seen as the gentrifiers are highly educated newcomers, mostly of Belgian origin. In the literature we can find the dominant idea that these gentrifiers are attracted by the diversity of the neighbourhood (see e.g. Blokland & van Eijk, 2010; Jackson & Benson, 2014; Tissot, 2014). Our interviewees do not confirm this idea.

“I wouldn’t say that the first point is to say, I like to live here, because it is a multicultural neighbourhood.” (R15, female, 31-45, living with family member, Belgian origin)

As already mentioned, they mostly came to the neighbourhood because of the low housing prices and the central location. The highly educated newcomers appreciate diversity and connect living in diversity with being or becoming more open-minded. We elaborate on this in chapter 7. However, even though they appreciate diversity, the newcomers generally do not invest in building up diverse social relationships in their neighbourhood. They ‘consume’ diversity in a rather passive way. They do not have a diverse network, or do not actively try to create strong ties with their non-Belgian neighbours. This weak connection of gentrifiers with diversity becomes very clear when we asked people whether they want to move or not. Those who want to move out of the city because of the lack of green, did not mention diversity as a criterion for places outside the city to live. On the contrary, people from foreign origin living in Antwerp Noord or Borgerhout, mention Deurne Noord as a good place to live, since it is more quiet, but also diverse, so they will not be the only non-white person.

Furthermore, highly educated people from Belgian origin living in a diverse neighbourhood, mostly live in a relatively homogeneous Belgian part of the neighbourhood. Although they do not mention that they wanted to move to a relatively ‘white’ part of the neighbourhood they do mention it was important that they already knew people living there, which is also important for other groups. The people that they knew were always ‘people like them’ and as a result parts of the neighbourhood become more homogeneous.

However, it is very important for some interviewees that not only highly educated people of Belgian origin live in the neighbourhood. This is the case in some gentrified parts outside the case study area, like ‘t Zuid and Zurenborg. One interviewee argued that she does not feel

comfortable in these neighbourhoods, because of the lifestyle of those people, although she can be seen as a gentrifier herself.

“I lived for a long time on ‘t Zuid. [...] People were always well dressed and looked very neat. And I always felt a little bit different because I don’t... Well, I like to wear sweatpants and. I just like to go outside without much make-up and stuff like that. And I felt a bit different.” (R27, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin).

Recent newcomers of foreign origin

Apart from the highly educated newcomers the case study area, especially Antwerp Noord, is confronted with the inflow of recent newcomers born outside Belgium. Before moving, they did not know the country, the city, or the area. They mostly settle in the neighbourhood, because someone helps them to find a house or because they move in with their husband or wife. Therefore they do not specifically choose to live in a diverse neighbourhood but are more or less ‘forced’ to live in diversity.

“There was a family in the asylum centre, and that was a family from the same country. And I say, I need an apartment and then I had a friend here. And I went to that friend and she said, this woman needs an apartment. She gave me a number and I made an appointment and I came to the house.” (R7, female, 18-30, living alone, Middle-Eastern origin)

The newcomers who do not speak the Dutch language are mostly more critical about the concentration of ethnic-cultural minorities in the neighbourhood than the highly educated Dutch speaking newcomers. The same woman explains that she experiences a lack of diversity:

“I have to stay here [...] but I don’t like my neighbourhood. Yes, but I don’t have problems with my neighbours, but I have the problem that I cannot learn the Dutch language. All my neighbours speak another language and in all stores. Sometimes I think, I live in Turkey or I am in Morocco.” (R7, female, 18-30, living alone, Middle-Eastern origin)

When people are forced to live in neighbourhoods with a lot of people with a migration background, their opinion about ethno-cultural diversity is likely to differ from people who choose to live in diversity. Moreover, the highly educated Dutch speaking newcomers can autonomously decide when they want to get confronted with diversity. They can delimit their relation with diversity by deciding to live in a more homogeneous white and more expensive street, while the newcomers from other countries who do not speak the language cannot choose in which part of the case study area they want to live.

However, some newcomers of foreign origin choose to live in a diverse neighbourhood. These are mostly the ones who already built up a social network and are more familiar with the neighbourhood. The existence of a network of people of their own origin is important. At the same time, they choose the neighbourhood, because they appreciate the fact that that they are not the only foreigner in the neighbourhood, as mentioned before.

Diversity of shops and in schools

The presence of diversity does not only mean the presence of a diverse population. Diversity influences other facilities in the neighbourhoods like shops and schools. The diversity of shops is an important motive to settle in a diverse neighbourhood. On the contrary, the schools in the neighbourhood were not an important motive.

The diverse neighbourhoods of the case study area in Antwerp are characterised by the presence of ethnic entrepreneurs. People with a migration background appreciate a heterogeneous shopping environment because they can find products from their home country; Belgian people mostly enjoy the diversity of food. In addition to this, the ethnic shops have longer opening hours, so people can always buy their grocery. Hence, different groups appreciate this diversity of shops. However, some residents of Belgian origin are also critical, because they have the idea that the shops are nowadays becoming less diverse and that Belgian shops disappear.

“What also really changed is that [...] our baker retired a few months ago. But there is no other Flemish [...] bakery or butcher. They all disappeared here.” (R35, female, 46-60, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

When talking about school, people have rather different ideas about the diversity. Most people with children did not mention that the presence of schools was an important consideration in the housing choice. However, when they have to select a school for their children, diversity becomes very important. Almost all respondents from Belgian origin talk about ‘mixed schools’ and about the importance of diversity. They define schools with 50% Belgian children and 50% children of other origins as mixed schools and prefer these schools over predominantly white schools. However, schools that are predominantly white are less problematized than schools where the majority of children are of foreign origin. A school with all kinds of different origins, but with a minority of Belgian children, is not seen as a mixed school. Hence, ‘mixed’ has a very specific meaning in this context. When there are only schools in the neighbourhood where Belgian children are a minority, some children go to school in another neighbourhood.

3.3 Moving to the present neighbourhood: improvement or not?

Moving to the present house is mostly experienced as an improvement. Some interviewees experienced specific problems in their previous house, like bad housing conditions, problems with roommates or simply a lack of space.

Apart from the housing conditions and the space, moving is also experienced as an improvement when people become home-owners. It is said that Belgians do have ‘a brick in the stomach’, which means that every Belgian wants to own their house. Hence, owning a house is an important step in the housing career.

“In the end it was the rent every month [...] Then we said, the rent we pay at the moment, we can also pay instalments and invest the money in ownership.”(R1, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

When it comes to improvements on the level of the neighbourhood, moving from Borgerhout or Antwerp Noord to Deurne Noord was experienced as an improvement. People of foreign origin appreciate Deurne because its diversity and quietness. This is interesting because the reputation of Deurne Noord has been worsening among local policy makers and longtime residents. The inflow of people of foreign origin might be an explanation for the bad reputation because interviewees associate foreigners with low housing prices (as we mentioned before) and with a lower class background (Saperstein & Penner, 2012). One of the interviewees moved from Borgerhout to Deurne Noord.

“I used to live in Deurne and I experienced Deurne as really good. Quiet and yes a very good place. But Borgerhout is not good. And over there, people are also a bit, racist. Yes, but here in Deurne, no. 80% are good people [...] I got to know a lot of Belgian people here. In Borgerhout, nothing, nobody.” (R19, 31-45, living alone, Middle-Eastern origin)

It was important for this interviewee that there are more people of Belgian origin living in Deurne Noord than in Borgerhout and this contributes to a better neighbourhood. An older woman who lived her whole life in Antwerp Noord, also moved to Deurne Noord. She moved to senior housing, where care is available when it is needed. We asked her if she would have moved to this housing complex if it would have been located in Antwerp Noord. Her answer was no.

“First of all, because of the foreigners, I say honestly. Secondly, because I can’t handle the bustle of the city anymore. I’m better now here, quiet. When I, I have to visit the doctor every 14 days and then I pass my [old] street by bus. Then I think, ohh, I couldn’t live here anymore. I haven’t been unhappy there.” (R12, female, >75, living alone, Belgian origin)

This interviewee feels much better now and moving to a more homogeneous neighbourhood is seen as an improvement. Another interviewee, who lived outside the case study area, but used to live in Antwerp Noord, was also very satisfied with her decision to move out because now she lives in a homogeneous neighbourhood without ethno-cultural diversity. Although she cannot afford a spacious house at the place where she lives at the moment, it is much better for her.

3.4 Conclusions

Diversity of the neighbourhood is not an important motive to move to the present neighbourhood. Considerations like housing price and location are much more important. Furthermore, the role of diversity in the decision to move (or not) can differ for different groups. People with a migration background appreciate a minimum of diversity, in the sense that they do not want to be the only ‘foreigner’. On the one hand, they are looking for diversity, because they prefer a neighbourhood, populated not only with people from Belgian origin, but also from other origins. On the other hand, they are looking for ‘people like them’ and are therefore searching for a minimum amount of homogeneity. At the same time, this group is critical about having too much foreigners in the area. That the highly educated newcomers are less critical about diversity might be explained by their relative autonomy in confronting diversity. Although they do appreciate a diverse neighbourhood, they are not ‘locked’ in their neighbourhoods and have broad social networks outside of it. For people who do not appreciate diversity, diversity is an important aspect in their housing choice. They move out of diverse neighbourhoods and feel much better in homogenous white areas.

4. Perceptions of the diversity in the neighbourhood

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we describe the perceptions of the residents of the diversity in the neighbourhood. Is diversity perceived as positive or negative? To begin with, it is important to know how people define their neighbourhood. Borders between areas can symbolize distinctions between groups (Elias & Scotson, 2008/1965; May, 2004). Drawing boundaries can be used as a strategy to exclude others who are perceived as people who do not fit in the neighbourhood identity (Hwang, 2015). In section 4.2 we argue that people who live on the administratively border or on the perceived border between a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ area use boundaries to distinguish their neighbourhood from the ‘worse’ neighbourhood.

In section 4.3 we focus on the perception of neighbours. Which groups do people describe and which aspects are used to distinguish one group from another? In section 4.4 we focus on the positive and negative aspects of the neighbourhood, with specific attention to diversity. Is there a difference between different groups in their perception of the neighbourhood and to which extent are positive or negative aspects linked to diversity?

4.2 Perceived boundaries of the neighbourhood

Inhabitants of the case study area use different definitions of the neighbourhood. In general, we do not observe a relationship between membership of a specific group and the size of the perceived neighbourhood. Boundaries are mostly not defined by the diversity or other characteristics of the population. Instead, most interviewees use big streets, the built environment and places they visit often to limit the boundaries of their neighbourhood. However, when people live or feel like they live on the border of a neighbourhood, they are more likely to use demographics and the reputation of a neighbourhood to draw neighbourhood boundaries and define to which one they belong.

Ways to define the neighbourhood

Three aspects are used to define the borders of the neighbourhood. Firstly, the big streets like ‘Turnhoutsebaan’ and ‘Plantin Moretuslei’, ‘the urban ringway’ and Antwerp Central station are often mentioned as self-evident territorial markers.

“The other side of the urban ringway that is also Borgerhout over there. But that is not my neighbourhood.” (R14, female, 46-60, living alone Belgian origin)

Secondly, people define the borders based on activities and places that they visit often. For example, the school of the children and the activities of the children mostly lead people to define the neighbourhood in a larger way. Territorial markers can be crossed because of these activities, like R5 explicitly states.

“It doesn’t stop at the Turnhoutsebaan, the other side also [is part of the neighbourhood] [...] Take Rattaplan, I volunteer there, so that is for me. I go there frequently.” (R5, female, 31-45, living alone, Belgian origin)

However, involvement in activities can also limit the definition of the neighbourhood when the places where the activities take place are far away. One of the interviewees used to live in Deurne Zuid, but currently lives in Deurne Noord. Deurne Zuid is located at the other site of a park (a territorial marker). When she has to describe the borders of her neighbourhood, it is very limited.

