The struggle to belong

Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.

Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011

Dealing with Diversity

Social reproduction, middle-class family households and the issue of 'black' and 'white' schools in Amsterdam

Willem R. Boterman

Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011

Session: nr. 10 Negotiating social mix in global cities

University of Amsterdam
Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130
1018VZ Amsterdam
W.R.Boterman@uva.nl

Dealing with Diversity

Social reproduction, middle-class family households and the issue of 'black' and 'white' schools in Amsterdam

Abstract

Research shows that in socio-economically or ethnically diverse neighbourhoods the interaction between various groups is minimal. Yet, many gentrifiers celebrate the diversity of their neighbourhood. As soon as gentrifiers have children, however, the diversity of the neighbourhood may be perceived as a threat rather than an asset. In the words of Bridge the desire to display symbolic capital may conflict with the need to reproduce cultural capital through the educational system (Bridge, 2006a).

In the Dutch context most urban neighbourhoods are mixed in terms of ethnicity and social class. In Amsterdam segregation levels are low and are not significantly rising (Musterd and Ostendorf, 2003). The school system, however, is much more segregated. Particularly primary schools are often either 'too black' or 'too white', that is, respectively populated by a higher share of non-western or native Dutch than the composition of the neighbourhood would predict.

This paper presents data from a longitudinal study in Amsterdam on middle class families. Based on in-depth interviews it argues that ethnic diversity becomes a major concern for urban middle class parents when they are orientating for primary schools for their children. Furthermore, this paper indentifies various socio-spatial strategies for dealing with diversity ranging from moving away from diverse areas to actively engage with the neighbourhood diversity.