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2   Neighbourhoods, cohesion and social safety

Jan Willem Duyvendak

2.1   The neighbourhood approach today

Introduction

More and more policy makers, institutions and organisations have discovered the neighbourhood as a field of intervention.[1] This proximity approach has raised expectations sky high in the Netherlands and other countries. Nearly all Dutch municipalities are developing area-oriented strategies to implement their social and safety policies. Policymakers emphasize the significance of location and place; in political debates the question of *who* requires social support or *who* has to be disciplined are being answered by looking at *where* things are happening and *where* disadvantaged groups are located (Duyvendak 1997a; Stouthuysen, Duyvendak, and Van der Graaf 2000). There are numerous, good arguments for promoting a neighbourhood approach to social problems. Especially in those areas where the composition of the population has changed rapidly due to an influx of immigrants, there is often a great need for interventions by "proximity professionals". In this article I discuss what kind of neighbourhood approach is appropriate in the case of public safety policies.

2.2   The meaning of the neighbourhood

2.2.1   *Site of disintegration or recovery?*

What are the expectations of the professionals working in the neighbourhood? The numerous plans for community development and for improving the public's feelings of safety highlight two related reasons for concentrating on the neighbourhood: first of all, because the local environment is the logical place for improving *social cohesion*; secondly, because the local environment seems the most obvious place for reducing various kinds of social problems, such as crime and

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[1]   Whereas Anglo-Saxons often speak of a community approach, I use the term neighborhood approach to emphasize that a territorial entity does not necessarily represent a "true" community. (In fact, a neighborhood is usually *not* a community in the traditional sense of the word.)

insecurity. "Going to the neighbourhood" gives (or seems to give) social professionals the opportunity to deal with these two sources of concern: the erosion of social ties and the resulting misbehaviour of certain groups. The neighbourhood is the place where most social problems are manifested: confrontations between indigenous and migrant groups, high levels of school dropout, both petty and serious crime, feelings of insecurity on the streets, pollution, and chaos. This is where social workers, teachers, police officers, real estate agents, district attorneys, probation officers, and district managers need to be. Besides substantive reasons, there is also a methodological reason for the district approach. The district or neighbourhood represents the scale at which professionals can cooperate effectively. The commonly promoted "integral" or "multi-agency" approach to social problems develops most naturally in small geographical areas. In other words, territorialisation of policy helps to avoid sectoral approaches (De Boer 2001; De Boer and Duyvendak 1998; 2000).

But if the neighbourhood is really a natural site for social integration, why does it require such a great deal of investment? Shouldn't the integration of people and groups evolve more spontaneously? Or is the neighbourhood not so much a natural site for integration, but one of the few remaining places of integration, now that families are breaking up and political parties are declining? Or perhaps it is the only site for integration of those who are unable to participate in the labour market?

Two competing (and incompatible) perspectives have emerged in recent discussions about the neighbourhood and the potential of the territorial or "proximity" approach (Duyvendak and Hortulanus 1999). According to one side of the debate, the neighbourhood is a breeding ground for *disintegration* where problems concentrate and fester (Junger-Tas 1997). According to the other side of the debate, the district is an attractive, hospitable, healthy, and even healing place that allows for the *recovery* of those who are socially weak or excluded (Commissie-Brinkman et al. 1998: 2002). This second image presents the neighbourhood as (potentially) safe, cohesive, and harmonious. The first image accentuates the insecure, disruptive, and unhealthy aspects of "disadvantaged districts," which threaten to become ghettos or *no go areas*.

The second perspective describes the neighbourhood in rather romantic terms. For psychiatric patients, elderly, mentally disabled, and other people, the neighbourhood is a more attractive living environment than a large institution in the forest or the dunes - or so the argument goes. It is even expected that the neighbourhood will have some kind of "healing" effect; in any case, it prevents hospitalisation. The argument assigns qualities to the neighbourhood (such as care, attention, social exchange, and neighbourliness) that the first perspective (focusing on the neighbourhood's lack of order, insecurity, and weak social ties) denies. From the latter viewpoint, neighbourhoods increasingly resemble jungles due to the growing number of drug addicts, illegal immigrants, and people with psychological problems. De-institutionalisation of psychiatric care produces an influx of problematic inhabitants into neighbourhoods where the proportion of disadvantaged residents is already large. In short, *the image of the neighbourhood as a site of recovery clashes with the image of the neighbourhood as a site of disintegration*.

This clash of two perspectives has only intensified in the last few years. Some describe the situation in problematic neighbourhoods as completely desperate; others, in sharp contrast, expect more from neighbourhoods than ever before. The growing attention to problems in neighbourhoods has raised the expectations regarding area-oriented strategies to unprecedented levels, at least among many politicians and social professionals. But is such optimism appropriate?