“We only see our part, because we don’t do anything here. When we do something it is always outside, or otherwise Deurne Zuid actually.” (R23, female 31-45, living with her partner and children, South-American)

Origin)

Lastly, the built environment can define neighbourhoods.

“These are residential streets, no shopping streets. It are all places to live, houses. Really a residential neighbourhood and it is pretty quiet actually.” (R18, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

Although people give quite specific answers when asking about the borders of the neighbourhood, they are not consistent when talking about the neighbourhood. When they talk about activities that take place in the neighbourhood, they mostly broaden their idea and when we ask to describe neighbours they mostly narrow their perception of the neighbourhood. In conclusion, we can say that people do not define the boundaries of the neighbourhood in any static way, but that the perception of borders varies within one interview depending on the activities or social groups that are talked about.

Living on the borders, the importance of demographics and reputation

Boundaries become more salient when people feel that they live at the administratively defined border of a neighbourhood or at a perceived border between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ part of the neighbourhood.

One of the interviewees lives on the administrative border of Antwerp Noord/Borgerhout. Her house is located on the side of Antwerp Noord, but she mentioned that it does not feel like she lives in Antwerp Noord.

“We really live on the border of 2060 (Antwerp Noord), but actually, I feel more 2140 (Borgerhout), because we live really on the boundary. [...] I also think that all of my friends live in Borgerhout and not in 2060. [...] And 2060 does have a negative connotation in Belgium, because it comes in the news. Over there a lot of drugs euh, crimes. Sometimes somebody is shot or stabbed. And when it does happen it is always there. And since we wanted to have children, I think it is the reason that we did not look [for a house] over there.” (R27, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

Interestingly, this interviewee talks about Antwerp Noord as ‘over there’, while administratively speaking she lives in Antwerp Noord. However, because the bad reputation of this neighbourhood, and because most of her friends live in Borgerhout, she explicitly mention that she lives in Borgerhout and not Antwerp Noord.

This rigid distinction between a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ neighbourhood is very present in Deurne, which is divided in Deurne Zuid and Deurne Noord. For most inhabitants, the area to the north of the big park Rivierenhof is seen as Deurne Noord and the area to the south as Deurne Zuid. In general, Deurne Noord does not have a good reputation. For people in living in Deurne Zuid, the whole area of Deurne Noord is seen as a bad neighbourhood. One of the interviewees grew up in Deurne Zuid.

“When I lived in Deurne Zuid, I always said very explicitly “Deurne Zuid”. Because Zuid is so to say the better part of Deurne. But for people outside Deurne it doesn’t make any difference [...] [I: Why did you always said it explicitly?] Well, because. It is also known. Deurne Noord is yes, the more, marginal neighbourhood, well that is how we always named it (laughs).” (R 46, female, 18-30, living alone, Belgian origin).

Although for people in Deurne Zuid, Deurne Noord is seen as a bad neighbourhood, people living in Deurne Noord differentiate between the ‘bad’ and the ‘good’ part of Deurne Noord.

The bad part is the most northern part close the event hall, the Sportpaleis. Again, this distinction becomes clear when people live exactly on the border.

“I definitely don’t have the idea that this is a rich neighbourhood. [...] Especially, the further you go in the direction of the Sportpaleis. When you, so to speak, cross the intersection, than I have the feeling, oei, everything is a bit worse here than with us, then I have that idea. [...] Yes, that would be the direction of the Sportpaleis, nobody like us is suddenly going to live there, I think. A young working couple, they would not suddenly buy a house over there.” (R43, male, 31-45, living with his partner and children, Belgian origin)

It seems that nobody wants to live in a ‘bad’ neighbourhood. According to interviewee R27 Antwerp Noord is the ‘bad’ neighbourhood, and according to R43 the area of the Sportpaleis is the ‘bad’ neighbourhood. Considering that they live on the border they want to emphasize that although the outside world could think that they live in these bad neighbourhoods, they do not. Similar results were found in earlier research (see for instance Wakefield & McMullan, 2005). By drawing this spatial border, they also draw a border between groups and distinguish themselves from the ‘criminal’ or ‘poor’ people living in the ‘other’ neighbourhood and create a social hierarchy. However, we did not find any evidence that people living in the ‘better’ part actively exclude people from the ‘bad’ part of the neighbourhood in their social networks or for example in organisations within the neighbourhood.⁴

4.3 Perceptions of neighbours

The case study area changed demographically during the last years and became more diverse in two different ways. A lot of interviewees refer to the increasing inflow of people of foreign origin and of young Belgian couples or Belgian families with children, mostly middle class. In this section we therefore focus on the perception of the ethno-cultural diversity of the neighbours and the class diversity.

Perceptions of ethno-cultural diversity

When interviewees are asked to describe their direct neighbours and people living in the neighbourhood, almost all interviewees use ethno-cultural categories. They say that a lot of different ‘nationalities’ or ‘foreigners’ live in the neighbourhood or name their neighbours based on the country of origin. Some interviewees refer to different ‘religious groups’. According to newcomers of Belgian origin this ethno-cultural diversity is self-evident and they already knew the neighbourhood as a diverse and mixed area. They mostly appreciate this diversity and are positive about the mentality of the people living in these neighbourhoods, because they connect living in diversity with living among tolerant people. This assumed connection between diversity and tolerance was also found in other research (Talen, 2010).

Long-time residents of Belgian origin experienced that the neighbourhood changed and that more people of foreign origin moved in.

“A lot, let’s say that 50% [of the houses] were bought by foreigners, people of foreign origin. [...] We have seen that it changed, but I don’t think that there is one street where there is a problem.” (R1, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin).

⁴ This is in contrast with the study of Elias and Scotson (2008/1965), where stigmatization was used as a power resource to exclude people living in the ‘bad’ neighbourhood.

Interestingly, this interviewee explicitly mentions that there are no problems with the foreigners and several other interviewees say the same. Although most residents are not negative about their neighbours, they actually do relate negative aspects of the neighbourhood with diversity. We will illustrate this in section 4.4.

Although, most long-time residents of Belgian origin get used to the ethno-cultural diversity, some find it hard to accept the change. We only spoke three residents of Belgian origin who were in general very negative about their neighbours of foreign origin⁵. They mention that foreigners are very noisy and that they do not feel at home anymore, because of the amount of foreigners living in the neighbourhood. They do not differentiate between direct neighbours and others living in the neighbourhood.

“R: Sometimes, I feel like a foreigner here. Do you know what I mean? [...]”

R2: New people came to live here and then, it is hard to make contact with them.

R: Yes, and those who came to live here, don't speak Dutch. [...]

R2: I think that those people don't want contact either.” (R48, lesbian couple, 61-75, living together, Belgian origin)

Perceptions of gentrifiers

Another group that is often mentioned when people were asked to describe their neighbours are young Belgian middle class couples or families with children, known in the literature as gentrifiers. People in Borgerhout often refer to this group as white middle class. Some call them BoBo's (Bourgeois Bohemian) or the 'tricycle-generation'. White middle class families often use the tricycle.

“That kind of people who have a tricycle. And the tricycles, yeah, they are like... They are modern and ecological minded and so on.” (R14, female, 46-60, living alone, Belgian origin)

While most opinions about the inflow of foreigners are neutral or positive, the opinions of this group are more mixed. R14 explains why she is not positive about this group.

“They have their own circle in my opinion. They see themselves as 'great'. [...] But I don't know if they are that 'great' to other people [...] to older people or to people who are not like them. I don't think so, because I don't like them that much, in general, not very sympathetic.” (R14, female, 46-60, living alone, Belgian origin)

R14 is not highly educated, so there is some distance between her and the gentrifiers, regarding class. However, R30 who is more similar to the gentrifiers is also critical.

“Or also, the fact that one [policy makers] became stricter about migration and so on. The people who are the most indignant about it [...] are the same parents who put their kids in a tricycle to go to Zurenborg to a white school. [...] They are oh so progressive, and oh so open-minded, yes, yes. But they only go to, yes, environments where their own children surely cannot get 'infected' by. Where they don't have to do concessions on the nice lives of their children.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

Other old middle class inhabitants, and some gentrifiers themselves, also refer to gentrifiers, but they mostly refer to the people living in Zurenborg or 't Zuid when they talk negatively about this

⁵ This is rather surprising given the historical electoral strength of the anti-migration party Vlaams Blok in Deurne and may point towards an underrepresentation of Belgian people with a strongly negative attitude towards ethnic-cultural diversity in our sample of interviewees.

group. They do not only refer to class when they talk about them, but also to lifestyle. R18 explains what she does not like about the gentrified neighbourhood Zurenborg.

“Everything is like, everyone knows everyone and this is a pleasant neighbourhood and we are the cool people of Zurenborg. [...] A Turkish restaurant wanted to start in Zurenborg and yeah, they [the residents] immediately started a petition that it shouldn't be there, because it was of lower status. It was a take away pizzeria. Yes, actually quite messy. And that didn't fit in the nice, cool Zurenborg. [...] Than, I think, well, there you are with your tolerance and openness. We are the progressive Zurenborgers' so far.” (R18, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

4.4 Perceptions of the neighbourhood: positive and negative aspects

Diverse areas are seen as lively, dynamic areas. Several interviewees with different backgrounds (old inhabitants, newcomers of Belgian and foreign origin) mention this. An often heard argument is that people of foreign origin spend more time on the street and therefore make the neighbourhood more lively. On the other hand, some interviewees think that Belgium people prefer to spend time inside their houses or garden. Therefore, people do not experience many problems with the people of Belgian origin, but they also lack spontaneous contact with them. Although people of Belgian origin also said this, people of non-Belgian origin most explicitly mention it.

“Also, a Belgian on the street would never say, ‘he, how are you, what is your name?’ No. Also not positive or not nice words, but also no bad words. Nothing, nothing, nothing to you.” (R17, female, 46-60, living alone, South- American origin)

On the one hand, diversity causes more activity in the neighbourhood and contributes to the lively and dynamic character, but at the other hand it causes some difficulties, which will be described below. We focus on the positive and negative aspects of living in a diverse neighbourhood and distinguish between old inhabitants, newcomers of foreign origin and newcomers of Belgian origin.

Perceptions of the neighbourhood, old inhabitants

As mentioned before, old inhabitants used to live in a much more homogeneous neighbourhood. Some old inhabitants of Belgian origin have mixed feelings about the change of the neighbourhood. Their first reaction on the inflow of people of foreign origin was rather negative and they needed time to accept these changes.

“And also the feeling like. Yes, ok, a lot is possible, a lot is, but I am actually the only white person here in the Offerandestraat, Diepestraat [...] that is also not how it should be.” (R18, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

Nowadays this older woman is used to the diversity and accepts it. Although she mentions that she is the only white person this does not mean that there is a lack of diversity, because there is not one single ethnicity that dominates. She rather tends to emphasize the positive aspects of diversity. People of foreign origin bring a lot of shopping facilities with them and you get to know people who you would not have met when you lived in a less diverse neighbourhood. Most other interviewees also emphasize the positive aspects.

“Like with my Moroccan neighbours, I have a good contact with them. When you [have that] it is enriching.” (R24, male, 61-75, living alone/with his child, Belgian origin)

Talking about negative aspects of the diversity several old inhabitants of Belgian origin mention the lack of knowledge of the Dutch language with people from foreign origin. R12 experienced this at her former neighbourhood in Antwerp Noord.

