

Chapter 2

Risky Neighborhoods as Specific Type of Social Space



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Neighborhoods, defined as geographical and social units below the city level where people live (e.g., Galster 2001: 2112), are places of daily experiences, especially for immobile groups like children, elderly, or juveniles. For those groups, their neighborhood is a place of personal belonging, and daily experiences within the neighborhood can have a significant impact on their personal life and norms. Norms are defined by Coleman as “ordinarily enforced by sanctions” (Coleman 1990: 242) and “for the norm to be effective there must be an effective sanction to enforce it” (Coleman 1990: 269). Based on the assumption that humans like to live in balance with their environment (Kurtenbach 2017a: 60), we assume that the perception of violence and deviant behavior within such a context leads to coping strategies regarding irritations and an acceptance of violence as a way to deal with situations. In this regard, neighborhoods become disadvantaged, if violence and deviant behavior, like drug dealing, are a part of the daily sphere of experience (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011; Wilson 1987). To analyze the relationship between the individual and its neighborhood, with an emphasis on male juveniles as the focus group of this study, the classical ecological approaches are discussed first. Second, a short overview of the context effect as the macro–micro-link is provided. Third, the literature of social–cultural influences of neighborhoods is reviewed. Fourth and last, the implications for the empirical study are discussed.

2.1 Segregation and the Neighborhood as a Precondition for Risky Neighborhoods

Segregation, the disproportional distribution of groups within a city is one of the classical topics of urban studies. The scientific research about it begins with the seminal work of the Chicago school of sociology in the early twentieth century. Preceding this, reports of travelers such as Engels (1971) made clear that in the industrial city, the poorest and the richest live close to, yet separate from each other. The early stud-

ies showed a wide range of approaches about the same problems of a growing and industrialized city in an immigration country. Robert E. Park, one of the founders of the Chicago school, described figures of marginalization and disorganization on the streets, using journalistic methodological approaches (Park 1928). However, the basic assumption of the researchers of the Chicago school was that a city can be described as an ecological system and so they called their perspective “human ecology” (Park 1936). From this perspective, neighborhood as “natural areas” (Park 1984: 6) tend to be not only ethnically homogeneous but also in behavioral patterns, whilst interacting as an ecological system that forms the entire city. This clear macro-sociological perspective supposes an influence of the individual by the broader context, which we discuss as neighborhood effects (Dietz 2002; Kling et al. 2005; Wilson 1987). Influenced by the work of Simmel, Spencer, Tönnies, and Durkheim (Shils 1996: 90), the work of the Chicago school brought together social–structural and social–cultural dimension on a spatial, mostly geographical level; what Park called “physical structure” and “moral order” (Park 1984: 4). This serves as the basis for studies about human behavior in relation to their social and physical environment, like the social (dis)organization approach (Bursik 1988; Sampson et al. 1998; Sampson 2012; Shaw and McKay 1969) or the broken-windows theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982; Haney 2007; Keuschnigg and Wolbring 2015).

Against this background, it is not astonishing, that the study of deviant behavior and crime in urban contexts was one of the primary topics of the early years in Chicago school (Hardyns and Pauwels 2017). For example, in his classic study, Thrasher (1936) analyzed data of 1,313 gangs in Chicago and described different types of gangs (i.e., diffuse, solidified, conventional, and criminal). In their groundbreaking work, Shaw and McKay (1969) analyzed crime and indicators of disorder at the neighborhood level. They showed that crime, poverty, and fluctuation are correlated. In their deeper interpretations, they claim that the level of social disorganization of a community explains the occurrence of youth violence. From this perspective, poverty and crime are imbedded in specific spatial settings which make its occurrence more probable. This is backed up by older ideas of the Chicago school of sociology, such as those of Burgess (1984: 57), who named inner-city neighborhoods, where new arrivals as well as the poorest of a city live, places of “lost souls”. Those social–ecological studies had a significant impact on urban research, even until today.

However, the most essential point is that place matters for individual development and that neighborhoods are a useful unit to explain individual outcomes. In line with the studies of the Chicago school, Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed his framework of the ecology of human development which was highly influenced by Lewin’s (1951) field theory. Even here, the basic idea was that a child uses the resources of its environment for its own development. However, social stratification, like the family, schools, and the neighborhood, was separated from each other. From this perspective, individuals are embedded in interconnected social spaces with their own normative structure and resources. Furthermore, people learn from their environment how to solve challenges and develop their own strategies to do so.

