

# THE TIME AND PLACE OF LOCAL SOCIAL LIFE

*AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LOCAL SOCIAL  
INTERACTIONAL MECHANISMS IN RELATION TO SOCIAL  
CAPITAL FORMATION*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Social capital is understood as those features of social relations that harness the capacity to derive benefit for the individual and/or the group that possesses it. In this ethnographic case study of a disadvantaged residential area in Groningen, The Netherlands, dynamics of local social structure and agency in relation to principal preconditions for social capital formation are explored through everyday social interactional mechanisms. In recent years the area was targeted by a social mixing strategy, introducing new renters with a higher socioeconomic status to the area. Results indicate that social interactional mechanisms can be highly ambiguous and sometimes conflicting between and among groups, harming preconditions for social capital such as familiarity and trust, which prevents the socially mixed to socially mingle. Structurally, social mixing potentially amounts to a spatially diluting process of problematized notions of poverty and 'social deviance', which calls for a critical re-examination of the aims as well as the consequences of social capital in policy.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SOCIAL CAPITAL.....</b>	<b>5</b>
TWO UNDERSTANDINGS.....	5
SOCIAL CAPITAL IN NEIGHBORHOODS.....	7
<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>9</b>
STUDIED CONTEXT DESCRIPTION .....	9
METHODS .....	9
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	11
TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS FORMAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS .....	12
TABLE 2: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS.....	13
<b>TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS .....</b>	<b>14</b>
DIFFERENT GROUPS, DIFFERENT PROSPECTS.....	14
AMBIGUITY OF SOCIAL MEANINGS .....	16
QUALITY OF PUBLIC SPACE: SOCIAL STREET ACTIVITIES? .....	17
LOCAL DOG OWNERS: SUPPORTIVE FEATURES OF REGULAR SOCIAL CONTACT .....	21
INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGES AND BLAMING.....	23
PROBLEMATIZATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL ISSUES .....	24
<b>DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>29</b>

**Appendix A - Reflections on ethnography, methods and positionality**

**Appendix B - Study area 'walkthrough' (photos)**

## INTRODUCTION

Under neoliberal forces – characterized by a repression of state-led welfare-service provision and a delegation of these services to grassroots levels – uneven development and spatial polarization have increased (Leitner et al., 2007; Brenner et al., 2012). Inequality is in particular visible in North American cities (Glaeser et al., 2009), nonetheless, urban inequality and polarization in welfare states like The Netherlands are also increasing (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2013).

Neighborhoods are a popular and comprehensible site of inquiry for exploring the relation between social characteristics of place and uneven development in life outcomes such as health, employment and education (see: Kawachi et al., 1999; Sampson et al., 2002; Lochner et al., 2003; Leyden, 2003). Neighborhood effects studies suggest that neighborhoods of concentrated socio-economic disadvantage often lack collective features of social organization, e.g. civic participation (Putnam, 2000), associated with the concept of social capital (Sampson et al., 2012). Successful neighborhoods exhibit higher levels of social capital – the capacity of actors and groups to derive tangible or intangible benefit from social ties (Sampson, 2012; 2009; Blokland, 2001; Putnam, 2000, Leyden, 2003). The concept of social capital is recognized to harness promising potential to activate and propel community-based interests (Mayer, 2003). Following this reasoning, social policies in many Western cities focus on the development of social capital in particularly disadvantaged neighborhoods (Galster, 2007; Buck, 2001). However, the concept is often wrongly applied in neighborhood contexts through operationalized indicators of (lack of) social capital, rather than through the underlying social interactional mechanisms that constitute it (Sampson et al., 2002; Mayer, 2003). Consequently, if neighborhood scores on civic participation and employment rates are improved, that might be interpreted as a sign that the neighborhood's local social structure possesses social capital resources that benefit *all* residents. After all, neighborhood indicators of social capital (civic participation and employment rates) have improved. However, local social interactional mechanisms, as they unfold in everyday life through contact and exchanges between social groups, potentially exclude typically disadvantaged groups from the benefits of social capital (Buck, 2001). This way higher aggregate scores on the consequences of social capital effectively cloud the structural endurance of disadvantage (Mayer, 2009; Sampson, 2012).

To form an empirical base for future social capital research, the complex exchanges and relations involved in the emergence of social capital require a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding. Therefore – by presenting a detailed ethnographic study of the social life of a residential social housing block in the city of Groningen, The Netherlands – this study explores the dynamics of local social structure and agency in everyday social

interactional mechanisms in relation to principal preconditions for social capital formation.

# **SOCIAL CAPITAL**

## *TWO UNDERSTANDINGS*

The concept of social capital is widely and vigorously used in policy, academic and political debates. Commonly, social capital is considered as those features of social relations that harness the capacity to develop 'latent social or economic potential' (Mayer, 2003, p. 114), and thus derive benefit for the individual and/or the group that possesses it (Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998; Coleman, 1988). It should be recognized that social capital takes on many forms and shapes, both tangible and intangible. Social capital benefits can be very tangible with respect to instrumental support; such as the money a parent gives to a child, or the sugar one lends from a neighbor. Simultaneously, it can take shape in intangible forms along lines of information, such as information on the availability of a job somewhere, and mutual trust in terms of receiving emotional support in situations of loss or distress. However varying the tangible and intangible shapes of social capital, they share the common feature in the sense that they always result from a social interaction.

Following the lines of Bourdieu (1979) and Lin (2002), social capital emerges from the delicate dynamics between social structure and agency. Social structures are considered hierarchical systems of social agents (e.g. people, organizations or institutions), which have social relations with varying access to and possession of social resources (e.g. social capital) and share rules in how these resources are used. Agency, in relation to social capital, is the perceived capacity of individuals or other actors to access and utilize these resources according to their discretion. On the one hand, the social structure one is situated in, to a large part determines the social resources one has access to, which in turn leads to an uneven playing field, which perpetually reproduces disadvantage. On the other hand, individual actors within these social structures possess agency (to a lesser or greater extent), i.e. the capacity to take action to change their (social) situation, either for better or worse. In these dynamics, both structure and agency affect each other. Consequently, social structure, to a degree, shapes the opportunities for and limitations to agency, and, in turn, social actors respectively possess varying degrees of agency to alter structure (see: Lin, 2002).

In the overwhelming amount of literature on social capital, two main – not mutually exclusive – understandings can be discerned. First, an economic understanding, predominately explicated in economics and management studies (see: Adler & Kwon, 2002; Granovetter, 1973, Gargiulo & Benassi, 1999, Glaeser et al., 2002). Second, the constructivist understanding rooted in sociology and community studies (see: Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Forrest & Kearn, 2002). Both views shed light on possible conceptual formations of social capital.

