

Preface

# On the Crossroads of the Social and Spatial Dimensions of Poverty

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## 1. Setting the Scene

The gradual widening, since the beginning of the 1990s, of the scientific and policy debates on poverty from a narrow focus on income poverty to a more inclusive concept of social exclusion, has made poverty research both more interesting and more complicated. In a way, this transition to a more multidimensional conceptualisation of poverty – and the concomitant efforts to measure this multidimensional concept – forms the background and starting point of this book. As Jan Vranken emphasises in the prologue to this volume, poverty and social exclusion not only became more complex in their manifestations on multiple domains, during the past decades research into its spatial dimensions also became more relevant and important, giving rise to (or rather, reviving) a vibrant research tradition. To this day, researchers studying the ‘social’ and ‘spatial’ dimensions of poverty have only started to challenge and explore the boundaries of each other’s research perspectives and instruments. With this book, we hope to sketch a picture of current evolutions in research, practice and policies, and to make a case for more synergy between these approaches as a promising strategy to improve our understanding of the complex phenomenon of poverty.

## 2. The Social Dimension: Forms and Patterns of Poverty

Much has been written on the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty. The waning of post-war optimism and the realisation that even an extended welfare state cannot prevent many people from being confronted with shorter or longer periods of poverty during their life course, has contributed to the regular resurfacing of the debate on the concept of poverty, often accompanied by ‘new’ qualifications. However, the extensive literature on the definition and measurement of several notions, such as ‘poverty’, ‘(relative) deprivation’, ‘social exclusion’ or ‘underclass’, is characterised by an endemic malaise, which Øyen (1996: 4) once formulated as:

the constant uneasiness of working in a field where neither the concepts and the methodologies, nor the theories are precise enough to be useful working tools [...] It takes courage to live with the complexity of a poverty definition and the lack of an adequate theoretical framework.

Notwithstanding this lack of a general conceptual framework, most poverty researchers do agree on some points. Perhaps the most important point of agreement is that poverty should be understood as a social and relative concept, depending on the general standard of living in society (e.g. Andreß 1998). Many authors still revert to the poverty definition introduced in the 1970s by Townsend (1979: 31), who states that: 'Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged, or approved, in the societies to which they belong. They are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities'.

Conceptualising this multidimensional poverty concept also requires a reflection on how different dimensions – height, width, depth and time – impact on the different forms poverty can take. Firstly, poverty can manifest itself on (many) different life domains ('width') and in different gradations of severity ('height'). The 'depth' dimension of poverty then refers to the accumulation of problematic situations on those several life domains. Poverty could thus arise from a severe deprivation on one life domain or instead be the result of a multitude of not so severely deprived situations on several life domains.

However, the most pervasive 'variability-inducing' component is probably the time dimension, producing 'mixed' evidence on the poverty status of individuals, depending on the specific point in time at which they are observed. Poverty can be a short-lived or a long-term experience (Bane and Ellwood 1986; Walker 1994; Jenkins 2000). Research has furthermore shown that the correlation between income and life-style deprivation is stronger the longer people are confronted with financial poverty (Jeandidier and Kop 1998; Whelan, Layte et al. 2002). Also, the trajectories leading up to a situation of poverty can be very different for different population groups. While for some 'poverty' is the result of a major 'poverty-inducing' life event, such as a divorce, for others the experience of poverty is the outcome of a long-term build-up of smaller events eventually pushing them under the poverty line, resulting in different 'forms' of poverty at different points in time. The picture is even more complex in comparative research where an additional source of variation is added to the equation.

From the above it is clear that the 'poor' population at one point in time is rather heterogeneous. Given this heterogeneity, the repeated finding in empirical research that different approaches to measuring poverty identify different risk groups, is hardly surprising. To complicate matters further, different 'forms' of poverty seem to be differently patterned over time and to be induced by different determinants (Whelan, Layte et al. 2004).