Even a combination of the two classical approaches, the social–ecological work of the Chicago School and the human ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979), reinforced the idea that neighborhoods influence individual outcomes such as norms and patterns of behavior. Thus, it is important to notice that segregation creates specific kinds of neighborhoods (e.g., those which are violent and poor and where individuals are confronted with disorganization and cope with it by developing their own social rules). However, this claim is a theoretical one and the broader empirical informed discussion about *neighborhood effects* begun with the work of Wilson at the end of the 1980s.

2.2 The Consequence of a Neighborhood Effects on Individuals

In his study, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson (1987) indicated that parts of the African American community in many US cities live in segregated poor and violent neighborhoods. Effects of deindustrialization and welfare reforms as well as policing strategies had a disadvantaging impact on the inner-city poor black community. The important point is that the residents of those neighborhoods were not only disadvantaged by macro-forces, but by the situation in the neighborhoods as well. Restricted resources, such as a very limited marriage pool of responsible men for single mothers, as well as poor education had an additional negative impact on the life perspectives of humans in these inner-city communities (Wilson 1987). Absent positive role models provide the impression to minors that unemployment, illegal, or low-paid part-time jobs are normal and part of their own future. Thus, they assimilated to their neighborhood instead of leaving it.

The underlying assumption is that the community is confronted with a disadvantaging effect which is created by living jointly in a neighborhood. This claim provoked an intensive debate about neighborhood effects. Further studies used a broad range of methodologies to identify and explain different kinds of those. However, this perspective on neighborhood is that it links the macro- and microlevel together, and so, it was easy to link it with Coleman's approach, published in the same period, who also worked at the University of Chicago (Fig. 2.1).

Usually, the theoretical and empirical challenge is to specify and estimate the neighborhood effect. Therefore, different theoretical concepts or models were formulated. For example, the role model, which stresses that children and juveniles do learn patterns of behavior from older people in the neighborhood (Wilson 1987). The network model asserts that behavior is learned from peers in the neighborhood (Crane 1991). The model of relative deprivation follows the assumption that neighborhood effects are a result of the comparison between the self and the environment; if the perception is that the own position is poor, alternative pathways to success are developed (Kawachi et al. 1999; Merton 1938). The model of environment-related

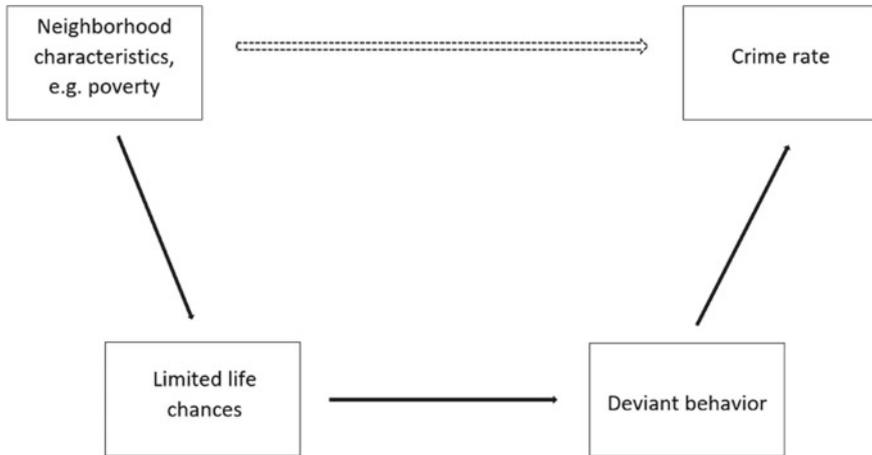


Fig. 2.1 Micro–macro-model of neighborhood effects

learning shows that individuals change their norms to reduce stress (Kurtenbach 2017a: 247).

Those models are often translated into empirical multilevel analyses. For example, Galster et al. (2016) focused on the relationship of neighborhood and school performance for low-income African American and Latino juveniles between 12 and 18 years ($N = 764$). They used data from a natural experiment in Denver, which allowed low-income households who live in poor areas to move to better-off neighborhoods. The main finding is that juveniles (especially African Americans) perform better in school, and after they have moved to a better neighborhood. In another study, Kulis et al. (2007) analyzed the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use. Therefore, they analyze data of a survey ($N = 3,721$) and the census data of Phoenix. One of their findings is that neighborhood characteristics, the crime rate, and length of residence predict substance use (Kulis et al. 2007: 287). Those studies use the neighborhood characteristics as an independent variable to explain variance for an outcome at the individual level, using different kinds of regressions. In addition, cross-sectional as well as longitudinal designs are common in this research area. These studies provide a strong contribution to stressing the importance of neighborhood as an analytical unit which affects the life of humans. However, those studies cannot provide an understanding of how and why specific patterns of behavior are developed and in which dynamics of day-to-day practices those are embedded.