*“It bothered me that that person lived there now for so many years and she even could not say *name* to me. It bothered me enormously. [...] That person did not come outside. So she couldn’t talk to anybody. And when the children came from school, they spoke Berbers inside.”* (R12, female, >75, living alone, Belgian origin)

Apart from the language barriers, this group also mentions other negative aspects linked to diversity. The garbage on the street, which they sometimes connect explicitly with diversity, annoys interviewees. Some interviewees use the deprived position of migrant groups as an explanation. Migrants and other deprived groups are too busy surviving and therefore ‘forget’ to put the garbage outside on time. Other interviewees see the fact that people are used to throw their garbage on the street and spit on the streets as a ‘cultural difference’.

Although most old inhabitants have accommodated the ethno-cultural diversity in their neighbourhood, others still have difficulties dealing with it. Two interviewees in Deurne Noord were very explicit. One woman in Deurne Noord would rather move to a homogeneous white Belgium village. She does not like the way that diversity influences the streetscape and it bothers her to see women wearing headscarves. In another interview a couple complains that people of foreign origin lack norms and values. They are loud and do not adapt their behaviour. The couple argues that foreigners act like they used to do in their country of origin and that they do not integrate. They knew one person of Moroccan origin, who was well integrated and who adapted his behaviour, he died a few years ago. However, when they start to talk about the funeral, one tells it was too traditional for a funeral in Belgium.

“R: The men first to the cemetery.

R2: The women were not allowed

R: No women. That was much later. So, first the men. Yes, that is very typical but yes. I don’t have problems with that; they can do with it whatever they want.

R2: Yes, but I think, when they want to be buried like that. Well, go back to Morocco.

R: Yes, but the wife did not want that.

R2: Yes, but then, they have to adapt.” (R48, lesbian couple, 61-75, living together, Belgian origin)

Interestingly not only old inhabitants of Belgian origin are critical about the changes within the neighbourhood. One of the old inhabitants of foreign origin was especially critical about the fact that there lived too many Kosovars in the neighbourhood some years ago. Talking about Kosovars she used the same discourse that people use who are negative about immigrants in general, namely complaining about noise and garbage.

“There were too many Kosovars, too many foreign-, well too. I am a foreigner myself, but I found it too busy. [...] The garbage, it always smells there uhm, yes, I don’t know. Noisy. It was uhm always uhm yes, noise. Or else, fighting, either talking too loud. [...] And a lot, above all a lot of illegal dumpers. [...] Now, it is much better. [I: who is living there at the moment?] Either Turks or Poles. You almost don’t hear them.” (R50, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

Another interviewee is in general very critical about the inflow of immigrants. He was raised in Antwerp Noord with his parents who were born in the Middle East, and was shocked about the change of the neighbourhood, when he moved back because of the cheap housing in Antwerp Noord. He does not like the presence of so many foreigners. He has also lived in a small village for a while and said:

“The situation [in that village] is not ubb, disturbed by newcomers. While the situation here in Antwerp Noord is totally disturbed. Actually, it is totally fucked up.” (R29, male, 31-45, living alone, Middle-Eastern origin)

The other old inhabitants of foreigner origin we spoke do not agree. They are in general not negative about the changes. R11 for example was raised in Borgerhout and mentioned that there were first only Belgian shops and that here are now Moroccan, Turkish, African and Chinese shops. She likes this diversity of shops, also because it is very easy for her nowadays to find Moroccan products. It is no problem for her that the neighbourhood changed from a Belgian, Belgian – Moroccan, to a much more mixed neighbourhood nowadays.

Perceptions of the neighbourhood, newcomers of foreign origin

Newcomers of foreign origin take a rather critical stance concerning diversity. As said in section 3 this is partly because they did not always choose to live in this neighbourhood. Here, we will elaborate more on the question what they do and what they do not appreciate about the diversity in the neighbourhood.

Talking about the positive aspects, they mention the fact that they are not the only person of foreign origin and therefore feel comfortable, as explained in chapter 3. They also appreciate the presence of shops where they can find products from their home country.

“And this supermarket nearby Diepestraat. Is there all the Moroccan shops are there. And there you can find some Indian shops. And all the African shops.” (R10, female, 18-30, living with her partner, Asian origin)

Apart from the positive aspects, most newcomers of foreign origin mention some problems with diversity and specifically with the people of foreign origin. Some interviewees complain about the children. R16 explains that he has a problem with the children who play outside late at night. Because of the language barrier it is hard to talk about these problems.

“When you begin to speak to the parents they tell you [that] they don’t speak the languages. Yeah, today lucky don’t hear anything. So. [...] You see them (the children) maybe 11 or 12 o’clock. And it is so loud, they play, everywhere noisy.” (R16, male, 46-60, living alone, West-African origin)

Another complaint is related to sexual intimidation. The female interviewees connect this with people from foreign origin and do not experience this from people of Belgian origin. This topic came up much more explicitly in the interviews with females of foreign origin than in interviews with females of Belgian origin.

“Yes, but maybe you would call me a racist, but I already thought [that the neighbourhood is] a little bit too Arabic. [...] I was never ubb against them, I always loved them. But, I was walking and behind me kids shout me prostitute, Russian prostitute. [...] I had it several times.” (R8, female, 31-45, living with her partner, East-European origin)

“We need to be a little bit ubm be careful that what you wear, that you do it. Because if you go alone and in the summer if you wear the open dress, and if you go by this street, and yeah then people start to make some. How to say? They start to whistle or they start to yell “Oh hi” like this and if you reply then maybe you will have a fight.” (R10, female, 18-30, living with her partner, Asian origin)

Perceptions of the neighbourhood, newcomers of Belgian origin

Newcomers of Belgian origin mostly deliberately choose for this specific neighbourhood, are aware of the diversity and appreciate it. However, they mostly seem to be attracted by city life as such and can be seen as ‘urbanity seekers’ (Weck & Hanhörster, 2014). Positive aspects of the neighbourhood are much more related to the urban environment and ambience than to diversity per se. The newcomers like the facilities in the neighbourhood, the fact that you do not need a car and the festivities in the neighbourhood. They consume the city and the diversity that comes with it.

“You have more the feeling that you are on vacation here. Being away. I think, because there are a lot of small stores here, which are more southern. The mentality, which is more lively. It is more exciting and more urban, challenging and harder.” (R44, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, West-European origin).

Perceptions of diversity become more critical when people start to talk about schools and social contact. We elaborate on this in chapters 6 and 7. Newcomers of Belgian origin also refer to other difficulties. Like the old inhabitants they also connect garbage on the streets with the presence of foreigners and mostly use their deprived position as explanation.

4.5 Conclusions

People define their neighbourhoods in different ways and there are no static boundaries. Most interviewees do not use boundaries as a strategy to distinct themselves from others. However, when people live on the boundary between a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ neighbourhood they explicitly distinguish themselves from the ‘bad’ neighbourhood and in this way of the people living there.

When people talk about their own neighbours, a lot of interviewees refer to the inflow of people of foreign origin and the inflow of the white middle class. The inflow of this last group is among policy makers seen as something positive, but the interviews show that opinions about them are more mixed. Although this middle class lives in a diverse environment some people have the idea that they distinguish themselves from others and live in their own homogeneous social world.

Interviewees also refer to the inflow of people of foreign origin. Old inhabitants were not always positive about this, but their opinion mostly changed over time. This confirms the idea, that when people start to get confronted with ethno-cultural diversity, the ‘group threat theory’ (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010) is confirmed, and when people get used to it and establish more contacts the ‘intergroup contact theory’ (Pettigrew, 1998) gradually becomes a better predictor of perceptions of ethno-cultural diversity (Downey & Smith, 2011; Thijssen & Dierckx, 2011). However, some long-term residents are still negative about people of foreign origin. These interviewees did not have any contact with their neighbours of foreign origin. This lack of contact could explain why their behaviour still fits more in the ‘group threat theory’. Furthermore, they lived in Deurne Noord, an area that is confronted more recently with the inflow of people of foreign origin. The other interviewee who was very negative moved recently from a white middle class neighbourhood to Antwerp Noord. Hence, these residents maybe do not live long enough in a diverse area to accept it.

Another group, which was critical about the amount of people of foreign origin living in the neighbourhood, were people of foreign origin themselves. This may be explained by the fact that they mostly did not choose to live in this diverse area and that they were not used to live in such a heterogeneous neighbourhood.

5. Activities in and outside the neighbourhood

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we investigate how important the neighbourhood is in the daily activities of people living in a diverse neighbourhood. People are nowadays more mobile than ever and the importance of the neighbourhood is questioned. The idea that the activities of residents do not only take place within the neighbourhood is often connected with a changing role of local communities (see for instance Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2004; Karsten, Lupi, and Stigter-Speksnijder 2012; Lupi and Musterd 2006; Putnam 2000; Wellman 1979). In this chapter we first investigate whether residents prefer to spend time inside or outside the neighbourhood? Which activities do residents do inside the neighbourhood and do they meet neighbours by doing so?

Blokland & Nast (2014) emphasize that being inside the neighbourhood and using its public space can contribute to the feeling of belonging. Areas with functional diversity are more suitable to enable everyday interactions than mono-functional areas. These everyday interactions or 'absent ties' are important to create 'public familiarity' (Blokland & Nast, 2014). We will therefore give specific attention to the question whether people prefer to go to the city centre for their activities or rather to a mono-functional shopping mall. This question is most relevant in Deurne Noord, which is located between the city centre of Antwerp and a big suburban shopping mall in Wijnegem. In the literature the shopping mall is defined as a 'non-place' (Augé, 1995) and would contribute to the creation of the 'one-dimensional men' where people are only identified as consumers and not as citizens (Barber, 2001). This hinders social interaction and therefore differs from other places in the city and surroundings.

In the second part of this chapter we will give specific attention to public spaces, which are in general used by a diverse population. We focus on two parks, because most interviewees used (one of) these parks. Earlier research shows that urban parks are inclusive places, but that there is little contact between strangers inside the park (Peters, Elands, & Buijs, 2010). The central questions in this part are: Is there any contact between different groups at these places? How important are these places for the inhabitants?

5.2 Activities: where and with whom?

Living in the same street, but in different social worlds

Different groups of people do different activities in the neighbourhood. However, for all different groups the neighbourhood is still an important place where activities take places. People do not only use the neighbourhood to buy their groceries, but also to spend their free time. In general, people prefer to spend their free time alone, with friends or with family and not that much with neighbours. A lot of interviewees of foreign origin do not use facilities in the neighbourhood, except for public spaces (see section 5.3).

Several middle class newcomers use the neighbourhood actively and like to meet with friends in the neighbourhood. Popular places are new cafes and coffee bars. They are aware of the fact that almost only other white middle class people visit these places.

"That cafes, I have to say honestly, are quite similar with regard to the attendance. I found it hard to describe [...]. It are almost exclusively white people I think. [...] Occasionally there are some people of foreign origin at the bar to drink a beer. Actually more and more. But perhaps I did not notice until now. I see them. I think it is has more to do with class." (R15, female, 31-45, living with a family member, Belgian origin)

R15 explicitly links class and ethnic background to describe the category of people she meets when going out in the neighbourhood. Several interviewees also mention that it is even not allowed to visit some places.

“I was with friends and said, come on we go somewhere to eat, let’s try this, you know. It is a kind of Moroccan thing, but the food is very good. So we came in and it was directly “no no no, you can’t come inside, because this is for men.” [...] It is a cultural difference. [...] Do you need to have an opinion about it?” (R6, female, 31-45, living alone, West-European origin)

This is a very explicit example of separate spaces, but it became also clear in the interviews that people tend to go to cafes where they can find similar people. With similar people they refer to class, ethnic background and sometimes also to age. A lot of people find it regrettable that there is a lack of places where people with different backgrounds come together. As we will show in section 5.3 the public parks are an exception.

