Social Interactions in Urban Parks: stimulating social cohesion?

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Outline

- Background
- Research question and objectives
- Theoretical perspective
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion
Background

- Multicultural society
- Tensions between/within native and ethnic groups
- NL: peaceful and tolerant society → increasing intolerance, emphasizing unbridgeable cultural differences
- Leisure in urban parks
- Government stimulates inter-ethnic encountering
## Dutch population (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrants total</strong></td>
<td>3 216 255</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Western</td>
<td>1 450 101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Non-western</td>
<td>1 766 154</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Turkey</td>
<td>372 852</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Morocco</td>
<td>335 208</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Surinam</td>
<td>335 679</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dutch Antilles and Aruba</td>
<td>131 387</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inhabitants total</strong></td>
<td>16 404 282</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amsterdam</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>35% inhabitants non-western countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics Netherlands, 2008*
Research question and objectives

Main research question:
- do urban parks contribute to social cohesion as they facilitate (inter-ethnic) social interaction?

Objectives

Gain insight:
- in the use and meaning of urban parks for different ethnic minorities
- the extent to which urban parks serve as meeting point for different ethnic groups
Urban parks → social interaction?

- Ethnic diversity visible in urban public domain
- What is the public domain? (Jacobs, Lofland, Zukin)
  - Public spaces are not only physical patterns
  - Space interrelates with social-cultural values and perceptions
  - Manifestation of diversity
  - Contested spaces or sites of harmony
Social interaction and social cohesion

- Social interaction -> social cohesion (Maloutas & Pantelidou; Marschall & Stolle).
  - provide the basis for bonds among individuals,
  - produced through interactions in daily life (Potapchuk et al.)

- Social cohesion: the extent to which a geographical place achieves ‘community’ in the sense of shared values, cooperation, and interaction (Beckley)
Social cohesion: social capital and attachment

- **Social capital (active social interaction)**
  - Relations between people (e.g. Bourdieu)
  - Social capital = foundation of social cohesion (Maxwell, Forrest & Kearns)

- **Attachment (passive social interaction)**
  - Relations between people and places
  - Through participation and involvement, people connect to certain places (Halseth)
  - Importance of seeing and meeting people → acquainted → public familiarity (Blokland)
  - Appropriation → connection → possibilities for having contact → more involvement (De Haan)
Two research projects

1) Quantitative study
   - 3 urban parks in cities Arnhem, Haarlem and Utrecht
   - Survey (questionnaire)
   - N=618: 300 ethnic people + 318 native people

2) Qualitative study
   - Two urban parks in Nijmegen (Netherlands)
   - Observations (N=24 days)
   - Interviews ethnic people (N=38)
Results: use of urban parks

1) Familiarity (know about)
- 25% of the ethnic people don’t know the park (3% np),
- Turk. > Mor., 2\textsuperscript{nd} > 1\textsuperscript{st} generation

2) Visitor
- If known, more or less equal participation (92%)
- Turk. > Mor., 1\textsuperscript{st} > 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation
- Gender: male > female
- Frequency use: n > e, T > M, 1\textsuperscript{st} = 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation
3) Activities

- Walking and cycling equally participating, native people (slightly) more frequently
- Having a picnic/barbecue and meeting other people: ethnic > native people
- Differences between the parks:
  - function (neighborhood – city level)
  - design (facilitate specific activities)
  - image
Results: social interaction

Watching/meeting other people
- Ethnic > native people, Mor. > Turk., younger more than older, low > high education

Meeting familiar people
- Park as meeting place: people they know

Unexpected encounters
- Talking to strangers (specific issues, every day talk)
- Ethnic people wish for more contact
- Triangulation: balls, dogs, children
- Tensions between user groups
Results: attachment

- Reasonable/high level of attachment
- Native > ethnic people
- Turk > Mor.
- Old > young people
- Park use and level of attachment correlated
- Conclusion: ethnicity and park use explain the most
Results: attachment

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.301$
Results: attachment

Differences between the parks:

- **function** (neighborhood – city level)
  - Neighborhood park = feeling at home
  - City level = world of strangers

- **image** (famous/attractive – ‘everyday’)
  - Everyday place
  - Attractive = place to be, everybody comes there (age, multi-ethnicity, etc.)
Conclusion

- Urban parks are inclusive places
- Social interaction (active) = cursory
- Social interaction (passive) = important
- Ethnic > native people more social interaction
- Apparent paradox: being on your own, but close to others → contribution to social cohesion
- Use and involvement → feelings of attachment and familiarity → social cohesion
Thank you!

...time for questions and discussion...