Thus, another perspective is common in the broad body of literature of neighborhood effects. In contrast to multilevel analyses, the focus in neighborhood analyses is more on the dynamics within neighborhoods. For example, Goffman (2014) shows, based on a long-term ethnographic project, that male juveniles in segregated African American neighborhoods in the US suffer under harsh policing strategies and exclusion from the labor market which might encourage criminal careers. Pinkster (2014),

in attempting to explain why middle-class households are located in poor neighborhoods and how they perceive their environment, conducted 59 in-depth interviews with residents in Amsterdam and The Hague (The Netherlands). The study shows that the respondents did not rate the problems in their neighborhood high and but rather foregrounded the economic reasons. With rents cheaper in those neighborhoods, residents could save money for other purposes. At the same time, the interview partners claimed that they created social distance from the rest of the neighborhood by social practices such as avoiding public spaces (Pinkster 2014: 823). Kurtenbach (2017b) too focused on those coping strategies in challenging neighborhoods. Based on qualitative interviews with experts and residents of a poor neighborhood in Cologne, he outlined the coping patterns of long-term residents with their environment. In line with Pinkster, he finds avoidance and distance as coping strategies, but also frustration and resignation among residents.

Both approaches, the multilevel as well as the neighborhood analyses, show that neighborhoods have an impact on the life chances and norms of their residents. Neighborhoods are a useful unit for analyzing how individuals and especially vulnerable groups such as poor, single mothers or male juveniles, who perceive exclusion, cope with everyday life. The underlying assumption is that neighborhoods as collective units do have a normative structure, often claimed as street culture which structure both influences individuals or groups as well as being something with which they have to cope. This social-cultural dimension of neighborhoods runs in parallel with the social structural dimension, which is usually the focus.

2.3 Normative Structure of Neighborhoods

The normative structure of a neighborhood is the perceived set of shared norms of the local population and is conspicuously documented by election turnouts, the attitudes toward sanctioning of deviant behavior as well as social protests. However, three concepts of spatial norm structures are prominent in the literature: collective efficacy as an explanation of how a community acts normatively, legal cynicism as an approach to understanding how a community reacts to a perceived unfair trail, and spatial threat as a conglomerate of theoretical ideas as to how individuals cope with perceived danger in their social environment. All three concepts are discussed more in detail.

2.3.1 *The Collective Prevention of Crime: Collective Efficacy*

Collective efficacy was formulated in the 1990s at the University of Chicago, especially by Robert J. Sampson and tested by data of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) (Sampson 2012: 71–93). It is in line with the classical approaches of the Chicago school of sociology and social-ecological studies

in particular, which had the differences between neighborhoods as its ambit. Those differences are not only social structural but also sociocultural in nature. This means, for example, that not only does the average income differ between neighborhoods, but also the shared beliefs and norms, and these spatial circumstances have an effect on individuals.

Collective efficacy follows the basic assumptions that a more organized community has lower crime rates. Starting from this point, Sampson et al. (1997) link two lines of the discussion to each other: perceived trust on the one hand, and the willingness to intervene on the other hand. They embedded their concept in the theory of methodological individualism (Coleman 1990), which means that every explanation has to deconstruct to individual behavior, and which overcame the critique that strong social bonds in a neighborhood have to be established to act as a community. Their argument is that no real contacts with the neighbors are needed; rather a positive perception of the neighbors (e.g., trust that they are willing to help). Their own willingness to act would subsequently increase.

One of the most cited studies about collective efficacy was published by Sampson and Raudenbush (1999). They match census data with data of a survey as well as data of structural participant observations at the level of 343 neighborhood clusters in the city of Chicago. The structural participant observations took into account signs of physical disorder such as trash on the ground, as well as social disorder, such as loitering groups (N = 23,816). Collective efficacy is constructed out of the survey data, which included questions on trust in their neighbors as well as their willingness to intervene in criminal situations in the neighborhood. The results indicate that collective efficacy has a limited effect on crime in the neighborhood. Since then, this effect has been replicated in several studies (e.g., Gibson et al. 2002; Kleinhans and Bolt 2014). Sampson and Wikström (2008) compare the effect of collective efficacy in Chicago and Stockholm, arriving at the same result: the higher collective efficacy is, the lower is the crime rate: neighborhoods with a lower level of collective efficacy do have higher crime rates.