Belgian people often mention the cultural centre Roma as a place, which is used by a diverse public referring to class and age. However, ethno-cultural diversity is rather limited. Although most inhabitants want to get in contact with people of other origin they seem to live in different social worlds.

There are few exceptions of people who do go to more mixed places or to places where people of another origin use to come. One couple, both born in a West-European country, choose to live in Antwerp Noord because of its diversity and they like to visit Portuguese cafes. The other interviewee (of African origin) who visits other places goes to the same Portuguese cafes.

“We love Portuguese, they are very warm people. We used to live in Italy and they remind us of Italians.” (R26, couple, 46-60, living together, West-European origin)

City centre or shopping mall?

We would like to give some attention to the difference between the people living in Antwerp Noord and Borgerhout and the people living in Deurne Noord. All the interviewees who live in Borgerhout and Antwerp Noord focus on the city centre for many of their activities, e.g. to go shopping. They prefer to have a drink in the neighbourhood or in the city centre. Among the interviewees in Deurne Noord there is a distinction between people who feel more urban and are focussed on the city centre and those who are more focussed on the suburban shopping mall. Some choose to go to the shopping mall in Wijnegem because it is close by and can easily be reached by car and tram.

“Deurne and Wijnegem Shopping. Actually, I never go to the city. Well, it is a very long time ago.” (R23, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, South-American origin)

The people living in Antwerp Noord and Borgerhout almost never go to the shopping mall and are much more oriented on the city. Hence, places where people go differ not only between different class and/or ethnic groups, but also between places where people live.

However, not everybody living in Deurne Noord is focused on the suburban shopping facilities, some prefer the city centre or go sometimes to the city and sometimes to the shopping mall. We did not find demographic differences between these groups. The diversity of the public does not seem to be important. People mostly prefer the shopping mall when they quickly want to go shopping. The city centre is more associated with nice terraces and the atmospheric old town of Antwerp. This confirms the idea that shopping malls are more mono-functional places where

people act like a consumers, while the city centre is more used to experience the city and offers more space for everyday interactions. However, the confrontation with ethno-cultural diversity within the city centre is rather limited, because residents of Deurne Noord mostly go to the popular old town and do not visit the more diverse areas of the city.

“Sometimes when I think, it is a beautiful day and I don’t have anything to do, then I think, I catch a tram. [...] Then I go to the city and drink a cup of coffee on the Grote Markt, then, I feel really fortunate.” (R12, female, >75, living alone, Belgian origin)

5.3 The uses of public space

In section 5.2 we described the lack of spaces of encounter. However, public spaces seem to be successful in bringing all these groups together, especially two public parks, namely Rivierenhof and Park Spoor Noord. Rivierenhof is located in Deurne and is the biggest park of the city. The park offers a lot of leisure activities, there is for example mini-golf, a cafe, an open air theatre and a children’s farm. The park also offers different walking and playing opportunities for children. The park is not only popular among people living in Deurne but also among people living in Borgerhout and to a lesser extent, in Antwerp Noord. Interviewees use it to go for a walk, to go jogging, to play with the children, go for a picnic or hang out with friends. Hence, the park is used for all kind of different activities and therefore attracts also diverse groups.

The other popular place, Park Spoor Noord, is located in Antwerp Noord and has a different character from Rivierenhof, because it has a lot of open space and few trees. The park is created recently: half of the park opened in 2008 and the other half in 2009. The park has quickly become very popular, not only for the residents of Antwerp Noord, but also of Borgerhout and to a lesser extent of Deurne Noord. Like Rivierenhof, this park offers some leisure activities. There is a popular cafe in the park, there are public barbecues and the park offers sport and skating facilities.

Both parks attract a very diverse group of people: Belgian and non-Belgian, higher class and lower class, old and young. Every interviewee visits (one of) these parks. Several interviewees said that they like it that a lot of different people come together at these places. Although different groups use the same parks the contact between these groups is rather limited. Similar results were found in earlier research (see for instance Peters, Elands, & Buijs, 2010).

“Both, Park Spoor Noord and the Krugerplein, more than Terlooplein here, I find that really the places where you can say like whole Borgerhout comes together there. And yes, it is true that uhh, the Fleming, the Flemish families are sitting on the terrace having a drink and the allochthonous families are more sitting on a picnic blanket or couch with their own drinks. So you can say it is highly separated and that is even correct. On the other hand, the kids are playing together at the playground or play together in Park Spoor Noord, and in this way there is indeed contact. [...] It is how it is, socio economically seen, are the Flemish families in Borgerhout for 80-90% dual earners and the immigrant families in Borgerhout are for 80-90% single earners and very often even, families in which no-one has a paid job.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

R30 connects the segregation of Belgian and non-Belgian families with the socio-economic status of the different groups. She is not the only interviewee of Belgian origin doing this. In another interview it was noticed that in Park Spoor Noord, you can find the white middle class people at the side located close to the neighbourhood ‘Eilandje’, a wealthy neighbourhood, and that people of foreign origin use the part located close to the more deprived area called ‘Stuivenberg’.

Notwithstanding this segregation (only mentioned by white middle class interviewees) there is some contact between the groups through the children and this is appreciated. Most residents find it important that there are some places in the city, like the park, where all different groups of residents come together. Interviewees did not clearly explain to us why they find this important.

5.4 The importance of associations

Several interviewees mention that there are several associations active in the neighbourhoods and when you want to be active in the neighbourhood there are enough opportunities. Examples of associations active in the case study area are community centres, neighbourhood associations, youth organizations, migrant self-organizations and poverty organizations. Most interviewees are not active in any association in the neighbourhood. They participate in the Opsinjoren activities, like street festivities (see chapter 6) and that is enough for a lot of residents. However, several interviewees highlight the importance of associations.

Several interviewees make use of the community centres, mostly of Centrum de Wijk, Dinamo, Werkhuys and Cortina. This is not surprising, because we asked some residents through the first two community centres. Residents who are very active in these community centres, but also residents who visit these places sporadically are very positive about the presence of such meeting places in the neighbourhood.

“And there are a lot of initiatives here to learn people the Dutch language and so on. And actually to make more contact with the neighbourhood and so on. So, in that respect, the community centre here is a good thing.” (R24, male, 61-75, living alone/with his son, Belgian origin)

The community centres offer the opportunity to get to know more people in the neighbourhood and to participate in activities in the neighbourhood. Some residents have a very small social network and the community centres are especially for them very important. Not only community centres, but also other associations can function as meeting places, like R22 describes.

“Yes, the first three years actually I did not have any contact with anybody, no. [...] Lonely. Therefore, we went to this place [poverty organisation], because of the loneliness.” (R22, female, 61-75, living alone, Belgian origin)

These meeting places are very important for people with small social networks, but do not necessarily function as bridging places for groups with different ethnic backgrounds. The community centre the Werkhuys for example is often mentioned by people of Belgian origin, who say that the visitors are mostly white people. Notwithstanding the lack of ethno-cultural diversity, there is diversity in class and age according to the interviewees.

The coordinator of an organisation that wants to bring women together mentions that her organization also does not succeed to reach women with different ethnic backgrounds although she offers low threshold activities:

“That association is actually established [...] for women here in the neighbourhood, to meet up actually. [...] Sometimes they have a very little house and really want to be outside actually. And [the aim is to] bring them together with a cup of tea, coffee [...] and it is not obliged, but who wants can make something, and show that to other women. It are not only Moroccan women, everyone is welcome. But mostly, it are the Moroccan [women] who come.” (R50, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

Another association active in the neighbourhood, poverty organisation Recht-Op⁶, struggled with the fact that they hardly got people of foreign origin involved. Therefore they contacted the organisation where R50 is nowadays the coordinator to help them to reach a more diverse group.

“They only had white women actually and sometimes there were one or two women of foreign origin, but they never stayed. And then they asked us like, ‘do you want to do a group each week?’ So, I also go there.” (R50, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

Although R50 started a separate group, it is a first step to establish more ethno-cultural diversity within both associations.

5.5 Conclusions

For almost all interviewees the neighbourhood remains an important place where different activities take place. However, places that people use are divided by class, ethnicity and by the residential location. While none of the interviewees living in Borgerhout or Antwerp Noord mentioned the suburban shopping mall as a place they like to visit, people living in Deurne Noord did mention it. The diversity of the public is not important in this decision and people of different class positions and ethnic backgrounds go to the suburban shopping mall. This place is only used for functional shopping and it is expected that everyday interactions here are more limited than in the city centre.

Public spaces are by several interviewees seen as almost the only places where all residents of Antwerp come together. Some interviewees experienced that different groups use different parts of the parks. They see some segregation between people of foreign and Belgian origin and explain this by different class positions. However, this is not experienced as problematic per se. Although the contact between different groups is rather limited, people appreciate the fact that there are places in the city where there is the possibility to meet different people.

Community centres also attract diverse groups and are seen as important places to meet up with people from the neighbourhood. A lot of interviewees are not active in a neighbourhood association or in the community centre, but they agree that these places are important, especially for people with a rather small social network. Like in public space there is not necessary contact between people of different ethnic backgrounds through associations. However, sometimes organisations can help each other to reach a more diverse group of residents.

⁶ The literal translation of Recht-Op is both ‘Stand Tall’ and ‘Right to’.

6. Social cohesion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on social cohesion and the relation with diversity. Although the exact effect of ethno-cultural diversity on social cohesion is unclear most research shows that *“heterogeneity merely undermines intra-neighbourhood social cohesion: People in ethnically heterogeneous environments are less likely to trust their neighbours or to have contact with them.”* (Meer and Tolsma 2014: 474).

However, there are different degrees of social cohesion. As showed in earlier research in the Netherlands people are nowadays less connected to one single community but are connected to several ‘light communities’ (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004). In this chapter we therefore make a distinction between ‘strong ties’ and ‘weak ties’ to study the social cohesion within the neighbourhood (Granovetter, 1973).

We firstly elaborate how diverse the social networks of the residents living in a diverse neighbourhood are. In this first section we focus on ‘strong ties’. Wessendorf (2013) showed that personal networks in a diverse neighbourhood are rather homogeneous, we argue that this in the same in our case study area.

Secondly, we focus on the relations people have with their neighbours. How is their daily contact and is there mutual support in the neighbourhood? In this section we focus on the neighbourhood relations, which are mostly dominated by ‘weak ties’. The effect of diversity on these ‘weak ties’ is rather limited in our case study area, which was also found in earlier research (van Eijk, 2012). Since several interviewees refer to social control in the neighbourhood we also elaborate on this theme. Apart from the daily contact, several interviewees live in a street with activities of Opsinoren. This initiative offers financial and logistic support for residents who want to organise a street activity. We will focus on the question to which extent these activities attract a diverse group of people.

6.2 Composition of interviewees’ egocentric networks

The egocentric networks, referring to the networks organised around specific individuals, of the interviewees are in general homogeneous networks regarding class and ethnicity. This is especially the case for people of Belgian origin. Newcomers of foreign origin seem to have more heterogeneous networks concerning ethnicity. The neighbourhood does not play a strong role in the egocentric networks.

Inhabitants of Belgian origin

The interviewees of Belgian origin do have the most homogeneous social networks of ‘strong ties’. Older Belgian people often have rather small networks, limited to one or two good and long-time friends with whom they regularly do activities. Their friends are mainly people of Belgian origin, often in the same class position. When they have family members, they are also very important to them.