### **3. The Spatial Dimension of Social Problems and Urban Policies**

Next to this ongoing shift towards a more multidimensional conceptualisation and operationalisation of poverty, there has been a growing – rather independent – interest in the spatial dimension of poverty and social exclusion. Studies on the impact of different types of welfare states, on the effects of spatial and social policies (e.g. urban governance), on neighbourhood effects and on societal changes as a whole, but also on the nature and development of social problems as such, revealed different aspects of this complex relationship.

Recent research has focused on the impact of societal transformations, and more specifically on the intensification of the process of globalisation, and on the emergence of new forms of social exclusion (e.g. flexible workers, low-skilled labour and in-work poverty, the increasing divide between dual-earner and jobless households, unstable families and lone parenthood ...), which are often observed as having a spatial dimension. One of the elements which has been crucial in the theoretical debate about (urban) social problems during the last decade was the relation between global economic restructuring processes and the role of the (welfare) states. A key hypothesis in the literature is that the globalisation process almost inevitably results in an increase in the power of ‘the market’ (private firms) and a loss of power and of opportunities for local and national governments. Recently, two edited volumes (Andersen and Van Kempen 2001; Kazepov 2004) have focused on how new or intensified forms of social inequality go hand in hand with new or increasing forms of urban segregation, dividing (West-European) cities into areas of included and excluded citizens. This evolution provides for the structural requirements for a possible future emergence of an ‘underclass’ in European cities, either in certain inner-city districts or in large housing estates on the urban fringe. This research tradition has resulted in several policy-oriented publications on urban governance (e.g. Burgers and Vranken 2003). Thus, most authors agree that even though the local level is often challenged, it remains a relevant government level, with a possibly profound impact on living conditions and life chances and on the structuring of everyday life.

### **4. This Book at a Glance**

In this book, our focus is on the intersection between research on social and spatial exclusion. As both research traditions have developed relatively independently from each other, we hope to direct the attention of our readers (academic, students, policy makers) to some interesting possibilities for cross-fertilisation.

The volume consists of two main parts. The first part features new perspectives and research outcomes on poverty and related social problems. The second part tries to build bridges between the social and the spatial dimensions of poverty. In this section, we provide the reader with a brief overview.

*Part 1: Poverty as a Multidimensional Concept*

The first three chapters in this book are concerned with the theoretical and methodological reasons for, and implications of, extending the so-called monetary approach to poverty measurement to a more 'multidimensional' approach. In the first chapter, Serge Paugam deals with the variations in social representations of poverty and experiences with poverty in European societies which remain hidden behind the 'official' income statistics. Why is poverty more of a structural (intergenerational) nature or of a temporary, more or less incidental nature in different countries and regions? Why is poverty perceived differently in different societies and at different time periods? How is this linked to the persistence (duration) of poverty situations? Economic development, social relations, the nature of social security systems and of social action are all seen as contributing factors. The author explores the diversity of manifestations and related representations of poverty and introduces a typology in order to take this diversity into account. In the second chapter, Anthony Atkinson undertakes a well thought-out and elaborate effort to bring together two important dimensions of social performance, i.e. income and health. In this chapter, the author discusses the many theoretical and methodological problems that arise when combining different dimensions of poverty, and he reveals how seemingly innocent choices are based on hidden, underlying assumptions. The authors of the third chapter – Chris de Neubourg, Keetie Roelen and Franziska Gassmann – contribute to the debate on the multidimensional measurement of poverty by looking at the limitations of monetary poverty measures in Congo and Vietnam (with a focus on child poverty) and at the possible implications for social policy design in both developed and developing countries.