Furthermore, collective efficacy is used in international studies. Empirical analysis shows mixed results in Germany. Häfele (2013) analyses the relationship between collective efficacy and the perceived sense of insecurity in neighborhoods. He used data of a mail survey in Hamburg and matched them with data from structural participant observations (Häfele 2013: 134). The results of the multilevel regressions show that a low level of collective efficacy predicts a high sense of insecurity (Häfele 2013: 189). However, he does not find a link between collective efficacy and the perception of risk. He explains this unclear relationship—that physical incivilities such as trash on the ground can enforce collective efficacy—by claiming that the local community stands up against such kinds of disorder and that collective efficacy is just a part of everyday life. Furthermore, Blasius et al. (2008) use collective efficacy to explain the disadvantaging effect of neighborhoods in Cologne. Their finding is that the higher the level of poverty in a neighborhood, the lower the collective efficacy. Even here, an interplay between social and normative structure of a neighborhood is observable.

Moreover, studies using the concept of collective efficacy outside of Europe come to mixed results as well. For example, Messner et al. (2017) used the scale of collective

efficacy in a survey about crime perception on Chinese neighborhoods. One finding is that collective efficacy might have a cultural component, which had thus far been overlooked in the literature. Furthermore, Leslie et al. (2015) demonstrated with a survey in Agincourt, Mpumalanga (South Africa) that collective efficacy has a significant decreasing effect on heavy drinking in communities.

To sum up, the empirical findings on collective efficacy brought to light various results for the development of an analytical framework of risky neighborhoods. First, there is the basic assumption that neighborhoods or communities are able to develop shared norms and ways to respond to specific actions, such as crime, collectively. However, this requires trust and the willingness to intervene in criminal situations by residents of a neighborhood. We assume, second, that such collectively perceived responsibility is limited in risky neighborhoods, and that rules how to act are developed by groups and individuals, because the local collective is not strong enough or do not share the same norms.

2.3.2 The Collective Reaction to Discrimination: Legal Cynicism

In contrast to collective efficacy, legal cynicism means the reaction of shared beliefs that the police or legal system is an inadequate agent to solve problems. The concept was suggested by Sampson and Bartusch (1998: 778) as a means to explain the “anomie about the law” in neighborhoods. They argue:

Anomie in this sense is conceived as part of a social system and not merely a property of the individual. Normlessness and powerlessness tend also to go hand in hand, breeding cynicism about the rules of the society and their application, regardless of individual values. We thus maintain that tolerance of deviance and anomie—especially the component related to what we call ‘legal cynicism’—are district normative structures that do necessary operate in concern. (Sampson and Bartusch 1998: 782)

Thus, legal cynicism is related to specific characteristics of a neighborhood, namely, a low socioeconomic status, the concentration of a stigmatized minority, and the poor reputation of public services, like the police. The approaches premise that those deprived characteristics of a neighborhood shape the collective norms of a community within a city. To test the concept—using data from the PHDCN—Sampson and Bartusch calculated three different measures: tolerance of deviance, legal cynicism and satisfaction with the police (Sampson and Bartusch 1998: 788) and conducted multilevel regressions of individual and neighborhood data to explain these measures as dependent variables. They show that legal cynicism is explained by concentrated disadvantage at the neighborhood level as well as poverty, gender, and family type (Sampson and Bartusch 1998: 797).

However, legal cynicism is incorporated into several studies about place-related crime. For example, Carr et al. (2007) use the theoretical framework to explain why residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods in Philadelphia do not call the police in

the case of crime events. The police have a poor reputation and past experiences left the impression that the police do not respond to the real problems within the neighborhood. Kirk and Matsuda (2011) used the data of the PHDCN to analyze the effect of legal cynicism and collective efficacy on arrest. The results of the multilevel analyses show that neighborhoods with a high level of legal cynicism and self-reported criminal offending have low rates of arrest. They explain the effect: “We suggest that, in highly cynical neighborhoods, residents are less likely to report victimizations or crimes to the police or to cooperate with the police in an investigation because they perceive little benefit in doing so” (Kirk and Matsuda 2011: 460).

