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Karen Schönwälder, Söner Petermann, Jörg Hüttermann, Steven Vertovec, Miles Hewstone, Dietlind Stolle, Katharina Schmid, and Thomas Schmitt, "Diversity and Contact. Immigration and Social Integration in German Cities". London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 296 pp.

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Book review

Karen Schönwälder, Söner Petermann, Jörg Hüttermann, Steven Vertovec, Miles Hewstone, Dietlind Stolle, Katharina Schmid, and Thomas Schmitt, "Diversity and Contact. Immigration and Social Integration in German Cities". London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 296 pp.

Integrating an increasing number of immigrants and ensuring the pacific coexistence of people from different ethnic groups is currently one of the main challenges for Western societies, and is likely to continue to be so in the years to come. The public debate on immigration-related issues has been particularly heated in recent times, but often grounded on a limited empirical basis. Indeed, several scholars have investigated the effects of ethnic diversity on a multiplicity of outcomes – such as trust, cooperation, civic participation and interethnic contact and attitudes – without reaching conclusive results. Amidst this debate, *Diversity and Contact. Immigration and Social Integration in German Cities* provides new evidence on how peaceful contact and interaction between members of different ethnic groups takes place daily in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods of German cities.

Does ethnic diversity harm social cohesion and interaction? This question has been on the research agenda of social scientists since the early 2000s [Alesina and La Ferrara 2002]. The academic discussion around the topic has become particularly lively since the publication of Putnam's [2007] article "*E Pluribus Unum.*" In his study on US communities, the author advances the hypothesis that citizens living in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods tend to "*hunker down* like turtles," by experiencing anomie and social isolation [Putnam 2007, 149]. In his findings, the author shows a decrease in citizens' trust (even in people from their own ethnic group) in their willingness to cooperate and in their number of friends when living in more heterogeneous neighbourhoods.

Due to its controversial policy implications, Putnam's analysis has been replicated and discussed in numerous publications. In particular, several scholars have highlighted many non-negligible empirical issues in the original study and the need to undertake more accurate analyses and methodological improvements for investigating the issue [Abascal and Baldassarri 2015]. This is because, despite the impressive number of empirical studies on the effects of ethnic diversity in multiple geographical contexts, conclusive results are still missing. In addition, on top of the absence of any clear-cut results, a solid theorization on the mechanisms linking diversity to outcomes under scrutiny is also still missing [Meer and Tolsma 2014, 460].

Schönwälder and colleagues' book presents the results of an extraordinary example of data collection. After randomly selecting fifty neighbourhoods in West Germany, the authors invested three years in collecting a three-wave panel survey of about 2,250 individuals. Survey data were integrated with data drawn from the systematic observation of neighbourhood characteristics and with evidence from qualitative fieldwork in five

selected areas. The analysis of this multiplicity of data provides intriguing insights into how interethnic contact takes place in German neighbourhoods, as well as into its effects on inhabitants' attitudes to diversity.

The results depict a comforting routine of cohabitation and exchange in ethnically-mixed urban areas. First, the authors assess the relevance of neighbourhood as a unit of analysis. Common wisdom on contemporary societies would want only limited social interaction to take place within the neighbourhood in favour of relationships built over more dispersed geographical areas or within digital arenas. On the contrary, the book shows how the inhabitants of German cities spend a considerable part of their leisure time in their neighbourhood and many of them form friendships within its boundaries, including ties to members of different ethnic groups. An analysis of the survey data indicates that living in neighbourhoods with higher shares of foreigners does not affect attitudes toward diversity, trust in different ethnic groups, or numbers of interethnic friends. On the contrary, respondents seem to widely appreciate diversity, in particular in those contexts where the presence of foreigners favours interaction and daily superficial contact.

Overall, the book makes some important contributions to the debate. First, the survey data at the basis of the analysis enables some of the main empirical issues encountered in traditional studies to be handled. Estimating a causal effect of variables at the neighbourhood level, such as its ethnic composition, is usually complicated by the fact that it is difficult for researchers to manipulate these variables. Scholars have spent a great deal of time and effort trying to overcome this problem by, for instance, providing vouchers to randomly-selected families for encouraging them to move to more affluent neighbourhoods [Goering and Feins, 2003] or by exposing subjects in real settings to contact with confederates from different ethnic groups [Enos 2014]. However, these studies have often led to highly debated results [e.g. Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2008; Ludwig *et al.* 2008; Sampson 2008]. While the present study cannot estimate the causal effect of ethnic diversity with methods close to those of experimental practice, collecting a three-wave panel allows the authors to measure outcomes after their supposed causes, and thus significantly improving on extant studies.