The economic understanding of social capital considers social ties as resources embedded within social structures that facilitate an individual or group to secure benefit from those ties (Gargiulo & Benassi, 1999; Lin, 2002). Social capital as a resource induces competitiveness and, therefore - to an extent - accounts for varying levels of success of individuals and groups (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Glaeser et al. (2002) add that the resources of social capital can be seen as a stock to be accumulated, and that investing in social resources yields higher levels of social capital. Conceptually, this entails that adding social resources to social structures will lead to stronger and higher social capital for their members. This conception of social capital can be particularly interesting from an institutional perspective. Social mixing strategies more or less operate under the social resource principle, for example; by moving in residents from a higher socioeconomic class in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area, more social resources will become available in the local social structure, which in turn increases the level of social capital. This assertion relies on the notion of *bridging* forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Bridging ties connect otherwise unconnected networks and hence enable social actors connected to them to access a greater, more diverse array of social resources and information (see: Granovetter, 1973). Access to bridging social capital is associated with better life opportunities such as employment, education, instrumental support, and is consequently regarded as a means to 'get ahead' in life (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Availability of and access to social resources are central to the economic view on social capital. It does not, however, tell much on how or when a social tie or relationship becomes a social resource.

The constructivist understanding of social capital pays more attention to emergent features of social capital by focusing on the collective and cooperative characteristics in communities and other groups that are directed at deriving mutual benefits. In contrast to the economic take on social capital, the constructivist view places an emphasis on internal relational characteristics of a group such as reciprocity, trust and shared norms (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Forrest & Kearns, 2001). Rather than social capital being a resource to which an agent either has access or not, social capital in the constructivist view is a result of individual and group choices, actively produced and reproduced. The constructivist understanding assumes that social capital takes time to develop. Moreover, the formation of social capital is considered a mutual and relational process, whereas the economic view on social capital considers ties possessing social capital as resources that can either be accessed or dismissed by individual actors in a social structure. It are in particular bonding forms of social capital that require strong and close intra-group social ties, which rely heavily on mutual emotional investment and accumulated trust (Putnam, 2000). Socially cohesive groups therefore generally possess high levels of bonding social capital shaped by

trust and solidarity, sometimes explained as the social ties that help to 'get by' in life (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). In this sense, 'getting by' refers to e.g. receiving emotional support in times of distress and uncertainty (Krackhardt, 1992), but also to preserve the social features that make a living environment pleasant. Considering the relational and reciprocal nature of bonding ties, it follows that a high population turnover van poses an eminent threat to bonding social capital, as it takes away a critical prerequisite for it: time.

Whereas emotional support is a benefit exchanged predominantly between individuals, social control can be regarded as a type of social capital belonging to a larger group. In neighborhoods social order is not kept by institutions, such as the police, but by '*an intricate network of voluntary controls and standards*' among residents (Jacobs, 1960, p. 40; also see Rose and Clear, 1998). Here, Jacobs implicitly refers to the relational aspects of social structures that constitute social control such as familiarity, shared identities and solidarity. As a way to develop the social capital needed for voluntary social control, Jacobs promotes mixed-use functions in streets and 'eyes on the street', i.e. street activity and regular contact.

The economic view tends to place an emphasis on the structural characteristics of social networks, whereas the constructivist view highlights the relational aspects in social networks, underlining the role of the individual in terms of agency.

## *SOCIAL CAPITAL IN NEIGHBORHOODS*

Modern local social dynamics have been under pressure due to increasing inequality, diversity, exclusive community membership and anonymity associated with neoliberal urbanization (Mayer et al., 2016; Blokland & Rae, 2008; Castells, 1999; 2000; Wellman, 1979). In areas of relative disadvantage (e.g. public housing areas), structural social characteristics are often considered too homogenous to link residents to the social resources from which they might derive benefit (Blokland & Savage, 2008). Consequently, the capacity to build bridging forms of social capital from neighborhood social structures is hampered. Ironically, it are the residents in relatively disadvantaged areas who presumably have the most to gain from social capital. Taking into account the general lack in other forms of capital e.g. human capital or financial capital, establishing foundations of local trust and community bonds have the potential to activate otherwise obscured concrete and abstract benefits (Mayer, 2009). Therefore, many formal and organized strategies to support and develop local social structures aim at developing social capital, through, for example, social mixing policies. These strategies operate under the premise that mixing socioeconomic groups in a specific locality will yield higher levels of social capital for all its residents (Blokland, 2002; Nast & Blokland, 2014; Galster, 2007). Moreover, these strategies draw on essential questions such as: to which extent is social capital structurally

determined by the neighborhood where one lives? And, to which extent do actors possess agency to choose how and when to use social capital?

Social strategies, popularly aimed at social capital formation, to a large extent reflect how e.g. a neighborhood's social issues are identified as problematic and operationalized by different actors. Thus, an understanding of how problematization and practice are related is important (Bacchi, 2012). Problems emerge from a tension between contested norms and presumed deviating behavior. Therefore, problems must be conceptualized, reproduced and dealt with as such in everyday practices. For example, deviant social behavior is conceptualized as deviant not through idealist moral conceptions of what is good or bad, but in fact by an ambiguity of possibly conflicting practices and norms (Bacchi, 2012). Certain times and places represent and denote breaking points in practices, referred to by Foucault (Bacchi, 2012, p.2) as problematizing moments. These moments lay bare problematic issues that previously went unnoticed or were purposefully ignored.

Barnett and Bridge (2016) underline that neighborhoods are the preeminent place where social problems are produced and pursued in practice. The neighborhood can be a site of where perceived threats are posed for daily practices and routines for different social groups. Simultaneously, the neighborhood is a site of familiarity that promotes features of social capital such as problem resolving behaviors and social control (Barnett and Bridge, 2016). Time and regular contact are fundamental features to achieve this sense of familiarity in a neighborhood setting (Lager et al., 2015). Thus, the neighborhood is the site where social capital formation is threatened through conflicting claims of problematization, while it is at the same time a place of familiarity, which provides preconditions for social capital formation.



# METHODOLOGY

## *STUDIED CONTEXT DESCRIPTION*

The study area stands out compared to the wider neighborhood, both by design and by social reputation. In 2013 the mayor of Groningen issued a gathering ban due to increasing reports of neighborhood disturbances – e.g. drug use, drug dealing, noise, intimidation, alcohol use, loitering and littering (Municipality of Groningen, 2013). Also, the area breaks with the typical design of the wider neighborhood – characterized by cul-de-sacs with single-family dwellings lining a courtyard. The studied block of streets consists of: a large 5-storey gate-building containing studio apartments; a wide street with a long monotonous line of three-storey tenement buildings; two back streets with terraced houses; and four semi-detached dwellings (see appendix B ‘walkthrough’ with photos of the area).