2.2.2 The meaning of place and location for residents

Does a neighbourhood approach resonate with the experiences of residents? What is the meaning of 'proximity' for them? What do all the satellite dishes attached to immigrants' houses say about their neighbourliness, for example? Aren't those indications that residents identify with something else than their own district, neighbourhood, or street? Don't these residents experience events abroad more directly than events nearby?

Yes and no. Recent studies show that watching Turkish television stations, for instance, does not imply that Dutch immigrants ignore their immediate living environment (see Duyvendak et al. 1999). People do not identify exclusively with one territory or the other, but can identify with various, changing, overlapping, complementary, or even contradictory places (Ten Heuvelhof 1996; Mohan and Stokke 2000). Focusing on the neighbourhood, therefore, can appeal to groups with foreign attachments, too. The multiplicity of their identifications, however, warns us against overestimating the significance of neighbourliness and emotional ties to the local community.

But this does not mean that we should underestimate these groups' local ties, and deny the relevance of the neighbourhood as sites for their integration. We should not make the mistake of arguing that the neighbourhood concept invokes an outdated ideology about the idealized village where people still lived together harmoniously (Van Doorn 1955; Van der Lans 1997). Although such a village is indeed a thing of the past, the local square and neighbourhood remain meaningful meeting places for a large number of residents. Some inhabit these spaces throughout the day (parents with young children, children going to school, the unemployed and disabled, the elderly), while others (including those who work at home) inhabit these spaces for a substantial part of the day (Blokland-Potters 1998a).

Even though the world of some local residents has expanded as a result of internet, satellite dishes, and so forth, the immediate living environment remains important - perhaps even more important, because it is frequently the only

territory that citizens with worldwide identities and loyalties share with others. This trend illustrates a well-known paradox: since people are no longer tied to a place through history or tradition, and since they have become more mobile, they take the identity of the location where they choose to live and work more seriously. In other words, in a *footloose society* the meaning of place and neighbourhood "identity" has grown.

Of course, this does not necessarily imply that local residents have once again started to value the warm feelings associated with a tight-knit community. To some extent and for some groups, relative anonymity is one of the charms of a city. Career-oriented professionals and nonconformists, for instance, often choose to live in urban areas because they want to be left alone. On the other hand, there is a great need to improve and strengthen local ties in neighbourhoods with an accumulation of social problems, because other ties with society have disappeared. The neighbourhood approach must be ambitious for those who are 'locked in' their neighbourhoods (Wacquant 1999), as well as realistic regarding the problems that can be solved by such a territorial approach. For in addition to the question whether a neighbourhood approach resonates with the residents' experiences of 'place', we must ask another important question: what kind of problems can be solved by the neighbourhood approach?

2.2.3   *Why a neighbourhood approach?*

Some politicians support the neighbourhood approach because they believe that since the problems occur within the neighbourhood, the causes of and solutions for these problems are also located within this area. Since social disadvantage tends to be concentrated in certain areas of major cities, many politicians assume that the location of problems is also the exclusive location of solutions. Numerous social scientists have demonstrated, however, that - at least in the Netherlands - problems *within* the neighbourhood are not necessarily *caused by* the neighbourhood (Deurloo, Musterd and Ostendorf 1997; Duyvendak and Schuyt 2000; Musterd and De Winter 1998; Van Kempen 1999). They argue that good employment policies, a strong welfare state, equal educational opportunities, and low levels of income inequality are more essential in preventing criminal behaviour than a neighbourhood approach. This may be true. Nevertheless, I suggest that the neighbourhood may be the place for tackling some of the *existing* problems of social safety, if we help improve the self-confidence of citizens and increase their ability to forge ties among themselves.

2.3   Residents

2.3.1   *Blaming the victim*

Looking for solutions to all kind of problems exclusively in the neighbourhood may produce explanations that *blame the victim*: by regarding neighbourhoods as unbalanced in their residential compositions, and by only applying this label to neighbourhoods with low incomes and high unemployment rates, we assign guilt to the "unbalanced" neighbourhood. By focusing exclusively on the neighbourhood for solutions, the victimized residents appear to be solely responsible for their plight. Moreover, the policy against "social imbalance" may sometimes succeed in meeting statistical targets (the population becomes more mixed since relatively prosperous people are attracted by diversifying the supply of houses in neighbourhoods with social housing), actually ameliorating the conditions of disadvantaged citizens and expanding their opportunities for social mobility do not occur very often (Blokland-Potters 1998b; Butler and Robson 2001; Duyvendak and Veldboer 2000; Galster and Zobel 1998; Lanz 2000).

