



Foundation P&V

**Research on overcoming divisions in society
“Connecting You(th)”**

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FOUNDATION P&V

*emancipation participation
citizenshipsolidarity*

Contributors

Introduction: Research on overcoming divisions in society “Connecting You(th)”

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Paper 1: Geographical inequalities in educational credentials, 1961-2011

written by *Raf Vanderstraeten and Frederik Van der Gucht* #3

Paper 2: Education and selective mobility: How parental and ethnic background assort the relocations of young Brussels adults

written by *Lena Imeraj and Sylvie Gadeyne* #4

Paper 3: Worlds apart? An empirical assessment of education as a social boundary among young people in Flanders

written by *Bram Spruyt and Filip Van Droogenbroeck* #5

Paper 4: Building bridges in and with youth work. Connecting with vulnerable youngsters

written by *Nathalie Van Ceulebroeck, Els De Ceuster and Britt Dehertogh* #6

Paper 5: Local community lifelong learning centres and supports as spatial relational systems: Changing diametric spaces of exclusion towards concentric spaces of inclusion for a spatial-ecological systems science

written by *Paul Downes* #7

The Foundation P&V supports active citizenship and fights against social exclusion of young people.

The composition of the population by educational level has changed drastically since the Second World War. In the period between 1961 and 2011, the proportion of people with a low level of education - at most lower secondary education - decreased from 92 to 34% in Belgium, the proportion with an intermediate level of education - a diploma of secondary education - increased from 6 to 35%, and the proportion with a high education level, a post-secondary education diploma, rose from 2 to 31%. It is expected that by 2030 just over 40 percent of the Belgian workforce will be highly skilled. The share of the low-skilled would then plunge just below 20 percent.

The enormous change in the composition of the population according to educational level means that the youngest and oldest age cohorts differ profoundly from each other in this area. In 2019, no fewer than 47.5% of all Belgian 30-34 year olds had a higher education diploma. Among the 55 to 64 year olds, this is 3 in 10. In the latter age group, 3 in 10 are also low-skilled. This is clearly less in the younger age groups (around 10%).

As a foundation which mission is to fight against the exclusion of young people, we launched a prize for research on overcoming social divisions in society among young people, more specifically regarding education: "Connecting Youth". This publication gathers the abstracts of the 5 winning articles of this call. The contributions in their entirety will be gathered later in a collective publication.

It is well known that, despite all policy measures, not all sections of the population participate in education in the same way. In addition to the social inequalities - between boys and girls, or between young people from different socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds - there are also geographic differences in terms of educational participation and school dropout that are less known. Paper 1 is interested in such (shifting) spatial or geographic patterns of educational inequality in Belgium since the 1960s. Paper 2 shows how education generates opportunities for some groups of young people to move out of certain neighbourhoods, but not for others.

These forms of geographic inequality in education show that the low and the highly educated meet each other less and less. They do not live in the same neighbourhoods, they do not go to the same sports club or school, they do not meet each other in the same (digital) places and they no longer meet each other in the church or the army. Where there used to be cleavages according to religious beliefs or class, according to some, the new societal cleavage emerges along educational lines. This is also called a horizontal cleavage, which means that higher and low-skilled people hardly have access to each other's network. Not only do short and high-skilled people see each other little, they are also concerned about different things.

Highly educated people (including young people) are, for example, concerned about the environment, (higher) education and healthcare. The low-skilled are more concerned about crime, migration and unemployment. This observation that in our society there are large differences in life chances, views and attitudes, perceptions and experiences, ... between the high and the low skilled is not new. However, some suggest that this divide has deepened or intensified in recent years. Added to this is the growing awareness of the consequences of the education gap on social cohesion and the (im)possibility of building a society to which everyone can relate.

More and more young people are studying for longer and longer times. More and more companies are also calling on highly skilled human capital. But that connection has a downside. Not having a (higher) diploma becomes a serious handicap when a diploma is considered normal or evident in a knowledge society. In knowledge societies, educational credentials or diplomas become symbolic capital. Diplomas are seen as "competence badges" that help to legitimize a position. Education classifies people (higher versus lower education, vocational versus general education), which causes people to view educational differences as legitimate status differences. Paper 3 takes a closer look at the meaning of the differences in the world of young people in secondary education according to the form/track of education they attend (general vs. technical/vocational education). It is argued that identified educational differences in attitudes, views, tastes, ... could be partly an expression of status differences related to value judgments about the education followed.