Second, the present study does not only deal with the effects of ethnic diversity *per se,* but it also measures and analyses the relations between members of specific groups. Long before the current debate on the effects of diversity, social psychologists have studied the attitudes of individuals towards *in-group* members and *out-group* members. For instance, scholars have studied which conditions favour a reduction in generalization and prejudice [Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998] and the origins of intergroup competition and threat [Tajfel and Turner 1986]. Analysing the effects of ethnic diversity, rather than exposure to out-group members, can easily lead to some of the dynamics that were crucial to this oldest strand of research being overlooked. Ethnic groups, that is to say, are usually different on several dimensions – such as their social ranking – and these can easily be flattened by indexes of ethnic heterogeneity. Schönwälder and colleagues are quite right to have integrated these two traditions. The outcome is a detailed analysis that considers how the experiences of immigrants and natives might be different in equally diverse neighbourhoods. Potentially, this approach also enables historical relationships between specific ethnic groups to be taken into consideration.

Finally, the most innovative part of the study is, for sure, the use of a mixed method approach. Living in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood might affect individuals' attitudes and interactions through a multiplicity of channels. Integrating different types of data is probably the only possible step that can be taken to unpack these underlying mechanisms. In this book, the use of qualitative data adds to more standard statistical analysis in several ways. First, the authors can compare statistical measures of ethnic diversity with their own measure of *noticeable diversity*. In order to assess whether ethnic diversity is actually perceived by people living in neighbourhoods, the research team conducted systematic observations of neighbourhood streets by registering visual cues of ethnic diversity. Second, the use of qualitative interviews allows them to assess respondents' actual perceptions of diversity, while the combination of these techniques allows them to confirm that ethnically diverse neighbourhoods are perceived differently from the more homogenous ones. Finally, the combination of systematic observations and qualitative interviews allows them to identify the conditions under which interaction between different groups is more likely to take place. In particular, the authors consider the role of physical infrastructure, the different organization of functions and roles covered by ethnic groups, and the presence of collective narratives in favour of diversity.

Schönwälder and his colleagues' study lays a useful foundation for future research on the effects of ethnic diversity. A first promising avenue for future research could be that of further exploring how citizens' expectations of members of the other groups vary in relation to specific actions. Consider, for example, the case of trust in members of other groups. Our understanding of interethnic trust could greatly improve with a finer measurement of respondent's expectations. In general, we say that we trust when we trust that someone will do X and our trust does not necessarily extend to the expectation that this same person would do Y [Gambetta and Bacharach 2001]. Indeed, studying people's *generalized trust* could limit our understanding of the effects of diversity on trust and, more generally, on social capital and cohesion. As remarked by Portes and Vickstrom in their answer to Putnam from 2011, cooperation in modern societies is closer to what Durkheim calls *organic solidarity* – thus based on heterogeneity, role differentiation, and a complex division of labour – than to the *mechanical solidarity* of traditional societies – based on cultural homogeneity and mutual acquaintance [Portes and Vickstrom 2011, 472; Durkheim (1894) 1893]. Exploring how trust in members of different groups varies in relation to specific actions – e.g. returning a wallet, arriving on time, paying back a loan, helping a person in case of need – could lead us to some new interesting findings. By following the suggestions in the present book, this analysis could reveal itself as particularly interesting if coupled with an assessment of the roles and activities covered by ethnic groups in different neighbourhoods.

Another interesting expansion of this study is connected to exploring how changes in diversity can affect attitudes toward foreigners and interaction at the neighbourhood level. As already mentioned in this review, assessing the causal effects of ethnic diversity is complicated by straightforward problems in manipulating the independent variable. In the present book, the authors choose to focus on neighbourhoods in Western German cities. Indeed, the authors illustrate how ethnic diversity was still rather uncommon in

Eastern German cities at the time of the study. This situation is likely to change in some parts of Eastern Germany in view of the recent inflow of asylum seekers. In particular, those cities that will open some new reception centres for asylum seekers will experience something close to an exogenous shock in ethnic diversity. Applying the array of methods presented in this book to study the effects of changing diversity in Eastern Germany could lead to interesting comparisons and possibly expand our understanding of the topic.

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