

The role of moderating and mediating factors in the relationship between objective and perceived social diversity, and neighbourhood attachment

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between neighbourhood diversity – in the ethnic, income, and age dimension – and place attachment. Drawing on the sociological literature on the 'diversity effect' and theories originating from social and environmental psychology, this research investigates the moderating role of individual social ties, and the mediating role of affective appraisals in shaping this relationship. Therefore, it provides a psychological perspective to the ongoing scholarly debate on the consequences of ethnic diversity for social cohesion, of which place attachment is an indicator. The thesis addresses both objective and perceived diversity. Three interrelated studies were done, which applied a mixed methods approach. Study 1 was an international survey conducted in six European cities, and focused on ethnic diversity. It revealed a negative relationship between objectively measured ethnic diversity and place attachment, which is in line with macro-level sociological theories such as the conflict/threat theory, homophily principle or conflict of norms theory (Tolsma & van der Meer, 2014). This relationship was, however, moderated by interethnic ties, differently for native and migrant residents. The negative effect of ethnic diversity on place attachment was reduced for natives who had interethnic ties, which supports the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1988), and for migrants with mono-ethnic ties. This asymmetry between natives and migrants may be explained by the different meaning that a diverse setting and interethnic ties have for the majority and minority group members. Study 2 was a qualitative study which investigated perceptions of three types of social diversity – ethnic, age and income diversity among residents of three socially diverse neighbourhoods in Warsaw. It revealed that inhabitants of Warsaw, while speaking of neighbourhood diversity, divided their neighbours into two categories only: the 'ordinary, normal' residents and those who disrespected the norms of neighbourhood coexistence. They perceived socioeconomic diversity as the most problematic and ethnic diversity as the least problematic. Their perceptions of age diversity were ambiguous. Study 3 was a quantitative study conducted in Warsaw, and examined the effects of perceived

social diversity on neighbourhood attachment, while accounting for measures of objective diversity. It demonstrated that perceived ethnic diversity was positively related to neighbourhood attachment, and this link was mediated by the emotion of excitement. Perceived income diversity undermined attachment regardless of the neighbourhood ties, and this effect was not mediated by affective appraisals. Perceived age diversity was related to lower neighbourhood attachment only for individuals who had few ties with neighbours of different ages. Perceived age diversity was also related to the emotion of excitement, but its direct effect on attachment was negative, thus confirming the ambivalent meaning of this type of diversity. Overall, this thesis contributes to the literature on consequences of social diversity by revealing that different dimensions of diversity may have different implications for neighbourhood attachment and possibly social cohesion in general. It highlights the role of intergroup ties in moderating the effects of both objective and perceived diversity, but also shows that it is worth thinking about the positive emotions that social diversity in the environment may trigger. The latter is a novel perspective given the empirical findings demonstrating that ethnic diversity has negative consequences for individuals.