

English summary

Neighbourhood effects and parental strategies: the geography of upbringing environments in the divided city

This thesis offers a study of how neighbourhoods influence its residents, so-called *neighbourhood effects*. The two main research questions are: *how and to what degree do the neighbourhood context shape socioeconomic prospects of children and youths? And what is the role of their parents?* The dissertation includes empirical analysis of neighbourhood effects as well as literature reviews, discussion, and theoretical advancements in the field of neighbourhood research, particularly in relation to parenthood. The study is among the first neighbourhood studies conducted in a Norwegian urban context examining the impact of neighbourhood attributes on the future socioeconomic status of adolescents. The findings reveal *long term neighbourhood effects* on young people's educational attainment, income, and unemployment in Oslo; they also suggest that wider urban districts in Oslo matter more for adolescents' educational attainment than close neighbours.

Another part of the dissertation utilizes existing literature in a discussion of societal and community factors that shape childhoods. A key point in the discussion is that *socioeconomic opportunity structures* within which youths navigate may constrain or enable choices, behaviours, and future outcomes. This happens through numerous *mechanisms*, many of which are social in nature. Particular attention is given to segregation and socio-spatial inequalities that affect children's upbringing, both nationally and internationally. Even if the importance of parents for children's upbringing is well established in the literature, I find that the understanding of their role in the relation between children and neighbourhoods is less developed in today's literature. The thesis provides a theoretical advancement to bridge this knowledge gap by providing a typology for parental neighbourhood strategies.

The dissertation consists of four articles that are prefaced by an introduction that clarifies the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. The first two articles are both empirical studies of neighbourhood effects on youths. These two studies are based on quantitative analysis and were among the first neighbourhood effect studies on socioeconomic prospects of urban youth in Norway, applying multilevel statistical modelling on register data at the neighbourhood level. The first paper, studies about 5500 youths growing up in Oslo, Norway, in the 1980 and 90s. It analyses the impact of the composition of neighbours in their community during adolescence has on their future educational attainment, income, and employment status as young adults. Results show that, after control for socioeconomic family background, the level of neighbourhood deprivation appears to have a lagged effect on socioeconomic status. The effect is significant for all three outcomes, but strongest in terms of long-run educational achievement. Corresponding effects on income are weaker, whereas effects on unemployment disappear in the longer run. Registered individual-level effects are generally moderate in magnitude, but their significance at a larger societal level must be seen in the context of numbers; they affect a large share of the population. Some attributes of the residents appear to matter more than others. The share of neighbours outside the labour market

and dependent on public welfare showed surprisingly robust effects on adolescents' educational attainment. Even if the study is not able to measure social mechanisms directly, a life outside the labour market is, in the Norwegian context, a life on the fringes of society, which may influence people's identity, motivation and well-being. It may further influence peer group norms, attitudes, and behaviours.

The second paper analyses the same youth cohorts and pick up the thread from the first article by investigating more carefully how the youth's educational accomplishments is influenced by three different levels of geographical areas: blocks, neighbourhoods, and urban districts. The study introduced a more place-sensitive approach to area effect studies, taking these geographical levels into account simultaneously. By applying a multilevel statistical model with four levels, the study reveals a modest but significant effect on the youth's future educational achievements at all geographical levels and for all the eight demographic and deprivation measures tested. However, a rather surprising result is that the variation in educational attainment at the urban district level (the highest geographical level) seems to have most profound effect on educational outcomes, more than blocks and neighbourhoods. Even if the indirect character of the data suggests a cautious interpretation, it is still possible to discuss some plausible explanations emerging from these results. One can observe a combination of three operating mechanisms: the youths' extended activity spaces and social interactions; place stigmatization and institutional aspects like local schools. It underlines the need to explore the complex interplay between residential areas, school institutions and the wider system for school intake. The share of low-educated neighbours was also found to have an impact on youths' future educational attainment. A reasonable explanation for the effect of the low educated neighbours is that the local educational culture may affect the pedagogical motivation among adolescents. This culture might be passed along through *socio-spatial opportunity structures* and *mechanisms* like role models, shared norms and values and social learning in the local community.

The third contribution, also a book chapter, is based on a literature review of neighbourhood effect studies and mechanisms related to long term socioeconomic status for children and youths. It presents and debates what social mechanisms that are most likely to bring about neighbourhood effects in Norwegian urban areas. It underlines that social mechanisms are selective, and that neighbourhood effects are differentiated according to individual characteristics belonging to the youths themselves, and variations in the socio-spatial opportunity structures of the neighbourhood.

The point of departure of the fourth paper is that the neighbourhood affects the younger generation directly and indirectly through their parents, more specifically through what is called parental mediation. However, few studies, especially in a European context, have recognized parents as being aware of neighbourhood effects, and their own potential buffer role in developing parenting strategies for their offspring's relationship to the local community. Based on a literature review, the paper is building an analytical framework to improve our understanding of parents' active buffer role in the interaction between children and their

neighbourhood through parenting styles, family stress and perceived parental efficacy, and how these aspects relate to parents' perceptions of the local community. The paper introduces a typology of parental neighbourhood strategies: (1) *to form or harden* the children through exposure to the neighbourhood; (2) *to strengthen the community* in order to improve the environment in which children are brought up; (3) *to protect* the children from adverse neighbourhood factors by (3a) *staying put* in the community while controlling children's exposure to the local community or by (3b) *moving out*. When it comes to family life, neighbourhood effects, processes of residential mobility and segregation and the level of socially mixed neighbourhoods, the potential societal consequences of these strategies are profound. This article is intended as a contribution to strengthening insight into these processes and as a point of departure for future research on parental neighbourhood strategies.

In conclusion, even if the policies of the Norwegian welfare state seem to equalize some of the socio-spatial inequalities, it is a paradox for an egalitarian welfare state that place-related factors during the teenage years continue to matter more than a decade later in life. As socioeconomic inequalities and segregation in Norwegian urban regions are increasing, it is likely that the place where young people grow up will continue to impact their life chances in the coming decade, and probably increase.