In the following chapters we proceed from poverty measurement to the institutions that determine the forms that poverty takes. Jos Berghman and Annelies Debels (Chapter 4) argue that the European Union (EU) social policy focus on social exclusion and poverty is illogical, as it is contradictory to the principle of subsidiarity. They argue that this is the case because these policies focus on the outcomes of the failure of social insertion policies rather than on its roots, blinding policy makers for other socially undesirable consequences of failing social insertion mechanisms. Therefore, and in the light of recent societal changes, the authors advocate a new, complementary approach for the EU social policy, directed at its core business: social security schemes, education and training, labour supply and organisation. They advocate the use of the relatively new concept of flexicurity (Wilthagen, Tros et al. 2004; European Expert Group on Flexicurity 2007) which should not be seen as an alternative for the EU inclusion policies, but as a complementary approach in order to redirect European social policy involvement to the core business of social policy in the EU Member States: the labour market, re-employment and social security systems. In Chapter 5, historians Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly place the current (and recurring) nostalgia for presumed 'caring societies' as an answer to several social problems (such as

poverty and exclusion) into a historical perspective. Their unique inquiry into the qualification of the caring pre-industrial society warns us not to overestimate the significance of families and neighbourhoods as channels of informal support, and moreover, not to underestimate the significance of formal poor relief in those days. In the final (sixth) chapter of Part 1, Walter Van Trier focuses on the potential effects of unconditional basic incomes on poverty and social exclusion, through a critical review of the arguments given by André Gorz for his shift in position from arguing against towards defending such a basic income concept. Gorz is considered to be an influential voice in the (early) debate on this matter.

### *Part 2: Spatial Dimensions of Poverty*

In the opening chapter of the second part (Chapter 7), Christian Kesteloot, Maarten Loopmans and Pascal De Decker challenge mainstream sociologists to take on the spatial dimension as an essential feature of social relations and not as an independent explanatory factor in sociology. They explicitly plead for a dynamic space-time perspective in social sciences. From this more general perspective, the following chapters move on to a more specific spatial level, namely that of the city.

In Chapter 8, Jack Burgers examines the effects of the Dutch area-based approach of urban renewal. He argues that physical restructuring not automatically results in increased social cohesion at the neighbourhood level. Neither does it contribute to the social capital of disadvantaged residents in renewal areas. He minimises the neighbourhood effects in Dutch cities partly because Dutch neighbourhoods are considered too small to generate a substantial spatial concentration of social problems. This is more specifically the case for unemployment and the capability to create new jobs. In Chapter 9, Eric Snel and Godfried Engbersen stay with the Dutch case but they start their analysis from a different paradigm. The authors focus on policies and assess the repressive turn taken in urban policies. The Urban policy's central issue nowadays is 'managing disorderly places' (Cochrane 2007), while it was previously focused on fighting social deprivation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, targeting specific segments of the urban population. The perception of disorder and of deviant norms form the main topic of interest of Jürgen Friedrichs and Jennifer Klöckner in Chapter 10. The authors probe into the role of social capital in deprived neighbourhoods. Social capital is operationalised in terms of collective efficacy and intergenerational closure. Their central question is: 'Does the extent of heterogeneity or the amount of social capital of a neighbourhood have an effect on perceived disorder and on the perception of deviant norms?'

In Chapter 11, Mike Raco and Tuna Tasan-Kok focus on the recent credit crunch and its link to the sustainability of urban policy. What are the main characteristics of the credit crunch? How does it affect urban competitiveness, in terms of changing dynamics of property and investment markets? How will it influence the recent view on cities as sources and places of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship,

its relation to social cohesion, change of urban communities, social mobility and interaction in cities?

Ronald Van Kempen and Karien Dekker (Chapter 12) present an overall analytical model that implies all the relevant factors for designing and evaluating the development of large housing estates. They argue that explanations for deprivation in post-war housing estates should not focus too much on population composition only, but also take other variables into account, such as the urban context, initial design and quality, current state and decay of the housing and public space, organisational issues, and competition and image on the housing market. Van Kempen and Dekker compare three cases: London, Stockholm and Amsterdam.

The closing chapter of this book is a discussion by the editors, in which they retain some of the most essential elements that are to be considered in the ongoing debates on poverty, its measurement, the problems identified and the possible avenues for a fruitful cross-fertilisation between the ‘social’ and the ‘spatial’.