Over the last two years the two housing corporations – that own all (except for 4 semi-detached houses) dwellings on the block – deviated from the conventional appropriation of dwellings by applying a ‘labeling’ strategy aimed to achieve social mix. The labeling strategy is regarded an emergency measure, only vindicated in special circumstances, such as (extreme) social disorder. As opposed to the conventional appropriation of available units according to a waiting list or special urgency, the labeling strategy allows corporations to pick and choose new renters for their units. Over the last two years so-called ‘strong renters’ have been moving into available apartments. There are two important criteria that these new renters have to meet: first, proof of steady income or enrolment in an educational program; second, a certificate of good conduct, attesting to their clean criminal record<sup>1</sup>.

## *METHODS<sup>2</sup>*

Across the entire data collection stage of this study<sup>3</sup>, participant observations were employed. During the observations the field researcher took part in, and took extensive and elaborate notes of daily activities, conversations, events, and interactions unfolding in studied area (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

The study commenced with a period of general observations, in order to acquire a sense of the local social structure and the frequency and nature of social interactions. For these general observations counts of street activity during different times of day were made, in addition to notes on the overall sights, sounds and smells in the area<sup>4</sup>. General observations were followed by

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<sup>1</sup> This information is obtained from stakeholder interviews.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for more extensive reflections on ethnography, methods and positionality

<sup>3</sup> Data collection lasted from early April 2017 to late July 2017

<sup>4</sup> For a period of 2 consecutive weeks systematic counts were made of street activity and (the nature of) social interactions in the area. The timing of the observational walks alternated between mornings, afternoons and evenings. Over the course of the entire research process

more targeted and engaged observations, where the researcher would participate in organized events or other activities (an Easter brunch and a soccer tournament organized for children in the area) that took place in the studied area. Furthermore, as a part of participant observations, informal unstructured interviews with street residents were conducted. These interviews are characterized by their spontaneity in the sense that they resembled everyday conversations, with the important distinction that the researcher attempted to direct the conversations to themes of interest to the study.

Spanning the entire research process, the researcher consistently documented observations and discussions from informal unstructured interviews in field notes, the writing of which simultaneously acted as data collection and preliminary data analysis. This dual function of documenting observations is rooted in the observer's role as the primary cognitive instrument of data collection, thus directing and shaping fieldwork and data and requiring constant analysis and assessment (Goodwin et al., 2003; Schensul et al., 1999).

In addition to the observations and unstructured informal interviews, eight participants were formally interviewed using interactive interviewing techniques (see table 1; Ellis et al., 2011). The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide, asking open-ended questions on broad social themes such as: everyday routines; local social contacts; organized activities and events; and social support. Ellis et al. (2011) explain that interactive interviews place a strong emphasis on interaction with the research context. If the participant mentioned a particular place in conversations or interviews, the researcher (or the respondent) sometimes would prompt to go there while the interview continued. Similarly, when the participant would mention an activity or a social contact he or she values, (if appropriate) the researcher would suggest partaking in the activity or visiting that contact. Methods were combined by drawing from observations that could serve as probes in the conversations and interviews, to test and validate these observations, resulting in a continuous, mutually informing process of data collection<sup>5</sup>.

Over the course of the fieldwork 5 stakeholder interviews were conducted to acquire an understanding of the relevant strategies in place (see table 2). These interviews are used to contextualize the lived experiences of institutional features of local social life. Moreover, the stakeholder interviews were used to assess relevant problematizations of local social dynamics.

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regular observation walks were made where the researcher would take notes and engage with informal conversations with participants

<sup>5</sup> For example, during observations it stood out that many people own dogs in the area. Based on observed interactions, these dog owners seemed to form a distinctive group within the social structure of the area. Subsequently, some dog owners were approached for interviews to provide a more detailed accounts of local dog owners' social lives.

## *ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS*

Over the course of the fieldwork actions were undertaken to ensure participants were not subject to any harm (physical, psychological, legal, social or economic) as a result of the study, anonymity of shared information was guaranteed and informed consent was obtained (Iphophen, 2011). Efforts were made to emphasize that participation was voluntary and assuring given information could be revoked at any stage of the research. All participants were provided with multiple options to contact the field researcher. To ensure anonymity all participants mentioned in this article have received aliases (see Table 1). Next to the alias, and strong/weak classification, age group characteristics<sup>6</sup> are given, as well as the time of residence in the studied area (short-term or long-term).

In terms of consent from participants in observations, thorough efforts were made to ensure every participant was aware of the field researchers role as a researcher. Overtly carrying around a notebook helped with that, and on multiple occasions the field researcher would ask participants if it was okay to take notes for the research. Furthermore, in every observation or conversation the research goals and aims were orally communicated to make sure participants were informed. For the formal interviews written consent was obtained by means of an informed consent form. These strategies of obtaining consent confirm that there is a certain extent of 'fluidity in consenting' in ethnographic research as elaborated on by Iphophen (2011, p. 29).

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<sup>6</sup> The exact ages of participants are not given in order to ensure anonymity

*TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS FORMAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS*

<b>Participant (Alias)</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Short-term/ long-term residence in study area</b>
Olivia	30 - 50	long-term
Hannah	50 +	long-term
Lucy	30 - 50	long-term
Claire	50 +	long-term
George	< 30	short-term
Katy	< 30	short-term
Joan	< 30	short-term
Amy	< 30	short-term

Two distinct groups can be discerned from the interview participants (see table 1). First, a group of long-term renters residing in the study area for over 10 years (with one exception), all of them lived alone, were not involved in a romantic relationship, and were aged 30 or higher. All participants belonging to this group were unemployed at the time of the study. Olivia, Hannah and Claire are recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction. Second there is a group of short-term renters who live in the study area under 3 years and all are under 30. At the time of the study, George and Katy were a couple and live together in an apartment. Amy also lived together with her partner, but was interviewed alone. Joan also had a partner but did not cohabit. All of the participants in the second group were employed or enrolled in a degree program at the time of the study, except for Katy, who had recently graduated.

The distinction between short-term and long-term renters will be upheld throughout the presentation of the findings in this article. Although the internal characteristics of these groups might indeed vary – e.g. in terms of ethnicity, personal interests and histories – findings indicate that the short-term vs. long-term distinction is the most influential on the local social structure.

