NEIGHBOURHOOD EMBEDDEDNESS AND INTERETHNIC SOCIAL TIES: EVIDENCE FROM THREE URBAN SETTINGS IN VIENNA

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1   Introduction

With cities being the major destinations for immigrants across the world, urban spaces provide the arena in which interethnic relations unfold. The neighbourhood at the very local level is the place where – generally speaking – people live, meet others and (probably) get to know each other. Subsequently the neighbourhood is the place where immigrants with different backgrounds, interests, cultural or religious affiliations and lifestyles meet natives. Though often doubted, the neighbourhood is (still) important and is even gaining importance as an important setting for integration and social cohesion, as some authors argue.

At the beginning of the 21st century growing diversity on the one hand and persisting social and spatial inequalities on the other are the major challenges for social cohesion and interethnic coexistence on the city as well as on the neighbourhood level. Various studies have shown that neighbourhood attachment is often higher in more homogeneous areas where individuals have common backgrounds, interests or lifestyles. Adding to that a growing strand of sociological research has indicated that increasing diversity on the local level reduces solidarity and trust among inhabitants and has a major impact on interethnic coexistence. An open question remains as to whether this also results in a reduced embeddedness in the place as such.

In recent decades Vienna has turned into an important destination for immigrants from the Balkan as well as Eastern and Western Europe, resulting in a share of immigrants of about one third of the total population. In order to investigate how embedded immigrants and natives are on the local level and how this is related to (interethnic) social ties, three neighbourhoods have been chosen, which differ in social status, housing type and presence of immigrants. The research questions we want to answer can be outlined as follows:

Are there differences in the levels of embeddedness between immigrants and natives in the three neighbourhoods? Do contacts in the neighbourhood have an impact on the level of embeddedness (the more contacts in the neighbourhood the stronger embedded people are) or are there also people who are strongly embedded in the neighbourhood and have their contacts somewhere else? What are the differences between the three quarters in this respect? Is place attachment also meaning social attachment? We will concentrate on the question how embedded people are into the local society and whether this embeddedness includes "the other" or whether we observe a strong in-group orientation. We take into account concrete encounters in distinct contact fields of varying social proximity or distance.

Our paper starts with a review on the state-of-the art of the actual discussion about determinants of neighbourhood embeddedness and its implications with regard to interethnic relations and social cohesion in the local context. The main underlying research questions and hypotheses for our study are developed on the grounds of this review. Afterwards, a brief description of the three neighbourhoods is given; followed by on overview on characteristics of the sample, the study in general and the methods applied. Next, the main results of our empirical enquiry with a strong focus on the sections measuring neighbourhood embeddedness are presented. In the final section, explanations for the findings are offered and discussed in light of the theoretical expectations presented at the outset of our study.

7   Summary and Conclusion

We have explored neighbourhood embeddedness in three selected Viennese neighbourhoods as well as the determinants of this embeddedness. While neighbourhood embeddedness has mainly been approached as neighbourhood attachment in previous studies, we argued that one should instead broaden the scope of this concept towards a multi faceted model including five dimensions: attachment to the place, subjective feelings of neighbourhood belonging, perceived feelings of safety, trust in the local residential population as well as a general knowledge of the people in the neighbourhood. The aim of using such a wider concept of neighbourhood embeddedness is to get a more detailed picture of what belonging to an urban setting entails in terms of both place and resident community.

Moreover, we included two levels of comparison in our study by exploring if and how neighbourhood embeddedness varies across geographical and non-geographical groups. The latter examined differences in the levels of neighbourhood embeddedness between native and immigrant residents within neighbourhoods while the former has been implemented by using three Viennese neighbourhoods as case study areas. Those neighbourhoods varied in a number of important contextual characteristics which might shape neighbourhood embeddedness directly or behavioral bonds in terms of social ties which may determine embeddedness.

Doing so has provided some key insights. First, we found that neighbourhoods are still important places for local residents. In all three neighbourhoods under consideration we found the majority of residents reporting high or at least medium levels of embeddedness. This holds true in equal shares for natives and immigrants within each neighbourhood. Secondly,

we explored the determinants of neighbourhood embeddedness. We found social networks within the neighbourhood as the major explanation for differences in the levels of embeddedness. Forrest (2000) stated in his study that whether neighbourhoods still matter for its residents depends on "who you are and where you are". We found that "who you are" was less relevant in our study since socio-economic and demographic factors did not play an important role in predicting neighbourhood embeddedness. Instead, we suggest to complement this phrase by adding "who you know and with whom you exchange". We found that with an increasing number of closest ties in the neighbourhood the likelihood to not feel lowly embedded increases, irrespective of whether these close ties are interethnic or not. The picture changes when weak ties are taken into consideration. These turn out to be important predictors of embeddedness and have an outstanding positive impact. This is why we thirdly focused on interethnic strong and weak ties. Once more it turned out that weak ties make the difference when it comes to predicting neighbourhood embeddedness.

Finally, we found significant differences across the three neighbourhoods with the residential population in the inner city district (Laudongasse) showing greater levels of embeddedness as compared to the remaining two neighbourhood populations. Neighbourhood differences remain statistically significant even after controlling for individual level characteristics and variations in (interethnic) ties. Again, group differences are not observable within these neighbourhoods. We have to bear in mind that our study ignored to some extent the physical environment of the neighbourhood and its impact on respondents' sentiments and emotional feelings concerning the neighbourhood. Previous studies have shown, however, that the material aspects of place, such as the condition of streets and buildings lead local residents to develop greater levels of attachment to place (Bonauito et al. 1999, Cuba & Hummon 1993a, Fried 1982, Guest & Lee 1983, Lee et al. 1994, Mesch & Manor 1998, Taylor et al. 1985, Taylor 1996, Freudenburg et al. 1995, Logan & Molotch 1987, Stedman 2003). Although we have not empirically tested this aspect in our study, this line of argumentation might explain some of the remaining neighbourhood differences we have found. As outlined earlier, the inner city district "Laudongasse" can be characterized as an attractive "better off" neighbourhood not only in terms of socio-economic composition of its residents but also in terms of the built structure (Kohlbacher, Reeger & Schnell 2010). The better spatial conditions might translate into higher levels of neighbourhood embeddedness that are beyond our operationalization. Thus, future research should consider the impact of material aspects of space on neighbourhood enbeddedness.

There are some limitations to our study as well. We focused on three selected neighbourhoods in Vienna. Thus, caution must be employed when generalizing our findings to other locations. Future research should build upon our finding and test whether the patterns observed occur in other European cities and neighbourhoods as well. Secondly, our sample was relatively small. Our findings should be replicated with larger data sets since confidence would be enhanced. Enlarging the sample size would bring a number of additional advantages when studying neighbourhood embeddedness, such as including contextual factors (ethnic and socio-economic segregation) and differentiations along ethnic lines within the immigrant population. Thirdly, we are limited by the cross-sectional design of our study. But neighbourhood embeddedness has also to be seen as process developing over time

(Smaldone 2006). Future research may want to adapt a longitudinal design to monitor processes of neighbourhood embeddedness over time. Finally, in order to disentangle how the process of neighbourhood embeddeness works insights could be gained by adapting an ethnographic approach.

Nevertheless, our findings highlight the importance for future studies to investigate the relationship between neighbourhood embeddedness and interethnic relations. Promoting contacts on the local level by creating opportunities for meeting "the other" also in a superficial way may lead to a more cohesive society by enhancing satisfaction with the neighbourhood. We further provided some key directions on which future research can built upon.

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