Initiatives to increase mutual contacts between young people from different educational tracks should, according to the authors, focus on both groups. It is often investigated how young people from e.g. vocational education or low-skilled young people can be attracted to existing activities in the social space, without examining the underlying assumptions within these activities and / or the needs and experiences of the young people. Papers 4 and 5 elaborate on this. Paper 4 offers a framework for thinking about bridge building as a way to break through dividing lines between and within organizations that work with young people from different backgrounds. Paper 5 focuses on the intercultural and spatial-relational conditions necessary to involve socio-economic and socio-cultural marginalized groups in society. This is to prevent subcultures that run parallel to the rest of a particular society.

Paper 1: Geographical inequalities in educational credentials, 1961-2011

Raf Vanderstraeten and Frederik Van der Gucht

The expansion of university-based education is linked with the rise of the contemporary knowledge society. But as the expected amount of education has quickly spiralled upward, the 'dropout problem' for people who quit school at an early age was also created.

Using a set of socio-geographical methods and longitudinal data from population censuses, we explore the geographical dynamics of forms of educational inclusion and exclusion in the knowledge society. This paper, more particularly, presents an analysis of geographical inequalities at the top and the bottom end of the human capital distribution across Belgium in the period 1961-2011.

Our findings show, firstly, that the segregation of university-trained human capital within Belgium and its regions has remained high throughout this period, despite the expansion of university education and the creation of 'regional' universities. Highly educated individuals now increasingly attract one another. Around major university towns, a few 'hot spots,' characterized by high concentrations of university graduates, have emerged.

Our findings show, secondly, different evolutions for early school leavers. While the overall decrease in the share of early school leavers has gone hand in hand with decreasing heterogeneity within Belgium, our analyses point to increasing divergences between Flanders, on the one hand, and Wallonia and Brussels, on the other. In large parts of Wallonia and Brussels, the labour markets suffer from the presence of comparatively high shares of school dropouts.

We conclude that the success of particular areas not only depends on the abundance of highly skilled workers, but also on their ability to avoid relatively large shares of the less skilled. The prevention of early school dropout may thus be among the most important factors in future economic success. It is also a good strategy to achieve more social equality in the contemporary knowledge society.

Keywords: geographical inequalities, university graduates, school dropouts

Data: Belgian population censuses between 1961-2011

Paper 2: Education and selective mobility: How parental and ethnic background assort the relocations of young Brussels adults

Lena Imeraj and Sylvie Gadeyne

According to spatial assimilation theory, educational integration leads to residential integration. Still, a gap in residential attainment between ethnic minorities and the native majority persists, regardless of educational attainment.

This study seeks to investigate if and how achieved education forges pathways of socio-spatial integration differently for individuals with differing ethnic and educational background living in inner-city neighbourhoods of Brussels. Analyses draw on linked longitudinal population-based censuses from 1991 and 2001 and register data for the period 2001-2006. Multinomial logistic regressions are applied to the young adult population aged 23 to 32 at the time of the 2001 census, who then lived in the inner-city of Brussels.

Analyses show that the role of achieved education in residential outcomes hinges markedly on ethnic background and parental education. Dispersal away from poor inner-city neighbourhoods appears least likely for labour migrant descendants and respondents having low educated parents, regardless of achieved education. Hence, while our approach partly confirms traditional socio-spatial integration, it reveals how educational success generates opportunities to escape poor neighbourhoods for some but not for others.

By illuminating the heterogeneity in socio-spatial mobility of young adults in Brussels, this research challenges the traditional approach taken in spatial assimilation theory, in particular for the offspring of poor low-educated non-Western households. Segregation research thus needs to critically evaluate and diversify classic theories, by examining in detail the extent to which theories are specific to locales, ethnic groups, social classes and generations. Only by fully disentangling the drivers of segregation that are evocative for specific people and places, can we fully understand and tackle urban inequalities. Our findings resonate the need for local actors to shape policies relevant to their place and for future policy interventions that are tailored to the needs of specific people, communities and places.

Keywords: education, ethnic background, socio-spatial integration, residential mobility

Data: Linked longitudinal population censuses from 1991 and 2001 and register data for the period 2001-2006 – analyses on young people between 23- and 32-years old living in Brussels

Paper 3: Worlds apart? An empirical assessment of education as a social boundary among young people in Flanders

Bram Spruyt and Filip Van Droogenbroeck

Although extensive research has documented educational differences in a wide range of outcomes among youth, the available evidence lies scattered over numerous studies. Consequently, there is a pressing need for synthesis that addresses the question to what extent educational tracks effectively constitute a social boundary separating young people who live in separate worlds, are aware of these differences, and whose educational track position organizes their social contacts. To (partially) answer that question, this paper analyzes data from 11 large surveys (Total N= 38372) gathered between 1996 and 2018 among young people enrolled in secondary education in Flanders.