**TABLE 2: STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

Stakeholder/ expert	Strategy/ relation to the studied context
<i>Municipal/district level</i>	
District coordination team	From the central municipal level, teams led by aldermen devise strategies to improve neighborhoods
<i>Neighborhood level</i>	
Neighborhood social team	The neighborhood social team serves as a neighborhood-level entry point for residents who need social support or other social assistance. These social teams are also the executive branch of municipal strategies
Housing corporation	The dwellings in the studied area are owned and rented out by two social housing corporations. One of the corporations was available for an interview on their social policies and strategies targeted at the studied area.
<i>Grassroots level</i>	
Faith Based Organization	In the studied area there is an active Faith Based Organization (FBO) that aims to bring neighbors in the area closer together. At least twice a year they organize social gatherings for the area's residents
Local journalist	In the explorative phase of the research a local journalist who keeps a popular online blog about the wider neighborhood was interviewed about his views on the studied area.

## TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

### *DIFFERENT GROUPS, DIFFERENT PROSPECTS*

From the fieldwork a picture emerges that local social interactions predominantly take place within more or less homogenous social groups. One of the most obvious structural limitations for social contact is rooted in the vastly different daily rhythms of the unemployed and employed. Being employed or not to a large extent determines the different times of day during which necessary activities such as grocery shopping are undertaken. As a consequence, the window for spontaneous social encounters in the street is very small, which accounts for a part of the lack of social mixing.

The majority of intra-group interactions of short-term residents seem to draw on previously established trust and familiarity. All participating short-term residents indicate that they are very satisfied with their local social contacts. Some indicate to have four or five good friends that moved into the area. Consequently, short-term residents do not feel a necessity to meet new people in the local area for e.g. friendly conversation or instrumental support one might expect from neighbors. Katy illustrates how this 'happy local social network' of previously acquainted short-term residents, in a way, removes any perceived necessity for establishing contact with not previously acquainted residents:

*"I don't know a lot of people in the area, who I didn't know before (...) we don't really talk much to our direct neighbors. They are more than welcome to borrow stuff from us, and maybe we could borrow things from them too. But that just doesn't happen (...) because we have so many friends living here now... I will ask for a casserole, or a pan for soup from our friends down the street. Because... Well, I can just enter their apartment, I don't even have to ring the bell and ask if they maybe have what I need. I already know they have it, so I can just come in and take it"*

- Katy

Long-term residents express similar tendencies to stick to the people they already know in the local area. These mechanisms of social division are maintained by different daily rhythms and the related likelihood of interactions and mutual familiarity and trust. Thus, it seems that different social groups sharing a street or neighborhood does not elicit mixed social networks, suggesting that in the studied context's social structure, *birds of a feather flock together*.

Another distinction for social experiences in the studied area can be made on the basis of future prospects and plans. Participants who have been living in the area for three years or more tend to have more local social contacts than participants with a shorter time of residence. Long-term

residents exhibit a higher degree of engagement and interest in local social life, exchanging gossip and personal stories with each other. Most short-term residents express that they have no need for or interest in establishing new local social contacts. This lack of interest for local social contacts could be related to a higher probability of short-term residents of moving elsewhere within the foreseeable future. Short-term resident Joan indicates how she is at the beginning of their professional career, while George and Katy are living together for the first time. Participants indicate that with changing circumstances in terms of e.g. income increase or family expansion, a move out of the study area is also anticipated.

Long-term residents such as Olivia do not have a realistic option of moving house, even if they really wanted to. Olivia explained how she always thought her place in the area would be a stepping-stone – a transition home – to move up the housing ladder so to speak. That transition never happened due to problems with alcohol and related financial issues. Being presently unemployed and a recovering alcoholic, she lacks the financial means to move from the studied area.

*“My mother would like to see me live elsewhere. She still thinks this is a ‘transition apartment’. She often asks me when will I move? (...) Do you have any idea how much that will cost me!? First of all I would pay around 100 euros more in rent. Also, I’ll start with a bare house; I would have to put in floors – haha! – and probably a lick of paint, minimum. That’s just not realistic. So that’s that.”*

- Olivia

Olivia tellingly let out a chuckle while listing all the financial impossibilities of moving house when she mentions putting in new floors – her current apartment does not have flooring everywhere. Whereas long-term resident Olivia expresses she has no realistic choice other than to stay, ‘strong’ renters like Joan, George and Katy feel that their options are wide open. Short-term residents are typically younger than the long-term residents, often in the process of obtaining a degree or just having obtained a degree. Therefore their future prospects are generally more promising than those of residents who have lived in the study area for longer, the majority of whom are unemployed or have very little financial means.

However, there is a structural foothold explaining why short-term residents might perceive very little risk in accepting an apartment in the area. In some cases the housing corporation ensures the eventual mobility in the case the living environment does not live up to expectations. Joan, George and Katy all point to an example where one of their friends who just was appointed an apartment in the street, is offered a guaranteed opportunity to move out if living there turns out to be unpleasant.

*“Well, apparently there is this neighbor in her building who has gotten a lot of complaints due to noise and drug abuse and such... So they [housing corporation] asked if she was sure she wanted to live next to that noisy neighbor. I don’t know how bad he is... Now she could move in without losing her points, so if she doesn’t like it there she can move again.”*

**- Katy**

This anecdote illustrates how security and prospects are offered to the group of (potential) new residents, underscoring the bad social reputation of the area by warning about a problematic neighbor. In effect the prospective new resident is structurally favored by being offered a free pass to try out living in a disadvantaged area, without any danger for her mobility prospects.

### *AMBIGUITY OF SOCIAL MEANINGS*

Nowadays it is encouraged to report disturbances through online programs, which lowers the threshold for reporting, but simultaneously acts as an impediment for social contact, and hence, a perceived necessity to exert social control. Most participants express to feel some hesitation to personally address a neighbor on his or her disturbing behavior. George illustrates how it is very easy to report disturbances online: *“I frequently report if there’s litter on the street by sending a message on Whatsapp<sup>7</sup> to someone working for the city. The last couple of months I made a report every week.”* He adds that the frequent reporting does make him feel somewhat like a nag, but also how the litter in the area is the biggest disturbance to him. Furthermore, he explains how he has no idea of who are responsible for the littering – *“Every new week new litter appears!”* – but that he does not feel an urge to address these litterers on their behavior, because he feels that falls under the City’s responsibility. Thus, structural processes such as online disturbance reporting have impeding contingencies for local social capital formation. The anonymity granted by online reporting, subjects important ingredients for local social capital such as mutual trust and shared expectations to pressure.

Among long-term residents – many of whom have witnessed first hand the turbulent social history of the area – there seems to exist some unwritten code about not reporting neighbors to institutions without first talking to the person(s) causing the disturbance personally. During fieldwork an incident occurred where Lucy, who had been drinking, made a bonfire on the patch of grass behind her (ground level) apartment. It had rained in days before, causing a lot of smoke to emanate from the wet kindling she used. After a while the police turned up and kindly requested her to put out the fire. Lucy complied with that request, but explained that she felt betrayed by her neighbors, that they did not ask her personally to put out the fire. At a later date she had found out that there was one lady who made the call to the

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<sup>7</sup> The city of Groningen provides a service where resident scan report disturbances through a chat messenger service



police. Appalled, Lucy explained that she knew this lady quite well and felt 'stabbed in the back' by her.