2.3.2   *The distrusted…*

Public discourse regarding disadvantaged neighbourhoods is often very negative and full of distrust. It describes such a district as unbalanced or one-sided in its composition, by which is meant that it harbours many migrants and people with a low income. (But how *one-sided* are these multi-ethnic neighbourhoods with residents from various countries anyway?) Some plans for restructuring post-War neighbourhoods convey, at least in the Netherlands, a deep-seated distrust of the people living in them. An adequate proximity approach, in contrast, would have to assess how people relate to a neighbourhood, whether they want to keep living in it, and what their social networks are like.

2.3.3   *…and the overburdened residents*

But at the same time another perspective of residents in 'disadvantaged districts' is emerging. Professionals working within a proximity approach now often idealize citizens rather than distrust them. They embrace them in terms of empowerment and local social capital (Forrest and Kearns 2001). The neighbourhood approach even threatens to "overburden" these citizens: it holds residents accountable for a wide variety of tasks, including those for which municipalities or welfare professionals are usually responsible. The risk exists, however, that if social problems in "disadvantaged districts" persist, residents will

be blamed (or will blame themselves) for failing to come up with adequate solutions. Both the distrust and the overburdening of local citizens are part of the paradoxical image of the district as a site of disintegration, on the one hand, and as a site of recovery on the other.

2.4   Conclusion

Two positions predominate in discussions about the most effective and durable approach to "disadvantaged districts". Both these positions relate to the paradoxical image of the neighbourhood as a site of disintegration and recovery, and to the distrusted as well as overburdened residents. Proponents of the first perspective are what I call "jungle fighters". They criticize the soft treatment of problems in disadvantaged districts that has been practised up to now. They argue that since the accumulation of problems has made certain districts extremely unsafe, local authorities should be tough on crime and disperse - rather than tolerate - deviant individuals (cf. Boutellier 2001). They believe that the neighbourhoods themselves are the cause of criminal behaviour and public insecurity, and therefore propose rigorous physical and social changes in them.

Proponents of the second perspective disagree with this tough stance and its emphasis on dispersal and discipline. They believe that the neighbourhood approach can contribute to solving social safety problems. They want to turn the neighbourhood into a site of recovery, a place where various lifestyles can coexist if people develop shared manners of interaction. Although they know that external and structural factors, and not the neighbourhoods themselves, are the primary causes of crime, they recognize the neighbourhood approach's potential for dealing with social safety issues.

Figure 1 Two competing perspectives on the neighbourhood approach

I	II

a. image:
   neighbourhood as a site of
   disintegration
	a. image:
	   neighbourhood as a site of
	   recovery

b. attitude:
   to distrust residents
	b. attitude:
	   to overburden residents

c. approach:
   jungle fighting
	c. approach:
	   developing shared manners

The two perspectives share the idea that the 'disorganisation' of the neighbourhood is the main cause of problems with social safety and that reinforcing social networks will resolve many problems. However, they have

diametrically opposed views regarding the question of how to improve social networks in order to combat public insecurity in these neighbourhoods.

The 'jungle fighters' want to replace and mix people. These neighbourhoods have to be saved by new residents, by people from the 'outside world'. They will live decent lives and by doing so, they will improve the behaviour of the other residents. The 'underclass' has to be saved by the middle class.

The second view, on the contrary, has confidence in the capacities of the residents already living in those neighbourhoods. It is just a case of helping those people to develop shared manners that will facilitate their living together.

Since a neighbourhood approach can contribute to the improvement of social relations among residents (Duyvendak and Van der Graaf 2001) and since the quality of social relations is the main factor in the sense of social safety (Intomart 2000), the second approach may indeed be effective. However, this 'positive' neighbourhood approach should be modest in its goals because to tackle the structural causes of criminal behaviour, let alone other social problems, requires policies at a higher level than the neighbourhood.

The jungle fighters seem too optimistic about the kind of 'helpful' social relations that will develop between the new middle class citizens and the lower class residents of these neighbourhoods (Duyvendak 1998b; Kempen 1999; Kleinhans, Veldboer and Duyvendak 2000; Klerk 1996; Veldboer, Kleinhans and Duyvendak 2002; VROM-Raad 1999). Heterogeneous neighbourhoods are not communities. Not because the neighbourhood is no longer relevant for residents, but because the life worlds of residents vary widely and because their ties are often weak and instrumental.

The ambition to improve social relations should be based on these empirical facts. In that sense "social cohesion" is an overly loaded, sentimental, and lofty goal for living together. "Knowing and being known" should be the main goal. Perhaps we should speak of "cognitive" rather than "social" cohesion. Proximity politics should focus on getting to know each other - on becoming acquaintances, not necessarily best friends.

This goal is already quite ambitious. Knowing others and being known by others demands a great deal from those who normally lead separate lives. But although it is ambitious, such an objective is also the least. To increase the feelings of safety and "livability" in neighbourhoods requires that the quality of social relations meet certain minimum standards. To regain a sense of social safety, we don't have to be friends with each other, but we do need to get along.

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