In the first part of the analysis, we assess to what extent young people's educational track position relates to a wide range of opinions and behavior in general (i.e. 471 outcomes) and the potential moderating role of gender and migration status. In the second part of the analysis, we focus on indicators that refer more directly to intergroup processes (i.e., cross-track friendships and perceived contempt regarding one's educational study).

Overall, our findings suggest that educational differences are especially large with respect to tastes and indicators of lifestyle and societal attitudes. We find clear indications that differences in educational track position are connected with (perceived) status differences of which young people are well aware and which constitute an important structuring factor regarding their friendships. In the conclusion, we elaborate on the implications of our findings.

Keywords: educational track, status, mass study, intergroup relations

Data: 11 surveys between 1996-2018 – Flemish youngsters between 15 and 18 years old (Total N= 38.372)

Paper 4: Building bridges in and with youth work. Connecting with vulnerable youngsters.

Nathalie Van Ceulebroeck, Els De Ceuster and Britt Dehertogh

Diversity amongst Flemish and Brussels youngsters has increased considerably in recent years. Among other things, diversity concerns disabilities, gender, (ethnic) origin, educational level and deprivation. Youth work faces many challenges of openness and accessibility to vulnerable youngsters.

The Flemish government invested in the innovative concept of 'building bridges' as a means to strengthen the participation of youth from different backgrounds. Twelve 'bridge-building' projects in youth work aim to improve the participation of vulnerable groups by creating meeting spaces and by strengthening people and organisations who can form a "bridge" between different groups of youngsters. By means of action research, a mutual definition of the concept of bridge-building is created, based on insights of the projects and inspiring literature concepts (e.g. contact hypotheses of Allport and social capital of Bourdieu and Wacquant).

The research shows that a number of conditions need to be fulfilled for bridge building to be successful. One of these is making traditions, values and norms of different people and/or organisations negotiable. In addition, a form of mutual interdependence is needed to enhance a common ground. Perhaps the most important finding is that bridge-building cannot be assigned to a single professional. It is a complex and slow process that requires a series of different competences at different levels in order to succeed.

Three main roles in the bridge-building process were identified: exploring, connecting and anchoring. All of which are equally important in order to successfully create a sustainable connection that breaks down divisions between young people and organisations.

Keywords: youth, bridging diversity, sustainable connections

Data: Action research in 12 Flemish and Brussels youth projects

Paper 5: Local community lifelong learning centres and supports as spatial relational systems: Changing diametric spaces of exclusion towards concentric spaces of inclusion for a spatial-ecological systems science

Paul Downes

Analysis of emerging meeting spaces to bridge social divides between groups of marginalised youth requires scrutiny of the fundamental concept of space itself, where 'bridges' between groups presupposes spatial understandings of mediating conditions.

It is hypothesised that contrasting cross-cultural concentric and diametric spaces serve as mediating conditions to inform exclusion and inclusion in transitions of marginalised youth to engage with community lifelong learning centres and support services. This article outlines key spatial contrasts between concentric and diametric spaces and seeks to highlight their relevance as enabling and hindering conditions for the transition of alienated youth into community education and services.

This proposed spatial ecological systems framework of contrasts between concentric and diametric spatial systems is both a domain of study and a methodology pertaining to change in mediating conditions. Concentric and diametric spaces are proposed as both structures and processes of change, where the unit of analysis is spatial system conditions underpinning empirical system phenomena.

Given the lack of detailed systematic reviews internationally of local community education and supports, and their relationships with specific outcomes, in the absence of this, selected projects across Europe and qualitative empirical studies are identified as illustrative examples of key processes and structures pertaining to concentric and diametric spatial systems relevant to marginalised groups.

Concentric processes include assertive outreach to individuals, community outreach, drop-in opportunities, promoting belonging through a life wide intergenerational approach, avoiding prescriptive, competitive institutional culture, and celebrating voice and difference. Concentric structural features include accessibility, colocation, social interaction spaces, anticipating territoriality, a gateway principle to more specialist multidisciplinary services. The policy relevance of these issues is highlighted through brief examination of EU documents on social inclusion for early school leaving prevention and peace building.

Keywords: community lifelong learning centres, outreach, spatial transitions

Data: Theoretical and qualitative research of European and American good practices

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