Lucy's expectation, that she had assumed was mutual, to work out problems face to face before calling the police, was violated. The base for trust toward this neighbor, carefully developed over a period of years, was undermined as a result of a single anonymous phone call. The same mechanism of anonymity that gives George and the woman that reported the bonfire a sense of social control, can have a devastating effect on ingredients of social capital such as trust, solidarity and shared expectations.

Richard<sup>8</sup>, a father living with his young daughter in the studied area, explained how he would search the garbage for potentially valuable objects. He is amazed at what some people throw away. Richard described how, after much hesitation to scavenge through the garbage and at a time of serious financial distress, he salvaged a few fixable home appliances. Subsequently he would fix up and sell on these appliances for a little extra money. We already know that strong renter George dislikes litter in his street and, without knowing who Richard is, George referred to his scavenging through the garbage and expressed his utter dislike of it – "*That's just disgusting!*" To George the sight of a person scavenging through the garbage merely adds to the incomprehension of 'the other', and acts as a barrier to developing a shared local identity.

On the flip side of the coin, for Richard – a man struggling to get by financially – turning to occasional scavenging represents a breaking point; a moment where he swallows his prides and consciously breaks a self perceived social norm. Richard described how his lack of social engagement in the area, helps him to do so, because he 'does not really care what his neighbors will think, because he does not really know them anyway'.

Thus, it should be recognized that social interactional mechanisms harness different meanings to respective social groups of short-term and long-term residents. What might seem convenient and relatively harmless to some might be experienced as insulting and degrading by others. The ambiguity of meanings accentuates the social differences of the respective social groups within the local social structure, which in turn causes an increased disengagement of local social life, particularly for the weak renter group. These processes form a serious barrier for fundamental prerequisites of social capital formation such as regular contact and time to achieve a sense of familiarity (Barnett & Bridge, 2016; Lager et al., 2015).

### *QUALITY OF PUBLIC SPACE: SOCIAL STREET ACTIVITIES?*

From the systematic observation of street activities a picture emerges that a vast majority of street activities serve a clear and sole, often functional,

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<sup>8</sup> Alias

purpose – for example transportation (by foot, bike, scooter or car) through the area. Interactions as a result of these functional street activities seldom seem to occur. The lack of social street activities can in part be ascribed to the area's poor quality of space – in particular around the line of tenement buildings. Participants refer to the impossibility of pleasantly passing time in the street, which they ascribe to a lack of places to sit or dwell. Furthermore, a large portion of the apartments has their bedroom windows at the street side and the living rooms, kitchens and balconies facing private gardens. Particularly the bedroom windows on street level are blacked out, presumably to ensure a degree of privacy. As Lucy describes: *"That's where I undress and try to sleep. I don't want any people looking in."* The blacked out windows contribute to the perception of an impermeable boundary between the public street and the residential units and thus evoke a sense of abandonment – a not very 'social' atmosphere. Joan adds that the street activities that occur at night do not exactly contribute to good night's sleep. She recalls that during some night scooters drive by and people have (loud) conversations, which sometimes sound like arguments<sup>9</sup>. This adds to a perceived awareness that there are activities that go on in the street that Joan does not want to mingle in:

*"I don't exactly know what people are doing driving around on their scooters and yelling at each other in the middle of the night. (...) I suppose they live in the street too (...) I never talk with them. That's not exactly a group I am interested in getting to know better – haha"*

**- Joan**

As Joan describes the activities heard overnight carry into the daytime where fellow residents encountered on the street are to greater or lesser identified as belonging to a group of 'disturbers' – which could also be defined as 'others' – or not. Most participants indicate that they are less inclined to interact with a projected 'other' in the street. The different daily rhythms, of people who go to bed before midnight and those that stay out on the street until after, clash with each other, mainly due to the bedrooms being located on the street side. Hannah provides further detail on how nightly activities on the street increase during spring and summertime and how that disturbs the main activity undertaken in the street side bedroom

*"The last one and a half months it's becoming more noisy on the street.. Well... I don't spend a lot of time in my bedroom. Usually I sleep when I'm in there (...) Anyway, I hear people."*

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<sup>9</sup> More participants express sense confusion as to whether some conversations overheard in the street are hostile or friendly. Particularly a group of Antillean residents tend to speak in their native tongue 'Papiamentu' which most participants do not understand. Also, this particular group tends to converse in a manner that sometimes seems hostile to outsiders but is in fact friendly.

*Yelling at each other or something. Having a quarrel. (...) I don't know who they are, maybe it's just one wrong character that lives here. But I hear them"*

**-Hannah**

Hannah and Joan give examples of indirect mechanisms how the mismatch between spatial and architectural design – and temporal activities associated with those spaces – hamper intergroup social contact and prevent mutual understanding between those groups from developing. Participants living on the same side of the tenement street mention they spend most leisure time spent at home facing away from the street either on their balconies or in their living rooms. As a consequence there are literally fewer ‘eyes on the street’, which leads to a general lack of awareness of what happens in the street and consequently a lack of informal social control.

The adjacent line of tenement buildings has the living rooms, kitchens, and balconies facing street side. Participants on this side of the street exhibit much more awareness about what happens in the street. Not only do they *see* more of what happens, they also tend to *interact* more with people in the street as well. Social interactions do not necessarily take place in the street, but can also occur on the public-private interface. For example, many greetings between people out on their balconies (smoking or enjoying the weather) and people walking or biking through the area were exchanged. These greetings might seem superficial and slapdash at face value, and do not usually develop into conversations or into deeper, more meaningful interactions – they do, nonetheless form a base of acquaintance, an important prerequisite in the constructivist understanding of social capital. Contrastingly, at the side of the tenement lined street (with the bedrooms at street side), opportunities for interactions are seriously limited as a consequence of street and building design, whereas the side where the balconies face the street facilitates a crucial prerequisite for social capital to take place: familiarity with street activities and interaction opportunities.

In the space surrounding the gate building participants were more likely to spend longer periods of time on the street, often exhibiting more deviant behaviors. Some examples of the deviant behavior observed in this area are: loitering, drug use, alcohol use and public urinating (by both males and females). These behaviors particularly occurred under the passageways, which stay dry during rain, give shade during sun, and in addition provide a place obscured from lines of sight from the surrounding apartments. Consequently, the passageways are particularly suitable for spending longer periods of time outside without being seen – a quality that seems to promote more or less deviant activities.

