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Neither bridging nor bonding A test of socialization effects by ethnically diverse voluntary associations on participants' inter-ethnic tolerance, inter-ethnic trust and intra-ethnic belonging



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ABSTRACT

The distinction between bridging and bonding associations is a cornerstone of social capital research. Nevertheless, this study is the first to provide a direct test of the socialization mechanism that supposedly causes ethnically mixed (bridging) associations to generate interethnic tolerance and trust, and homogenous (bonding) associations to cement self-affirming identities.

This multilevel analysis of the Citizenship, Involvement & Democracy (CID) 1999/2000 survey data on Mannheim (Germany), Enschede (the Netherlands), and Aberdeen (Scotland) covers 3166 active participants in 645 associations. The CID includes objective, exogenous measures of each association's composition and aim. Socialization and self-selection effects are pulled apart through interactions with detailed measures of associational involvement.

The results display no evidence for (diverse and homogenous) associations as socializing agents. Although inter-ethnic tolerance is higher in ethnically diverse associations, this should be attributed to self-selection effects.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decades, voluntary associations have been ascribed a strong socializing potential. The neo-Tocquevillian approach that gained prominence in the 1990s argued that associations function as schools of democracy, supposedly instilling pro-social values into their members, including tolerance and respect for others (Warren, 2001). Scholars have theorized on the type of associations that would be most inductive such pro-social values. Putnam (2000) proposed a distinction between bridging and bonding associations. Bridging associations bring together 'people who are unlike one another' (Putnam and Goss, 2002), especially across ethnic and racial lines (Putnam, 2000). Involvement in such bridging associations would stimulate connections with and attachment to dissimilar others (Coffé and Geys, 2007), generating overarching identities (Putnam, 2000). Bonding associations, by contrast, bring 'together people who are like one another in important respects (ethnicity, age, gender, social class, and so on)' (Putnam and Goss, 2002). Involvement in such bonding

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associations would stimulate intolerance and self-affirming identities (Putnam, 2000; Putnam and Goss, 2002; Geys and Murdoch, 2008; Theeboom et al., 2012). Ethnically diverse associations would thus stimulate inter-ethnic social cohesion, whereas ethnically homogenous associations would bolster intra-ethnic social cohesion. This supposed socialization effect of ethnically mixed associations has become a cornerstone of social capital theory (e.g. Coffé and Geys, 2007; Igllic, 2010; Hooghe and Quintelier, 2013; Rapp and Freitag, 2014).

More recently social capital research began investigating a rivalling claim. '[Ethnic] diversity, at least in the short run, seems to bring out the turtle in all of us' (Putnam, 2007), that is, ethnically diverse environment would be harmful to both inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic social cohesion. Although this 'constrict thesis' was originally framed in relation to residential environments such as neighbourhoods, municipalities, regions and countries (for an overview see Van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014), the theoretical propositions have been transferred to (and tested in) functional environments as well, including schools (Demagnet et al., 2012; Dinesen, 2012; Janmaat, 2015), the work place (Barak and Travis, 2009), and friendship networks (Stolle and Harell, 2013), but not to associational life.

However, there is even a third approach next to the contact and constrict theses on the socialization effect of associations. Citizens tend to self-select themselves into associations of demographically and ideologically similar people (e.g. McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987; Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Glanville, 2004; Mutz and Mondak, 2006). Hence, pro-social citizens are more likely to join voluntary associations, and citizens who do not object contact with ethnic others are more likely to join ethnically diverse associations. This selection mechanism might be the explanation of any positive association between associational involvement and pro-social attitudes found in cross-sectional analyses.

All in all, there are theoretical reasons to expect that the ethnic diversity of an association has a positive effect on members' inter-ethnic and/or intra-ethnic social cohesion, reasons to expect a negative effect, and reasons to expect no effect whatsoever. To date, it is unclear to what extent members' inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic attitudes are indeed the consequence of the diversity of the association they are involved in. Hence, this article aims to pull apart and empirically test the three main approaches: contact, constrict, and self-selection.

Methodologically, the literature has been plagued by various limitations that this paper aims to overcome. First, this paper is the first to directly assess the supposed diversity effects of voluntary associations. There have been studies that aimed to assess the effect of diversity, commonly using labels such as 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital (e.g. Coffé and Geys, 2007; Geys and Murdoch, 2008; see also Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Hooghe and Quintelier, 2013). However, these studies were insufficient, as data limitation led them to resort to measuring the diversity of associational type (such as sports clubs) rather than the diversity of individual associations (such as the local soccer club or chess club), thereby ignoring the social segregation that takes place within associational types: Even when ethnic groups have rather equal membership rates of a type of association (such as soccer clubs or baseball clubs), they may still be culturally or ethnically segregated into different associations (such as Moroccan, Indian and Italian soccer clubs, or white, black and Latin baseball clubs). Alternatively, other studies measured the ethnic diversity of an association subjectively, i.e., through the perception of the respondent (e.g. Rapp and Freitag, 2014), or as an individual level characteristic (e.g. Stolle, 1998). Due to endogeneity and nesting issues, such subjective and individual measures tend to overestimate diversity effects on inter- and intra-ethnic attitudes.

A second problem in the literature is the scarcity of (detailed) panel data to model the supposed dynamic socialization mechanism over time. Although theoretically the distinction between bridging and bonding associations may be concerned with differential socialization effects over time, its support and tests have almost exclusively been derived from outcome comparisons in cross-sectional analyses (Stolle, 1998; Coffé and Geys, 2007; Geys and Murdoch, 2008; Igllic, 2010; Theeboom et al., 2012; Rapp and Freitag, 2014; Achbari, 2015), or from panel data with at best a very brief time span (Hooghe and Quintelier, 2013).¹ This current study is no exception: there is no panel data available with detailed information on the associational context. However, this study does provide a more stringent test of socialization effects (a) by focussing on theoretically necessary preconditions for socialization to occur (most notably active involvement and length of membership), and (b) by taking various selection mechanisms into account as rivalling explanations.

An analysis of the actual diversity effects in associations thus requires detailed information on the ethnic composition of individual associations, and detailed information on members' involvement in these associations. This paper benefits from analysing the Citizenship, Involvement & Democracy (CID) 1999/2000 data on Mannheim (GE), Enschede (NL) and Aberdeen (SC), which covers associations and active participants. The unique feature of the CID is that it 'tailored empirical data on organisations to that on individuals engaged in these associations' (Maloney et al., 2008: 266), resulting in 645 identified associations and 3166 active participants of these associations.

Crucially, ethnic diversity is measured as an objective characteristic of every single association, exogenous from respondents' inter- and intra-ethnic attitudes. Its effect is modelled while controlling for associational aims (leisure, activism, ethnic concerns), and made conditional upon level of activity, hours of involvement, and years of membership. Additionally, the CID contains several measures of inter- and intra-ethnic social cohesion.

¹ The lack of panel data is also apparent in related fields, such as research on the impact of neighbourhood diversity on social cohesion (e.g., Putnam, 2007; Abascal and Baldassarri, 2015; see Van der Meer and Tolsma, 2014 for an overview) and the impact of class/school diversity on social ties (e.g., Demagnet et al., 2012; Dinesen, 2012; but see Janmaat, 2015 for an exception).

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