“So actually it is family [who are the most important], the little family which is left, because there are not many anymore.” (R1, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

Most of the newcomers of Belgian origin, mostly people in the age category of 31 to 45 years old, have a very broad network of friends. These friends are almost always of Belgian origin and have the same class position. Most newcomers of Belgian origin are middle class, and their network consists mainly of other Belgian middle class people. This is also the case for the people who were raised in a diverse neighbourhood. Interviewees got to know their friends through studying

and through youth movements such as ‘scouts’ and ‘Chiro’⁷. Although youth movements are nowadays slowly becoming more diverse (De Haene, Schuermans, & Verschelden, 2014), they are still predominantly white organisations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the friends, which interviewees know from the youth movement are mostly Belgian people

When we look at the places where the friends live it is much more diverse. A lot of interviewees have friends inside and outside the city.

“He bought a house in Antwerp Noord and [other friends] really live around the city and some in the city, but a lot around the city, swarmed out in different directions. And that are all people that I like to see and see frequently. And yes, there are actually many like that. The scouts group, they really remained friends.” (R15, female, 31-45, living with a family member, Belgian origin)

Location therefore does not seem to be that important in their social networks. The contact with people of other origin or other class positions is often limited to the neighbours and ‘weak ties’ dominate. Almost none of the interviewees of Belgian origin maintain friendships or ‘strong ties’ with people of foreign origin.

Old inhabitants of foreign origin

In first instance, family is very important for the established residents of foreign origin.

“Back then, I was always with my parents, nowadays not anymore. It doesn’t have to be every day, every weekend is also ok (laugh). [...] Mostly at Friday night or Saturday night, we all come together, the majority [of brothers and sisters].” (R11, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

One of the interviewees also mentioned the close contact she had with her family. She was also of North-African origin and mentioned that the close contact with her family was not positive per se.

*“Because in my family it is this *snaps her fingers* and you have to jump. And I put all my energy in that, really against my will.”* (R34, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

The close contact with her family hinders her from building up other relations, also with neighbours (see section 6.3).

Two other old inhabitants of foreign origin did not have much contact with their family and found new friends who belong to other ethnic groups. One of them grew up in a Belgian family and has nowadays barely friends of Belgian origin. Another grew up in Middle-Eastern family, but has no friends of Middle-Eastern origin. His group of friends is very mixed. Interviewees who rebelled actively against their family end up in a diverse social network, concerning origin.

“My parents are also eh, strict religious, Islamic. I was also raised like that. Until I was 16, almost 17, I uhb revolted. I became apostate in their opinion..” (R29, male, 31-45, Middle-Eastern origin)

⁷ ‘Scouts’ and ‘Chiro’ are two popular youth movement in Belgium that organise activities. Members of the local groups of the ‘scouts’ and ‘chiro’ meet each other on a regular (mostly weekly) basis. The organisations are very similar, but an important difference is the focus of the activities. Chiro does not focus on survival games, but on playing.

In general, the friends of the old inhabitants of foreign origin are of the same origin. Although there is contact between them and people of other origins (including people of Belgian origin), the most important friends are almost always people of the same origin as is also the case for people of Belgian origin.

“Well, they are mostly German friends and my neighbours. [...] I don’t have close friendships with Fleming actually, only one neighbour.” (R47, female, 61-75, living alone, West-European origin)

Newcomers of foreign origin

The newcomers of foreign origin have the most diverse networks of ‘strong ties’. Most newcomers that we interviewed came here alone. Some moved in with their (Belgian) partner, while others did not know anybody. Although most do not have family close by, their family is still very important and they often have contact with them. Their networks are more mixed in ethnic terms. These mixed networks are established through an intimate relationship, work or language lessons. However, the best friends of the newcomers of foreign origin are mostly people of their own origin.

“They will say that uh we sometime yearly. Two or three time we have some festival. And all the Tibetan people start to get together. There you can see all your friends from India or the people from India.” (R10, female, 18-30, living with her partner, Asian origin).

So, through cultural activities they get to know people of their own background. The church and the mosque are also important places where newcomers of foreign origin can meet people. These places can be seen as bonding places, examples are the African church, the Polish church and so on. At these places people create friendships with people like themselves.

Hence, although newcomers of foreign origin do maintain friendship relations with people of other origins (including people of Belgian origin), their most important friends are mostly people born in the same country or area.

6.3 Living together with neighbours.

Daily contact

The contact with neighbours mostly limits itself to greeting each other and small talk on the street. People greet their direct neighbours or smile at people who they know are from the neighbourhood. A lot of interviewees describe the relationship as neighbourly or friendly, without visiting each other (often).

“We are still neighbours. It is not like they are my friends. But I feel comfortable with it, with the ones I know.” (R5, female, 31-45, living alone, Belgian origin)

These little conversations are experienced as positive. People feel comfortable with the idea that they know their neighbours and this can also contribute to the fact that people have the idea that their neighbours can be trusted. Related to ethno-cultural diversity people appreciate the fact that neighbours sometimes share food, mostly based in the context of religious festivals. This is an important contact moment between neighbours of different origins and is a bridging activity.

Some interviewees mention that the daily contact with their neighbours is good, but they find it difficult to get contact that goes beyond saying ‘hi’. They do not manage to transform the ‘weak ties’ into ‘strong ties’. When residents do maintain ‘strong ties’ with neighbours it is with neighbours of the same origin and/or the same class position. R44 describes how the diversity influences the daily contact in the neighbourhood.

“I can say, it is much easier to make contact, on the one hand. And on the other hand I think, sometimes it is harder to make contact. But that is why it is challenging. When you go to a shop, it is very easy to, uhhm, maybe in specific a superficial way, [there is] much faster really contact. People talk a lot easier. [...] But on the other hand, euh, to enter into closer contact and build friendship relations with people of different cultures here is a lot harder.” (R44, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, West-European origin).

Although a lot of interviewees do have contact with their neighbours, some interviewees do not have any contact.

“I have little contact with them. I leave the people alone, and I hope they also leave me alone.” (R29, male, 31-45, living alone, Middle-eastern origin)

“We [are] all like stranger coming to live in the same street, so this way we do not have a good connection to each other and we just go to work and we come back home. Something like that. So that is why we do not know really well about our neighbourhood.” (R10, female, 18-30, living with her partner, Asian origin)

Another interviewee states the same as R10 and is very negative about neighbourhood diversity. To avoid problems it is better to just leave each other alone, he argues.

Mutual support: borrow tools, bring food

Although a lot of people do not have close connections with their neighbours they do experience some kind of support. Often mentioned forms of support are borrowing tools and watering the plants while the neighbours are on holiday. This first type of support is especially present in neighbourhoods where there is an inflow of young families who all renovate their house.

“I know that contact details and appraisals of contractors are exchanged in this street, which is related to the type of house. It is often about specific things. [...] There came to live new people in the street, a bit older, who wanted to renovate the house and they immediately let us in to have a look [...] they rang the door and asked ‘who did your roof?’, so. I say, it is a mini-culture.” (R15, female, 31-45, living with her sister, Belgian origin)

Another form of support is helping older people with their groceries and share food, for example with the feast of breaking the fast. Non-Islamic people mention this. Another interviewee had a relationship with a Moroccan man and she mentioned that the bonds with her Moroccan and Islamic neighbours changed since she has an Islamic boyfriend.

“Or, when I did not have a relation yet, I always got [...] those cookies. And, several times I got some food, because they find, oei, there is some pork or something like that in it, and then they gave it to me. [...] but they don’t do it anymore. But now, I get also always, well not me, but my boyfriend, he gets also always that meat, lamb now, with the feast of the sacrifice of some people.” (R13, female, 31-45, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

These small and sometimes practical forms of courtesy or support do not develop into other forms of support, like helping each other with personal matters. Most interviewees mention that they do not ask for personal support, but they think that their neighbours would help if they do, without distinguishing between ethnic, class, age or other groups.

Social control

Some people do not want to have contact with their neighbours and appreciate that they are not obliged to do so. People who do chat with their neighbours appreciate the anonymity, which is mostly connected to city life.

“Here, you can be pretty anonymous. While over there [where I was born] [...] it has always been that everybody knew me and I never knew anybody [...] When you live in such a small village, it is annoying that you don’t know anybody. While here, you just don’t know anybody, it is not annoying.” (R13, female, 31-45, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

This anonymity is sometimes related with limited social control. One of the interviewees moved from a place with a lot of social control deriving from her family in law, because she and her Moroccan husband did not like this. In the present neighbourhood there is still some social control, but there is a clear difference, because they are no longer part of the Moroccan community and do not have to care tremendously about what people think about them.

“For example, there are a lot of Moroccan families living near us, and uhh. Yes it is... Yes, it is a group actually. I don’t say that everyone knows everyone, but the most go to the school here and they are a lot on the street together. And then, people watch more how you live. Yes, like such a control uhh. It is like, yes, I just find that negative.” (R23, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, South-American origin)

One other interviewee also mentions this form of social control among the Islamic Moroccan community. She is concerned about this.

“Or for example a girl who doesn’t want to wear a headscarf, must accept a lot of critique and comments. And the sad thing is that they leave the neighbourhood. Exactly because they want to escape the social control. As a result that pattern will continue, because everybody who is different leaves.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

This form of social control, where people cannot behave like they want, is seen as negative and is connected with the dominance of one ethnic group. It may be the result of the contradiction between the liberties allowed by the host society and the obligations coming from the norms of a migrant community. We did not find this form of social control among Belgian residents. However, like R13 mentioned, she appreciates the city because she does not like the social control within a village, which is almost only populated by people of Belgian origin.

A milder form of social control is experienced as positive, people refer to a village mentality where you watch each other’s houses and know who is living next to you without interfering in each other’s lives. Interviewees describe this as a positive form of social control, which is experienced over groups, while the strict social control is only experienced within groups.

“I for myself call it a Turkish-Bulgarian village in Antwerp. It is that kind of neighbourhood uhh, everyone knows everyone. So there is a positive kind of social control. [...] When someone doesn’t open its curtains for three days, people start to knock the door to check if everything is ok.” (R4, male, 46-60, Belgian origin)

Street parties, some groups participate hardly

One way to improve the social cohesion are the street activities, supported by the municipal service Opsinjoren, like a barbeque, playing street or a drink.. Several interviewees live in a street with Opsinjoren activities and are very positive about it. Through Opsinjoren neighbours have more contact and it helps them to get to know each other better. Although everyone is positive about this initiative, there is one difficulty, namely that Moroccan and Turkish people hardly participate. The people who organise these events are mostly people of Belgian origin. Some of the interviewees became frustrated and it bothers them that some groups do not participate (see also De Coster, 2015). In this way, the differences between groups become more visible in these activities.

“But when there is a party, regrettably ubh... We have a Russian in the street, we have those Bolivians, you name it. They all participate, except for the Turkish and Moroccans. But what we have is, when it is ‘Neighbours day’ for example, they also don’t come. But, they come with a tray with mint tea, and and, glasses and so on. They bring something, but they do not stay.” (R2, female, 61-75, Belgian origin)

Neighbours often link the non-participation to the Islamic faith of Moroccan and Turkish people. Therefore a lot of streets offer halal food and sometimes separate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. But even then the participation of Moroccan people is very limited. Instead of getting frustrated some people ask themselves whether it is problematic or not that these people do not participate.

“We invite them on our new year’s drink and also on feasts during that period and they won’t go. [...] Then we started thinking in the street like, maybe we have to start a conversation about that, over how it comes and... But on the other hand we think, yes maybe, it is also... Maybe it is also OK like this and everybody [has] his own thing. The fact that they do participate at the flea market is, we think, maybe that they [...] that they do like that and OK. [...] (silence) that we do not have to meet each other at all activities and that everybody can have their own thing for themselves. These are difficult themes eh?” (R44, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, West- European origin)

R44 wonders if it is problematic that some groups do not participate in all activities. At the same time participation is defined in different ways. Bringing tea, without sitting outside is by some organisers seen as ‘not participating’, while others experience this as ‘participating in their own way’. Because a lot of interviewees mention this difficulty the danger of these Opsinjoren activities is that they do draw boundaries between groups instead of overcome differences.