It needs to be noted that what constitutes *deviant* behavior, relies heavily on shared norms regarding what is considered deviant. In other

words deviance has to be problematized but how deviance is problematized (or not) varies across groups and individuals (Bacchi, 2012). Some participants described witnessing someone smoking marijuana in the street might as not disturbing or even acceptable, while the same matter might seriously disturb another individual. Nonetheless after witnessing similar types of problematized of deviant behavior, participants express a reluctance to associate and organize with neighbors to address that problem. This generalized distrust toward fellow residents seriously limits the likelihood for interactions to happen and thus almost completely removes the possibility of acquaintance – a particularly critical precondition for social capital formation (Barnett & Bridge, 2016). Like in the case where Amy was having trouble with (very) noisy neighbors. During an interview she was asked whether she would ask neighbors if they were experiencing the same problem, to see if they could collectively organize in order to address the problem.

*“That’s [a neighbor playing very loud music regularly] just not normal behavior to me. Why should I be the one to put a lot of effort into talking to neighbors about it, while they are the ones who can’t act normal? (...) I did try to talk to neighbors about it, but that didn’t help, we didn’t do anything. It keeps happening.”*

- Amy

The quote above illustrates how an individual might have the courage, or agency, to address people on their deviant behavior. However, it seems that due to a general lack of acquaintance with direct neighbors, collective efforts to address the problem are ineffective. Therefore, the experienced deviant behavior is to an extent reluctantly endured and in this way exacerbates neighborly alienation. This pattern lays bare that if individual social norms are violated the perceived capacity to collectively organize and act is diminished.

In spite of these structural obstacles for social capital formation, there are instances of social acquaintance and positive social interactions that do take place in the shared space of the studied area. These are often results of repeated optional street activities, such as going for a stroll or walking the dog. Such interactions consist of casual greetings and short conversations, usually continuing the original activity thereafter. Opportunities for local social capital formation through spontaneous encounters require a coordination of first; the simultaneous occurrence of multiple optional street activities that allow for resultant interaction, and second; a recurrence of these resultant interactions over longer periods of time. The most striking example of how regular social interaction can lead to particularly bonding forms of social capital can be discovered in the local group of dog owners, a substantial and particularly noticeable group.

## LOCAL DOG OWNERS: SUPPORTIVE FEATURES OF REGULAR SOCIAL CONTACT

While participating in dog walks, the social interactions of dog owners were witnessed by the researcher first hand. First thing that stood out was the level of acquaintance local dog owners have with each other. Most dog owners greet each other while passing, usually quickly exchanging phatic interactions, such as: *'Hey, how are you?'* or *'Lovely weather today, isn't it?'* Better-acquainted dog owners exhibit the habit of engaging in longer conversations on their walks, while the dogs get a chance to play with each other.

The nature of some of these conversations reveals the supportive elements of social contact that developed among of dog owners. For example, when one of Lucy's dogs passed after a period of illness, multiple local dog owners expressed their sympathy toward the participant. Not only did they provide emotional support during emotional times, moreover, they kept regularly checking in with Lucy to see how *she* was coping. Lucy has a reputation for going on alcoholic episodes in times of emotional turmoil, which was known to some local dog owners. After the passing of her dog she also had a string of drinking days, which was noticed by an observant dog owner/neighbor. He told her he had not seen her walking the dog for a couple of days, which made him wonder if she was doing O.K. – if she was *getting by* after her dog had passed away. Lucy candidly responded that she was still very sad, but not to worry she added: *'I am so shaken up that I can't eat. I can't even drink! [Alcohol]'*<sup>10</sup> The man and Lucy had a big laugh about that last remark after which Lucy mentioned it was a good thing she could not eat, because that way she could save money for the dead dog's urn. In an earlier conversation Lucy had disclosed that the urn and euthanasia for her dog would cost her around 200 euros - quite a hefty sum for a woman living off a debt related living allowance of 60 euros per week. Then, in a serious tone, the man told her that if at any time he could help out by taking her remaining dog out on a walk, she should not hesitate to ask him. Although Lucy did not seem to intend to take him up on his offer any time soon, she reciprocally expressed her gratitude for the gesture. The conversation concluded with Lucy remarking that when she would get the urn with her dog's cremated ashes, she would return to her normal self. *'All right, take care'*<sup>11</sup> the man said as he continued his walk.

The observed interactions between dog owners, underline that frequent and spontaneous contact is an important prerequisite for the formation of particularly bonding types of social capital. In order for

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<sup>10</sup> Paraphrase of actual conversation based on field notes

<sup>11</sup> “

interactions to achieve features of social capital like mutual trust, reciprocity and shared norms (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Forrest & Kearns, 2001), social exchanges require frequent reproduction (Lager et al., 2015). Dog owners are able to overcome the structural impediment for frequent contact posed by the limited meeting qualities in public space, because they have a sense of obligation to take care of their pets – to walk their dogs. For the most vulnerable participants, e.g. those who are attempting to recover from addiction or are in debt relief, pets serve as a vehicle for social rehabilitation. As long-term resident Claire expressed during an interview:

*“If you want to get to know people around here, you need to get a dog (...) People meet each other on the street walking dogs, and the next day they are drinking coffee together (...) Like my neighbors here [points to an adjacent balcony]. They are also very social with other dog owners around here and have people over all the time”*

**- Claire**

Structuring the day around regular dog walks can be a type of crutch; a coping strategy to avoid the breaking point of falling back into blurry and chaotic daily rhythms associated with drug- and/or alcohol abuse, or just a general sense of hopelessness. A positive collateral effect is how dog owners frequently run into each other on the street, thus intricately building the fundamentals for social capital: familiarity and regular contact.

It has to be recognized, however, that dog owners in the studied area represent a rather homogenous group. All of the participating dog owners were unemployed at the time of the study, which is one of the main reasons they are able to be out in the street walking their dogs multiple times a day. There are other signs that keeping pets can increase self-esteem and self-worth – fundamental prerequisites for social contact – particularly for more vulnerable groups such as the extremely poor or recovering addicts. Like in the instance of Olivia, who does not own a dog but does take care of a cat, two bunnies, a turtle and a guinea pig:

**Interviewer:** *“Why do you keep so many animals if I may ask?”*

**Olivia: long pause** *“That’s a very good question... That’s a very good question... I don’t know.. It feels like family. Something I can look after – take care of. So... They need **you** (...) That’s nice for a change”*

Olivia also told about a situation when she had to address some local social capital of her own when her cat had an accident and went missing. First, she made an active effort to ask neighbors to keep an eye out for a wounded white cat. Then, after the cat was found (the cat returned on its own after a couple of days) she had to bring it to the veterinarian. The veterinarian made

a remark indicating he doubted whether she could pay for the required operation to fix the cat's leg joint. "*Like I have poor written across my forehead,*" Olivia remarked about this. Ultimately she had to rely on one of her best friends – whom she knew from childhood and who also lives in the studied area – to front her the money for the surgery. These types of favor exchanges require deep mutual trust, in this case found in a long-term friendship. Olivia benefitted from a social tie in her inner circle of friends. The social structure of the study area as whole, however, is much more diverse and characterized by less intimate ties, thus seldom leading to social capital rooted in bonding characteristics that take much time to develop such as mutual trust and familiarity.

### *INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGES AND BLAMING*

Thus far the findings of this article mostly dealt with social interactional mechanisms among residents of the studied area. Although bridging social capital features are not recognizable in local informal social networks, there are institutional mechanisms that provide bridging links to exogenous social resources. The neighborhood social team offers services concerning social support and assistance for the entire neighborhood, the studied area included.

The nature of exchanges between the neighborhood social team and residents is of quite a different nature compared to inter-resident interactions. In terms of expectations and reciprocity ties to institutional bridges exhibit a unidirectional expectation. Nonetheless, the neighborhood social team in particular has a good reputation among participants in assisting residents in finding the types of social support (e.g. welfare benefits, debt relief assistance, or child care) they need. Participants expect to be delivered a service from the various institutions offering social support, without a direct expectation of reciprocity. As a consequence, time and regular contact, intricate features of social capital foundation are absent this provision of social assistance. The way the neighborhood social team provides residents with exogenous social resources justifies the economic view of social capital where social capital can be viewed as a resource able to be added into local networks.

There are however mechanisms that diminish perceived access and trust to these institutional bridges. Multiple conversations with residents suggest the existence of a blame-mechanism when it comes to municipal institutions like the neighborhood social team, but also semi-private institutions such as the housing corporations. Personal problems, experienced by participants, are attributed to local institutional neglect or constraints. Shelly<sup>12</sup> – a single mother raising two children in the area<sup>13</sup> – exhibits a tendency to blame

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<sup>12</sup> Alias

<sup>13</sup> Shelly was repeatedly informed that the topics discussed in conversations with the field researcher might be used for research purposes and gave oral consent for this.

institutions. She holds the housing corporation responsible for her youngest child's illness. The child has kidney failure due to mold that the housing corporation 'refuses to take responsibility for,' Shelly claims. *"They tell me it's my own fault, but I see the mold, I report the mold and they don't do anything! (...) They just don't care about people like me"*<sup>14</sup>. She added that she had given up reporting to the housing corporation and other institutions because she feels they never do what she asks. In a later conversation Shelly mentioned that she had been visited by child services, *"probably because they [housing corporation] told them to (...) they don't know anything"*<sup>15</sup>, Shelly ranted. When carefully asked if that was the only reason child services might be on her case she elaborated: *'Well, I have caught some of my neighbors listening at my door. Therefore, she supposed that her neighbors might have reported her to child services too. "They don't know anything. Just because I have a loud voice and my child cries often – because she's sick, you know? – doesn't mean I don't take care of my kids"*<sup>16</sup>.

The case of Shelly's experienced problems with institutions illustrates how she rejects responsibility for any of the claims made against her. Instead, she places the blame on others, in this example the involved institutions and her neighbors. Whether these serious allegations (blaming the housing corporation for the illness of her child) are true or not, it shows how the role of an institutional victim is assumed by shifting the blame for things that go wrong to anonymous institutional actors. As a result of this blame mechanism, people like Shelly lose perceived access to local institutional bridges through the destruction of trust – regardless of if the grounds are rooted in factual evidence or fabricated by an individual.

## *PROBLEMATIZATION AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL ISSUES*

This paragraph deviates from previous paragraphs in the sense that an examination of how the area is perceived from a policy perspective is presented. By including this paragraph policy operationalizations of social capital can be contrasted to the everyday experience of participants.

From the interviews with policy makers at the housing corporations and municipality the discursive nature of the area's social problems becomes clear from the way in which policies are operationalized. Particularly the social mixing policy generates a telling example of how the negotiations of social problems end up in policy instruments. As is the case with most policies directed at social problems, a legitimization of the policy, often in the form of a problematization (Bacchi, 2012), serves as a starting point.

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<sup>14</sup> Paraphrase of actual conversation based on field notes

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In this case, the legitimacy for the social mixing intervention was derived from long list of reports of disturbances. From these reports emerges the problematization on a strategic level of the area's social dynamics; namely a too large concentration of social 'deviants', which seriously affects the perceived livability of the area. The root of this problem is believed to lie in the homogenous socio-economic composition of residents. I would like to argue that the construction of this problematization does not originate from the residents themselves, but rather from a strategic level. The corporations and municipality regard the disturbance reports as the *collective claim* of residents to eradicate socially deviant behaviors. However, the list of reports is contrived of individual residents' calls and e-mails – very rarely the result of an organized effort of residents. The claim to a more livable living environment, therefore, is at best a collection of fragmented reports and can hardly be seen as a collective one.

Policy makers described how there was a breaking point in dwelling appropriation policy in 2015, when a man was found dead in his apartment when he had been lying there for at least three years. To stakeholders, this was a strong sign of a serious lack of social cohesion – a clear '*problematizing moment*' (Bacchi, 2012, p. 2). Subsequently, the corporations successfully opted for an exception under municipal law to appropriate vacant dwellings to so-called 'strong' renters in order to alleviate the area's social problems and to re-establish some level of social order in the street.

After one and a half years of introducing 'strong' renters to the area, the corporation's statistics are showing that reports of domestic disturbance have dropped as well as the number of renters not paying rent in time. So does that mean the policy is successful? Stakeholder responses to this question were ambiguous. On the one hand the social indicators the corporations operationalized have improved; that is to say the average income of renters has risen slightly and reports of social unrest have decreased. On the other hand, the interviewed policy maker remarked that most of the 'weak' renters – i.e. renters that were residing in the area *before* the social mixing strategy was employed – were still experiencing the same problems as before, e.g. unemployment, poverty and addiction. Moreover, the interviewed stakeholders recognize the above-described problems regarding the design of the area and therefore feel that the solutions offered by social mixing will be temporary.

Following, it seems that although the spatial concentration of problems have been diluted, the underlying causes have not been addressed as such. Therefore questions can be raised if the social mixing policy merely replaces 'weak' renters (i.e. renters of lower socio-economic status and/or renters that cause disturbance) with strong renters, consequently diluting the problematized indicators – or does social mixing concern improving the lives and prospects of people it targets?