We did not interview residents who lived in a street with Opsinjoren activities and never participate in Opsinjoren. However, we spoke three residents who knew why others do not participate, apart from a lack of time. Firstly, people do not participate, because of peer pressure and cultural differences. R30 describes that her Moroccan neighbour did stay once, after insisting, so the next time, they asked her again to stay, but she did not.

“She said, “you have no idea how many months we have had to hear that, both me and my husband. That we were just sitting on the street.” So people asked her husband, because she was sitting on the street, at a table with other men who were not her husband. That she sat at a table where alcohol was served. And most outstanding of all, they drink alcohol themselves, the man, occasionally, in a coke glass, red wine in a coke glass, so that nobody can see. But their wife? No. That is insuperable. And that is why I say like for me, I find that problematic. That they place themselves outside our society through this.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

R30 has the idea that this behaviour is caused by the fact that people in her street start to interpret their religion more strict and is worried about this. According to her, this was initiated by one Mosque. One of the reasons that people do not participate can be peer pressure and strict interpretation of the Islam.

Secondly, people do not participate because they do not feel comfortable. They do not know anybody, do not speak the language and are not used to these kinds of street parties in their culture. One of the interviewees experiences this with her husband, who is not from Belgian nor Moroccan origin.

“With mixed couples, with me also, it is... Yes, it is also related to the Dutch language. He comes, when his friend who lives some houses further, well friend, his buddy of some houses further, also a French speaking African, than he will come. Or when I say, well come on, don't you come for a chat. Than he does, but he still feels a little outside..., or he finds it perhaps a bit weird, coming outside organised...” (R33, female, 46-60, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

This can be seen as a cultural difference. R33 says that her husband find it weird to come outside on the street, because he is not used to this. R34 of Moroccan origin mentions the same.

“The street festivity, that is something that. In Morocco it would not be organised. And even if it would be organised, than it would only attract men and teenagers. Children, guys, teenagers and men (...) You have to explain a lot, that is not spontaneous.” (R34, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin)

The third reason mentioned why people do not participate is that they are too busy with family matters. R34 is of Moroccan origin and she does not want to participate in the neighbourhood activities and explains that this is partly because she has to take care of her family, and she does not want to be obliged to do things in the neighbourhood. So, it has nothing to do with halal food, alcohol being served or the fact that men and women are sitting at the same table, but to the fact that she (and with her, a lot of people of Moroccan origin) are expected to do a lot for their family. Therefore, when she is home, she does not want to invest in neighbour relations, because she already has to invest a lot of time in family relations.

6.4 Conclusions

The social networks of ‘strong ties’ of most inhabitants living in a diverse neighbourhood in Antwerp are rather homogeneous. Friends mostly have the same ethnic background and class position. The people who were raised in a diverse neighbourhood do also have a homogeneous network. Despite these homogeneous social networks, the relations with the neighbours with different ethnic backgrounds and class positions are mostly good. People appreciate the small talks on the street and the mutual support. Diversity does not impede these ‘weak ties’, like Van Eijk (2012) also shows in her research. So, living in diversity is not problematic when people like the small contacts or prefer not to have any contact. However, some residents would like to establish ‘strong ties’ with their neighbours and mention that it is harder to create these with neighbours who are different and that it is easiest to maintain strong ties with similar neighbours.

With regard to social control, most people appreciate some social control, where people watch each other's children and that people know who is living next to them. This form of social control is also present in diverse streets and takes places across group boundaries. Some residents, however, experience negative social control. This can take place when there is one dominant ethnic-cultural group in the street and we only heard about negative social control within a group. A strong group formation is therefore not always positive, because it creates the power to exclude people who are different (see Elias and Scotson, 2008/1965). Group boundaries also become visible in the participation in the Opsinoren activities. Although, there are several groups who do not participate in these activities, non-participating is by the organisers linked with being Muslim.

To conclude, people who live in a diverse neighbourhood mostly have loose and ‘light’ contacts with their neighbours, they maintain good neighbour relations (van Eijk, 2012). However, strong ties between neighbours almost only exist between people who have the same class position and/or ethnic background.

7. Social mobility

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the question to which extent people think that the neighbourhood influences their social mobility. We firstly describe how living in the neighbourhood influences the social mobility of the interviewees. We start with a description of the actual social mobility of the interviewees and how living in the neighbourhood influences this. We did not find any evidence that the reputation of the neighbourhood hinders people in their social mobility, for example in finding a job (cfr. Wacquant, 2008). In the next part we focus on the perceived influence of the neighbourhood on social mobility. We found that most interviewees do not feel that the neighbourhood either helps or hinders them directly from taking advantages in life, but some interviewees mention how living in a diverse neighbourhood is an asset for them. The most mentioned asset is that people become open-minded and that living in diversity helps to build tolerance, which is also found in earlier research (Talen, 2010).

In the second section we address the question to which extent being raised in a hyper-diverse neighbourhood affects interviewees' children's chances in life. That is where the effect of the neighbourhood becomes clearer. We give specific attention to the choice of school. Earlier research shows that schools in mixed neighbourhoods not always represent the population living in the neighbourhood, because higher class people often perceive the neighbourhood school as a 'bad' school of low quality (Butler, 2003). The decision of these higher classes to send their children to a school outside the neighbourhood contributes to the segregation of schools.

7.2 Neighbourhood effects on interviewees' socioprofessional trajectories

Actual social mobility

During the interviews we asked residents about their current and former job to get a better understanding of their actual social mobility and the influence of the neighbourhood on this. None of the interviewees themselves mentioned that the neighbourhood influences their actual social mobility and none of the interviewees found their job with help of neighbours. Neither did people experience problems in finding a job or getting a mortgage, because of the bad reputation of the neighbourhood. On the contrary, interviewees feel that the central location of their dwelling helps them in finding a job, because they are well connected with public transport.

However, one interviewee mentions how living in a diverse neighbourhood can contribute to the social mobility of women of foreign origin. In most of the Moroccan families she knows the male is the only working person in the household and the wife is expected to take care of the children. While some women agree with this, others would like to work themselves to earn some money. For this last group, living in a diverse neighbourhood has an important advantage.

"If the woman works, it is secretly. They sometime come and ask: 'Don't you know anywhere where I would...? Do you know nobody who is searching for a cleaner? But you can certainly not tell other Moroccan people that I am searching for a job.'" (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

Because of the strong social control within the community R30 is not allowed to tell others that someone is looking for a job. On the one hand, living in the neighbourhood hinders these women in their social mobility, because of the strict social control. On the other hand, because of the diversity in the neighbourhood and the presence of people who are not part of the Moroccan community, these women are able to improve their situation. They can ask neighbours of other origin about job opportunities and by working in an informal economy where the Moroccan

community is not part of, they are able to work while it remains invisible for the Moroccan community.

Two other examples show to which extent the strict social control within the neighbourhood can hinder social mobility. R30 for example noticed also that one of her neighbours moved out to be able to improve his social position.

“[He] studies law, first year. And he had lived in the street for years. They moved 5 years ago and I never realized why they left. And now he told me [...] “we moved 5 or 7 years ago. I begged my mom to leave the neighbourhood because”, yes, he said “I could barely go to the bakery. I was continually bullied [...] because I was studying. Because I did not want to participate in the average life, because I wanted to live differently. And I begged my parents to leave. And I’m still every day glad that we did that.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin).

The person described that he had to move, because the social control hindered his social mobility. One other interviewee also referred to the strong sense of community within the Moroccan community, which can hold people back from taking initiatives and building diverse networks. R51 explains that he climbed the social ladder but believes that a lot of other people of North-African origin do not do that. Hence, the fact that he succeeds to improve his position was despite of, living in this neighbourhood and it did not help him.

“I was able to approach the society differently. Because those people, I think that they always stay like within their structure, their mode of life and that they... There is just (silence) a lack of (long silence), a lack of (silence). Of (long silence). Yes I think that these people actually ... That they are OK with it and that they do not want to change it. Maybe also a lack of ambition or so, but. (silence). Because the people my age now for example, are, yes, mostly married. Most are already married. Have children. And still live in the same neighbourhood as their parents. And yes, do the same job as their parents.” (R51, male, 18-30, living with his parents, North-African origin).

So, the influence of the neighbourhood on social mobility is mostly through the way local social networks shape ambitions and expectations of life. As R51 explains, it is the combination of the strong sense of community and living in the same neighbourhood, which creates low aspirations, so people do not feel urged to change their social position.

Perceived influence on social mobility

To get a better understanding of the perceived influence of the neighbourhood on social mobility we asked interviewees to which extent living in the neighbourhood helps or hinders them from taking advantages in life. In general most interviewees do not perceive any influence of the neighbourhood on their social mobility. One interviewee was an exception and said that living in this neighbourhood had a bad influence on his health and this might affect his social mobility.

“It’s going to destroy me once. [...] For me it is not good in all aspects. For my health, my mental health, physical. I think that here, every balanced person, every wise, balanced person, in this neighbourhood right, will become crazy, crazy. [...] It is the bustle, the violence, the pollution. [...] When you go to a rich white neighbourhood, the streets are clean. [...] It is for two reasons. It is good maintained, because the bourgeoisie lives there. And that bourgeoisie doesn’t pollute it.” (R29, male, 31-45, living alone, Middle-Eastern origin).

People who say that they believe that living in the neighbourhood helps often refer to the idea that living in a diverse neighbourhood makes people more open and tolerant.

“Because you live in a city with people of all kind of different cultures together. Yes, you soon become more open-minded for that, that you dare to look wider or more tolerant. Well, it can go in two directions, you can also become really negative.” (R5, female, 31-45, living alone, Belgian origin).

This is seen as an advantage, because the world is becoming more diverse. Residents of diverse neighbourhoods already know how to deal with cultural differences and are more open, while people living on the countryside can be afraid of diversity.

“I have worked for a long time in Vremde [a village]. That is different. Everyone has his own farm or posh house. You use the car to go to the bakery and that seems or feels a bit safer and neater. Yes, they found it adventurous to come to here. That you cannot find a parking or that there are people who come stand close to you. That you do not understand a lot [of languages] or that you get confronted with different frameworks.” (R44, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, West-European origin).

Interviewees do not only refer to ethno-cultural diversity, but also to socio-economic diversity and class differences.

“It broadens my view about how other people can live and that it does not always have to be house, garden, tree, middle-class or so. It makes me less naïve about this world.” (R25, female, 31-45, living with her partner and child, Belgian origin).

7.3 Raising children in a diverse neighbourhood

When asked about the impact of the neighbourhood on the social mobility chances of their children, interviewees perceived more effects. Although they expect their children to benefit from diversity in the neighbourhood, many interviewees voiced their doubts and concerns whether or not diversity at school is beneficial for their children. Some interviewees were also worried about the impact of the presence of crime on their children.

As mentioned in the previous section interviewees argue that living in a diverse neighbourhood keeps them open-minded and that they learn how to deal with different cultures. This argument is also used for children. Interviewees found this important, because ‘diversity is reality’.

“I think that the [my children] will have an advantage in society, which will be much more diverse. [...] Diversity is self-evident for them. [...] Knowing that others organise their lives in different ways. Learning a bit how to deal with differences and also learn to overcome these differences. The children also become – yes, how to say- streetwise.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin).

Living in the city, however, is not always positive for raising children because of the presence of crime. When children are young, they might get confronted with criminality and people do not want their children to think that this is normal.

“There are two families in this street were the police comes regularly. Including invade in the middle of the night with a special intervention squadron. [...] That is not about, about small drugs dealing, it is about serious business. Uhm, yes, the children hear that, they know it. [...] You have to take care that they are still... that their idea of the world is not too much affected. [...] They do not have to find it self-evident what is happening. They are still little now, but within 10 years, it will really depend on how susceptible they are.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin).