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this ethnographic study dynamics of local social structure and agency in five social interactional mechanisms were identified and explicated in relation to social capital formation. First, differences in groups and differences in prospects to a large part seem to determine the lack of mixed social networks between long-term and short-term residents. Next, ambiguities found in ascribed meanings to social behavior in the area contribute to a deeper division of short-term and long-term residents. Then, the physical design of the area does not promote social street activities hampering possible formation of social capital. In contrast, there are activities that unavoidably take place in the street such as dog walking that form a basis for regular contact between dog owners, which in turn leads to bonding social capital formation. Furthermore, owning and taking care of pets can serve as a vehicle to regain trust and confidence to take part in social interactions after a period of distress. Lastly, there are signs that institutional efforts to provide social services work as bridging forms of social capital, linking participants to resources absent from their own network.

The results in this study mainly follow two simplified groups of long-term and short-term residents. While this juxtaposition reveals much about the ambiguous nature of social capital, it should be recognized that the actual population of the study area is much more heterogeneous than the two simplified groups.

The notion that mixing social groups will lead to the formation of mixed social networks and associated social capital (Blokland, 2002; Nast & Blokland, 2014; Galster, 2007) does not deliver in the context of this study. Temporal dimensions such as the different structuring of daily rhythms of respective socio-economic groups (simplified as short-term and long-term residents) are identified as a causal mechanism contributing to the absence of social mingling. There even are signs that suggest the social mix is counterproductive for social capital formation in the sense that the unfamiliarity and division between social groups pose as threats for shared (local) social norms, trust and expectations (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Forrest & Kearns, 2001).

Is it a bad thing that the socially mixed do not socially mingle? The answer to this question depends on what the aims are of the social mixing policy, and subsequently how these goals are operationalized and monitored. On the one hand, the influx of strong renters seems to achieve very little in terms of the social capital aims of social mixing – i.e. benefits from mixed networks and subsequent improved prospects for the original population (Blokland, 2002; Nast & Blokland, 2014; Galster, 2007). On the other hand, replacing problematic renters with so-called strong renters has positive effects in terms of for example a decreased number of social disturbances and better

aggregate economic performance due to fewer renters struggling to make rent. These effects cause the aggregated unit of the neighborhood to improve on specific neighbor such as disturbances, missed rent payments and drug or alcohol abuse, however, the lived experience of social mixing does not seem to point to improved prospects for the relatively disadvantaged group.

From the findings certain barriers emerge for important prerequisites for social capital formation e.g. time and regular social contact, which can be related to the physical design of the area. This resonates with findings from Lager et al., 2015<sup>17</sup> and Barnett & Bridge, 2016, who underline that social capital formation requires time for repeated contact leading to familiarity. A spatial dimension exerting an impact on the possibility of social capital formation is the poor quality physical design of the area. As a consequence the shared spaces allow predominately for not more than necessary activities. At the same time the few optional street activities (e.g. dog walking) observed in the street in fact do show potential for resultant social interactions, thus fulfilling preconditions for social capital formation with respect to regular contact. Therefore, special consideration is needed in designing shared spaces in socio-economically disadvantaged areas as to whether the design meets standards that allow for spontaneous meeting opportunity that develop fundamentals for social capital formation such as familiarity and regular contact (Barnett & Bridge, 2016; Putnam, 2000).

Jacobs (1960) promotes 'eyes on the street' and vibrant street activity as contributive to informal social control and street safety. Although it has to be noted that Jacobs in her book writes about New York City, a metropolis back then, and still today. The 24/7 street activity and mixed-use of city space Jacobs advocates, might be feasible in the vibrant context of Greenwich Village, however, the function of the studied street – like so many streets – is completely residential. Moreover, it is safe to assume that there is little potential for businesses, bars or any other form of exploitation in the street. In this light it might be unrealistic for residential streets to have eyes on the street 24/7. Nonetheless, it should be recognized that dynamics of street activity and spatial function as well as the public-private interface have an impact on the opportunities for social capital formation.

Findings furthermore point out the possibility of successfully adding social resources to the local structure, which aligns with the economic view of social capital (Glaeser, 2001; Gargiulo & Benassi, 1999; Granovetter, 1973). These social resources take shape in institutional bridges, which connect residents to exogenous networks of with other resources of, often

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<sup>17</sup> Lager et al. (2015) write about social capital of older adults, which is a different target group than the participants in this study. However, the differences in daily rhythms between older adults and younger populations and consequent barriers for social capital development align with the different daily structures of employed and unemployed participants in this study.

institutional, social support. The institutional bridges align with the notion of bridging social capital, which enables residents to get ahead in life (Putnam, 2000; Granovetter, 1973; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). A striking characteristic of these institutional bridges is that they require less emotional investment and familiarity in terms of regular contact over time to develop mutual trust and reciprocity. This deviates from existing notions that the formation of social capital is a time consuming process (Putnam, 2000; Barnett & Bridge, 2016; Lager et al., 2015). However, it has to be noted that the social distance and anonymity between institutional social resources and residents can foster a blaming-mechanism, where the agency related personal responsibility for problems is completely denied and shifted toward structural neglect personified by these institutions. Furthermore, the principle of introducing social resources to a locality exhibits less prowess when it comes to informal, typically more emotionally invested ways of social capital formation.

On a structural scale, the social mixing strategy contributes to a spatially diluting process of problematized notions of poverty and 'social deviance' (Mayer, 2009; Bacchi, 2012; Barnett & Bridge, 2016). The area, as an ecological entity, presumably scores better on operationalized socio-economic indicators (e.g. unemployment rates, disturbance reports); however, by spreading out problematic residents over different neighborhoods, it simultaneously renders the problematic disadvantaged group statistically difficult to identify, if not *statistically invisible*<sup>18</sup>. As a consequence, enduring poverty and inequality become even more slippery issues to identify – let alone understand and address (Nast & Blokland, 2014; Buck, 2001; Sampson, 2012). Therefore not only the aims, but moreover the consequences of popular social mixing policies should be re-examined in light of structural perpetuation of disadvantage.

Hereby special attention should be directed toward the ways in which – as well as by whom – social issues and corresponding areas are problematized, and also operationalized. The operationalization of social issues discussed in this study exhibits an institutional preference for evidence-based social policies pertaining to the quantification of social aspects of everyday life in order to achieve tangible, quantifiable results. This cannot be seen separately from the neoliberal trend warned for by Mayer (2016), characterized by a privatization of governmental tasks focused on result and return oriented policies. A critical examination is required into the effects and consequences of such neoliberal result-oriented operationalizations of social problems with regards to the structural endurance of social and economic disparities.

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<sup>18</sup> Echoing Margit Mayer's proposition that neoliberal urban governance tends to 'dispose the discredited' (Mayer et al., 2016, p. 70).

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