This difficulty is not connected with diversity, but with city life. Another interviewee is concerned about youth hanging on the street and is afraid that her sons will get confronted with criminality.

“Because, they [my children] become very easy affected by the youngsters, in my opinion. Now they are in puberty they are very sensitive. Yes and then, when the youngsters from the streets, when they ask something or do something, they listen very easily. But they don’t listen to their parents anymore. I regret that. [...] I am afraid that they go the wrong direction. [...] There is a youngster who sits on the streets daily and when my son... My son is not allowed to go outside every day, but then, they start to ring the bell constantly.” (R50, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, North-African origin).

A last important aspect mentioned in a lot of interviews is the difficulty to find a good school. Diversity is seen as an important criterion. As we mentioned in chapter 3, people have a specific idea about the required diversity for a good school. The perfect mix is 50 percent children of Belgian origin and 50 percent children of other origins. Moreover, a school with (almost) only children of Belgian origin is less problematized than a school with (almost) only people of foreign origin.

“I am going to change schools. [...] because it is yet too diverse. Too many Muslim children (sigh). And we are surprised ourselves, because we chose that school also to contribute to the diversity of the school. But we thought that our daughter would have more white children in the class, and they are with two [white children] on 20, 25 children who do not speak Dutch. [...] We were really shocked about the class, about the group, about the children who did not go to childcare, do not speak Dutch and are still wearing a diaper. It is a totally different way of raising children. [...] We really regret it, but we are afraid that when we keep her there it will influence her development. [...]. She is now registered [and we] got a phone call from the ‘Kleine Wereldburger’, a Steinerschool, at the Krugerpark, which is very white. Very hip and alternative. [...] I really like that school, but I have my reservations like, yeah, it is extreme the other way around.” (R44, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, West-European origin).

R44 mentions a lot of arguments that other parents with white children, mostly of Belgian origin, also use. Her first argument is that the school is too diverse, but then she also mentioned a lack of diversity, because the majority are non-white Muslim children. The argument that people do not want their child to be the only white person in class is enough for most people not to choose a ‘concentration’ school as R27 explains.

“I don’t want my daughter to feel like a foreigner in her own country. [...] And I talked about it with a lot of people and there was a story of another women, her son was in the same situation and once he came home and said ‘Mom, I want to be brown, not white.’” (R27, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin).

Another reason why a lot of parents prefer a school with Belgian children is that they are afraid that the level of education is lower in concentration schools because children do not speak the Dutch language. Some succeed to find a mixed school and some white parents chose a predominantly white school. Those parents often mention that they regret the fact that the school is predominantly white, but that they chose the school because of the teaching method.

The idea that concentration schools are bad schools does not only circulate amongst white parents. Most people of other origins also prefer a mixed school or even a predominantly white school over a concentration school, equally using the argument of the quality of the school.

“A lot of people ask me, ‘why do you bring your children to school over there?’ Here it is the mix and the people I see in the morning. [...] It is not really a mix anymore, not here. In Deurne Noord it is really like... They used to call that 100% schools.” (R23, female, 31-35, living with her partner and children, South-American origin)

Some interviewees mention problems they experience at a school with predominantly children of foreign origin. One of the interviewees wanted to contribute to the diversity in schools and started a project to stimulate parents of Belgian origin to register their children in a concentration school together, so that their child would not be the only white child. She did the same herself.

“She [my daughter] has one very good friend at the moment, a Moroccan girl, very nice family. It is like her soulmate. But I see that my son for example, there are five children of Belgian origin in his class, that makes it much easier. [...] On the first day at school he was very unhappy. He came home with the message that his best friend of the past years also said ‘you can’t be my friend anymore, because you are not a Muslim.’ I discussed it with the mother and they worked on it at school and so on. So, it is not a big thing anymore at the moment, but you can feel that he... This is the first year that he is mostly attracted to the Belgian children. [...] That he maybe lost his trust a bit. [...] We never questioned whether we made right decision to do so. But it is not always the easiest choice, I am absolutely convinced about that, yes.” (R30, female, 31-45, living with her partner and children, Belgian origin)

Friendships between different ethnic or religious groups do not seem to be self-evident, also not for children. R30 and R27 already showed this and another interviewee also experienced that children can be aware of ethnic differences and draw boundaries between groups.

“My child is very often beaten. So we also contacted the parents two-three times, because four-five Moroccans grasped him and then really pushed him to the ground. My little child is on the ground and they pull more and more. They can’t stop at that moment. Then, my little child comes home and tells me ‘Yes, they beat me because I am a Kosovar.” (R38, female, 18-30, living with her partner and children, South-East European origin).

As mentioned before, most parents of foreign origin also do not prefer a concentration school for their children. However, children are not on all schools allowed to wear a headscarf. One parent was therefore forced to change schools and feels bitter about the restrictive view on diversity used at the school of her daughter.

“My daughter says ‘I want to wear a headscarf. I was like, do whatever you want, if that makes you happy do it. And the very first day [...] my husband got a phone call ‘what’s wrong, is your wife doing well.’ What did they think? [Name interviewee] died’, that could be ‘and [name daughter] has to wear a headscarf now, because of her religion.’ And we thought, she is just experimenting. ‘Last year she went to school with a Spanish dress and that was OK for you’ [...] For me, this is diversity. [...] I don’t like hypocrite diversity. As, look, ‘this is diversity, but when you don’t fit in, you are not welcome anymore.’ [...] Or you are diverse and start to communicate about it and only when you see it is harmful (...) you can ban it. [...] And the IQRA school was not on my list at all. [...] A friend said, as a joke, the IQRA school is open. Your daughter can wear a headscarf over there. [...] The only thing [name daughter] heard is headscarf. She said, ‘mum you can register me there.’ [...] And [now my daughter is on that school] she comes home sometimes with ideas that shock me. And in first instance I wanted to run away [...] I have to give it a change. It could be that I take my daughter when I will think like, oeh, too conservative.” (R34, female, 31-45, living with her partner and child, North-African origin)

Because her daughter wanted to wear a headscarf, she was forced to move from a mixed school to a school with almost 100% Muslim children. She feels that not all expressions of diversity are accepted. Her mother is concerned, because her daughter is confronted with conservative Islamic ideas, which might limit her social mobility.

7.4 Conclusions

Living in diversity can contribute to social mobility, mainly because it can broaden your view and helps you to become open-minded. This is especially seen as an effort because the world is becoming more diverse. However, the neighbourhood can also have a negative effect on the social mobility. Social networks within the neighbourhood can shape ambitions and expectations in life. This might result in the fact that people do not feel urged to improve their social position.

When asked about the impact of the neighbourhood on the social mobility chances of their children, interviewed perceived more direct effects. For the social mobility of children diversity can also help to broaden their view, but at school most people agree that Belgian children should be part of the diversity. When there are almost no Belgian children at school, people of Belgian and foreign origin think that the school is of bad quality. People who did send their child(ren) to a school with a majority of people of other origins experienced that children already draw boundaries, based on ethnicity or religion. Hence, being confronted with diversity from a young age is not enough to become open-minded. On the one hand, interviewees say it is important that children learn how to deal with diversity, but in practice people mention a range of negative experiences with diversity.

8. Perceptions of public policies and initiatives

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter we describe first what residents know about the policy. In 2013 Flemish nationalist party, the N-VA came into power in Antwerp. This was an historical outcome of the elections, since it is the first time in decades that the municipal government is not led by social-democrats anymore. To which extent do people refer to this change during the interviews and do people think that diversity is an issue? We will also refer to the question to which extent people are aware of the governance initiatives we studied in the previous phase of this research project (see Saeys et al., 2014) Secondly, we describe what people want in their neighbourhood. Do different groups want different things?

8.2 Perception and evaluation of existing policies and initiatives: what do residents know?

Most interviewees are not aware of the policies for and in their neighbourhood. Some know about the city's policies, but this is mostly limited to perceptions of the current city council and mayor. People who are in general positive about diversity, are in general negative about the current mayor. Some interviewees also refer to the fact that the mayor immediately removed the municipal slogan 'The city belongs to everyone'. They are afraid that the current municipal government draws boundaries between groups.

"I'm afraid that they are going for a polarisation in intercultural relations." (R15, female, 31-45, living with her sister, Belgian origin)

When people know about the policy in the neighbourhood they mostly refer to two things, first changes in the infrastructure, like the construction of Park Spoor Noord and the construction of other public spaces and second, the 'war on drugs'.

Firstly, talking about the creation of public places, most people refer to the previous social-democratic mayor and some have the idea that the current mayor does not do anything to improve the public space. Another interviewee had the feeling that this is in general how things work in Belgium regarding planning: people discuss a lot, but nothing happens.

"They wanted to build a park here. But the park still isn't there and the plans are already put aside. They wanted to make a low-traffic street, here around the square, but that also didn't happen. (...) All the time there are things that... that they want to improve it. But it doesn't happen." (R6, female, 31-45, living alone, West-European origin)

Secondly, people refer to the 'war on drugs'. Some argue that the previous mayor started this while others associate this repressive policy with the current mayor. Especially, people who directly experience problems with drugs are positive about this policy.

"R1: But he [the previous mayor] started to clean up. [...] It was just terrible. They were standing here at the corner of the street clearly intoxicated by drugs, dealing and..."

R2: there were needles and silver paper everywhere" (R26, couple, 46-60, West-European origin)

Apart from the city's policy we also asked the interviewees about their awareness of several governance initiatives. Almost all interviewees know the initiative Opsinjoren and people start to talk about it, even before the topic came up in the interview. Sometimes people describe the

activities, but are not aware that these are connected with ‘Opsinjoren’. As mentioned in chapter 6 the main critique on this initiative is that not all ethnic groups participate. The head of the department of Opsinjoren is also aware of this critique and the organisations tries to attract a more diverse group of people (Saeys et al., 2014). However, there is an important difference in the perception why some groups do not participate. While most residents connect this non-participation with ethno-religious characteristics, the department of Opsinjoren use socio-economic status as an explanation (Saeys et al., 2014). The reasons why people do not participate have important implications for the changes that are necessary to include all neighbours. For example, if people do not participate at a street barbeque because they do not have enough money, it is important to keep the costs low, while if people do not participate because of their religion, you have to make sure that there is food available that people of different religions can eat. This discrepancy can be problematic when the department offers solutions, which focus on the idea that people do not participate because of their social status, while it has in reality to do with religion or the other way around. The contact between the department of Opsinjoren and the neighbours who organise the festivities is therefore very important if they want to success to include all resident.

The other initiative that almost everyone knows is the street festival BorgerRio. People are very positive about this initiative, because it succeeds to bring all kinds of different groups together. During the festival everyone is out on the streets and people experience the festival as very diverse.

Other initiatives which are often recognized are the language activities, especially Taal*ooR, although people confuse different language activities. Residents do find these kinds of initiatives very important; either because they want to learn the Dutch language or because they believe it is important that everyone learns the language. However, it is not easy to organise these activities. One interviewee mentioned that the knowledge about the Dutch language among the participants differed too much. The coordinator of the project on one location stresses this same problem and tries to overcome this by working with different groups with different levels of language proficiency (Saeys et al., 2014). However, this does not solve the problem, because in some groups the knowledge of the Dutch language among the participants still differs too much. Another problem which the project faces is the lack of volunteers (Saeys et al., 2014). One of the interviewees was asked to volunteer in the project as a moderator. She refused to do this, because in her opinion you need professionals to do this.

*“Language*eaR, they asked me for that. [...] to moderate a women’s group, but who know nothing [about the Dutch language] and then start a conversation. I think that it is something for professionals. [...] I found myself not capable to do that.”* (R18, female, 61-75, living with her partner, Belgian origin)

Hence, it is not easy to find volunteers who are and feel capable to volunteer in this project. To overcome this problem the organisation offers schooling opportunities for the volunteers who moderate sessions. The last problem of this initiative was mentioned by a girl who wanted to practice her language skills, but was not aware of the existence of projects like Taal*ooR. The interviewees did not mention the other initiatives we studied earlier (see Saeys et al., 2014).

8.3 Policy priorities proposed by interviewees: what do residents want?

In general, interviewees do not refer to diversity, with the exception of the ones who say that the inflow of immigrants needs to be stopped. The only interviewees, who refer to this, are the same as the ones who are in general negative about the amount of people of foreign origin living in their neighbourhood.

“Yes, the inflow of newcomers, actually it has to stop. (silence) It is also not possible to put more people in a room than the amount of square meter that is available.” (R29, male, 31-45, living alone, Middle- Eastern origin).

However, most residents just want a clean, green and quiet neighbourhood to live in. Also road safety is a very important policy priority mentioned by different groups. The current city council is seen as a council who gives priority to the car, while they feel cyclists should get priority on the road.

“There is a big street. But there is no cycle path at all. And sometimes if I go by cycle I really need to be careful.” (R10, female, 18-30, living with her partner, Asian origin)

One of the interviewees is an active member of the action group ‘trage zondag’, meaning ‘slow Sunday’, which is committed to road safety. She knows that almost all her neighbours are concerned about this. However, she also has the idea that the white middle class is more willing to do something concerning this problem than other groups. She experienced this when she helped to organise a manifestation.

“And then they said, “yes, we are really going to participate and we are also going to say it to our family, because it is indeed terrible in the street.” But when the time comes, yes, it is again the people of Belgian origin who are there. [...] Because even then the poorer Belgians in the area of the Stuivenbergplein, [they are also like], “wow, great, we are really annoyed and it is not safe and for our children to let them go to the park.” So, they share that opinion, but they are not there [at the manifestation]. Yes, exactly maybe the average, the middle class, white middle class people.” (R36, female, 31-45, Belgian origin)

So, although road safety is important for the whole neighbourhood, the people who campaign actively against it, are mostly white middle class people.

This also seems the case for another policy priority, namely green space. A lot of interviewees of different class positions and ethnic background said that they wanted more green space. ‘Park Spoor Oost’ and ‘Ringland’ are often mentioned as good ideas to increase the amount of green spaces in the city. ‘Ringland’ is the name for the proposal of a civil society organisation to fully cover the ringway of Antwerp, which separates Deurne from the city centre. This proposal has quickly become very popular. At many windows of houses in the city you can find posters with the slogan ‘We want Ringland’. One of the ideas of Ringland is to create a park on the top of the ringway, which is often mentioned in the interviews. Although a diverse group of people mention this, we only saw the poster at the houses of white middle class interviewees.

8.4 Conclusions

Most interviewees are not aware of the city’s policies for and in the neighbourhood. Policies that they do know about are mostly decisions that affect them directly or that are known as key priorities of the city council, like the ‘war on drugs’. A lot of interviewees have an opinion about the current municipal council, but they do not know exactly what the city council does for their neighbourhood. Residents know a little more about the policies for the city, but the knowledge remains very vague and generic. Some governance initiatives, however, are well known and people underline the importance of initiatives like Opsinjoren and BorgerRio. Opsinjoren is well known because almost all interviewees know someone who lives in a street with Opsinjoren activities or live themselves in a street with these activities. BorgerRio is a big street festival that takes place each year with a lot of media attention and therefore this is also well known.

Themes that should become policy priorities according to interviewees are road safety and the lack of green space. Talking about policy priorities, residents mostly refer to nuisance or problems which they experience (almost) daily. Different themes are addressed by different groups and do not depend on ethnicity, class, age or any other category. However, the people who actively mobilise to influence urban policies around these themes mostly belong to the white middle class.

9. Conclusion

In this report we showed how residents of hyper-diverse neighbourhoods experience living in hyper-diversity. Contrary to the dominant idea in the literature diversity is not an important motive for gentrifiers to move to the current neighbourhood. Also other residents of Belgian origin do not mention diversity as a primary motive to move there. Low housing prices and location are much more important. Most people of foreign origin, however, do find it important not to live in a homogeneous white neighbourhood, because they do not want to stand out. At the same time, this group is also more critical about the presence of foreigners, because it hinders them for example in practicing their language skills.

Residents of Belgian origin are in general positive about diversity, but a lot of them live in rather homogeneous Belgian parts of the neighbourhood and can choose when or whether they want to be confronted with diversity. The diversity of shops is seen as a nice contribution of the presence of people of foreign origin. In this sense diversity is ‘consumed’ by many residents. Most long-term residents had difficulties with the inflow of migrants in the beginning, but got used to it in the meanwhile.

Although most interviewees want to have contact with people of different ethnic origins or class backgrounds, places like cafes and restaurants are divided along these lines, with the exception of public places. However, within the parks, some people still experience segregation among class and ethnic lines and contact between the different groups in public space is rather limited.

Also in the social life of the neighbourhood in general, people experience a divide along class and ethnic lines. The relations with neighbours of all different backgrounds are in general good. However, strong relations with neighbours almost only exist between people of the same ethnic origin and/or class position. Hence, social cohesion in diverse neighbourhoods is in general good, but strong ties exist mostly between similar people. These strong ties can be perceived as negative when it leads to strict social control.

Contrary to the negative idea that diversity weakens social cohesion in the neighbourhood, we argue that the character of the social cohesion within the neighbourhood changed. Social cohesion in hyper-diverse neighbourhoods is based on ‘weak ties’ rather than on ‘strong ties’. Instead of problematizing the lack of ‘strong ties’, it might be better to focus on the opportunities these ‘weak ties’ offer to the creation of inclusive communities.

The perceived effects of living in a diverse neighbourhood on social mobility are rather limited. However, strong social control within the neighbourhood can limit social mobility. The presence of other groups can then be important to get the opportunity to improve the social position. In order to escape the social control people can ask neighbours of other origins for job opportunities within an informal economy that is unknown by people of their origin, so that they are able to work secretly. Living in diversity can also contribute to becoming open-minded and to learn how to deal with cultural differences. This diversity is for example seen to be important in schools. Children will learn how to deal with diversity, but it is important that Belgian children are part of the diversity. Parents (of Belgian and foreign origin) are concerned about the level of the school when a school (almost) only consists of children of families of foreign origin and non-Dutch language background and are afraid it will negatively affect the social mobility of their children. In this sense, living in a diverse neighbourhood can have a negative effect on social mobility.

When talking about the city’s policies, interviewees did not refer to diversity. In general, they are not aware of the city’s policies for and in the neighbourhood. Some governance initiatives,

however, are well known and people underline the importance of initiatives like Opsinjoren and BorgerRio.

Policy advice

Our findings have direct implications for social mix strategies. Our data clearly show that living in the same neighbourhood does not mean that people actually do maintain in-depth relationships with each other. Attracting middle-class people to a deprived neighbourhood, hence, does not directly affect the social mobility of people in a deprived position. The white middle class living in diverse areas mostly connect with other white middle class people and meet each other at homogeneous places. The policy implication is that if politicians want social mix to generate results, they need to invest in programs to bring together the diverse groups of the neighbourhood, as this clearly does not happen automatically. The main challenge for these programs is that they have to attract all different culture, socio-economic and religious groups.

However, most people do not strongly problematize the lack of 'strong ties' with neighbours of other origin (while still expressing some regret that they do not meet more people of other ethno-cultural backgrounds) and feel that they do maintain good relations with their neighbours. Policy-makers should hence clarify what exactly they aim for with social mix strategies and perhaps better value the 'light' forms of living in diversity, which do not require strong bonds but a capacity to deal with diversity as a self-evident reality.

A lack of diversity is, however, problematized concerning schools. Almost all interviewees prefer mixed schools over completely white or non-white schools. Schools seem a particularly important site to bring groups together, which requires public investment and close attention of educational professionals to how children manage (or not) to live in diversity. As we showed in this report, creating mixed schools is not enough to teach children how to deal with diversity. Discussion on how diversity can be expressed at school is to be preferred over top-down interventions to curtail certain expressions of diversity, as this may lead to segregation. An example of such a discussion point is the question whether public school should be allowed to prohibit children to wear religious symbols. At the moment, a lot of public schools do not allow religious symbols at schools. However, is the diversity of religions not also part of the diversity of the society and an important theme to discuss with children? To which extent should public schools be allowed to decide which aspects of diversity could be expressed? Without first having these fundamental discussions it is impossible to solve the current problem of segregation at schools.

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Appendix: List of the interviewed persons

	Age group	Gender	Position in Household	Income ⁸	Ethnic group
1	61-75	F	Living with her partner	L*	Belgian
2	61-75	F	Living with her partner	ML*	Belgian
3	31-45	M	Living with his partner	ML	West-African
4	46-60	M	Living alone	L*	Belgian
5	31-45	F	Living alone	ML*	Belgian
6	31-45	F	Living alone	MH*	West-European
7	18-30	F	Living alone	L	Middle-Eastern
8	31-45	F	Living with her partner	ML*	East-European
9	>75	M	Living alone	MH*	Belgian
10	18-30	F	Living with her partner	unknown	Asian
11	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	MH*	North-African
12	>75	F	Living alone	ML	Belgian
13	31-45	F	Living with her partner	MH*	Belgian
14	46-60	F	Living alone	unknown	Belgian
15	31-45	F	Living with friends/family	H	Belgian
16	46-60	M	Living alone	unknown	West-African
17	46-60	F	Living alone	ML	South-American
18	61-75	F	Living with her partner	H*	Belgian
19	31-45	M	Living alone	L	Middle-Eastern
20	46-60	M	Living alone/with his child	L	Belgian
21	31-45	M	Living alone	unknown	West-African
22	61-75	F	Living alone	unknown	Belgian
23	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	ML	South-American

⁸ The income groups are based on the net income each month. Low (L) < €980; Medium-low (ML) €981 – €1400; Medium-high (MH) €1401- €1950; high (H) > €1950.

24	61-75	M	Living alone/with his child	L	Belgian
25	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	MH	Belgian
26	46-60	F/M	Living together	M*	West-European
27	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	L	Belgian
28	31-45	M	Living with his partner and children	unknown	North-African
29	31-45	M	Living alone	MH	Middle-Eastern
30	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	H	Belgian
31	31-45	F	Living with her partner/ living with her partner and children	H	Belgian
32	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	ML	Belgian
33	46-60	F	Living with her partner and children	MH	Belgian
34	31-45	F	Living with her partner and child	ML	North-African
35	46-60	F	Living with her partner and children	MH	Belgian
36	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	H	Belgian
37	31-45	F	Living with her partner	H	Belgian
38	18-30	F	Living with her partner and children	L	South-east-European
39	31-45	M	Living with his partner and children	MH	West-African
40	46-60	F	Living with her child	MH	South-American
41	61-75	M/F	Living together	L	Belgian/African
42	31-45	M	Living with his partner and children	MH	Belgian
43	31-45	M	Living with his partner and children	H	Belgian

44	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	H	West-European
45	46-60	F	Living with her parents	MH	Belgian
46	18-30	F	Living alone	MH	Belgian
47	61-75	F	Living alone	ML	West-European
48	61-75	F/F	Living together	ML	Belgian
49	31-45	F	Living with her partner	H	Belgian
50	31-45	F	Living with her partner and children	L	North-African
51	18-30	M	Living with his parents	M*	North-African

*Income unknown, interviewees classified their income themselves.