In sum, like collective efficacy, legal cynicism as a social-cultural concept takes its place with the usual socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods to explain deviant behavior. Both are concepts of collective norms. Furthermore, the probability that perceived, shared norms have an impact on the interpretation of violent situations is quite high, but the range of both concepts is limited because differences in behavior between individuals are not specified. Also, explanations of how residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods cope with their environment have to be taken into account.

2.3.3 Individual Patterns of How to Cope with Perceived Risk: Spatial Threat Approaches

In contrast to collective efficacy and legal cynicism, the spatial threat approaches focus on individual behavior as a reaction toward its environment. They are not a single theory; rather a bundle of concepts that explain how individuals react toward the social environment, such as the neighborhood. For example, in their classic study, Jahoda et al. (1960) showed that in a declining industrial town in Austria in the early twentieth-century individuals coped through different but equal patterns with poverty. Through intense fieldwork, they point out that four groups of people are observable (i.e., unbroken, resigned, frantic, and apathetic). Even this classic study, which harks back more than 100 years, hints that people react differently toward the collapsing social and normative circumstances of their community. Some migrated, if they could, others become depressive or even aggressive and yet others remained optimistic and still followed middle-class values. Important to note is that all these patterns are rational from the point of view of the individuals (Bourdieu 1980:47). So, the reactions of people toward a threatening environment have to be interpreted based on their perception of the environment and their ability to behave in their social circumstances.

Macro-driven explanations why individuals have to develop specific kinds of behavior and what those look like were also formulated by Wilson (1987) and Wacquant (2008). Recently, Kurtenbach (2017b) showed that, even under conditions of a western welfare state, people develop specific patterns of behavior when they perceive their neighborhood as threatening and themselves as vulnerable. Based

on 44 qualitative interviews, he showed that residents developed specific kinds of coping patterns if they perceived their environment to be deviant. Based on his data, he finds frustration and resignations as well as avoidance and distancing from the environment as common response. Sharkey (2006) developed the concept of street efficacy, which means that “adolescents with high street efficacy are more likely to expend greater effort and creativity to avoid violent confrontations, selecting social settings, peer groups, and activities that provide them a better chance of doing so” (Sharkey 2006: 831). He tested his assumption using data of the PHDCN and found clear support for his concept: juveniles develop a deep knowledge about their neighborhood, allowing them to stay out of trouble on the streets. Both latter studies suggest specific strategies as reactions to the environment but also avoidance strategies toward violent situations. The alternative is that one does not develop routines for coping with the environment, rather one developed individual norms, such as those that Anderson suggests in his concept of the code of the street; these are discussed in Chap. 3 in more detail. From this point of view, the neighborhood shapes the norms of an individual if it is perceived as being dangerous in a way that violence is perceived as a normal strategy for coping with environment-related challenges.

Altogether, the discussion of collective efficacy, legal cynicism, and the spatial threat approaches showed that the environment does have an impact on the norms and behavior of individuals. The normative structure of a neighborhood might influence the way male juveniles behave in violent situations. Furthermore, they develop coping strategies which are not limited to this specific group.

2.4 Risky Neighborhood: An Analytical Concept

All in all, the review of the literature demonstrated that risky neighborhoods are marked by a spatial concentration of poverty and a lack of trust in and social control of its residents, as well as high crime rates and violence in particular. Furthermore, a lack of trust in public services, such as the police, is observable and forms of physical incivilities are seen in the public sphere. So, on the one hand, risky neighborhoods have features that promote deviance such as crime and an absence of social control; on the other hand, this framework promotes a normative structure which enforces the development of coping strategies for handling a threatened environment, or more specifically, promotes a unique constellation of conflicts. On the background of the literature of the spatial threat approaches, different patterns are observable, ranging from maintaining middle-class values to a high relevance of specific street-related knowledge to avoid either violent situations or the contact with the neighborhood as a whole, to the learning of deviant behavior as a normal way of acting. So, risky neighborhoods promote the development of deviant behavior of vulnerable groups, such as male juveniles, what we propose as a neighborhood effect.

Nevertheless, the literature review provides some evidence for the concept of risky neighborhoods. However, two dimensions have to be considered: first, the neighborhood level. Here—as the concept of collective efficacy strongly suggests—the local

community might avoid violence either intentionally or through social control, but so too avoid practices to sanction deviant behavior. If this is missing, crime and violence rather occur in public spaces. The second approach is the group-based concept; this is where the code of the street comes into the game. The main claim—as provided in greater detail in Chap. 3—is that male juveniles in particular develop a specific set of norms for coping with their environment, which they perceive to be threatening. One part of this concept is that informal rules are formulated for regulating violence. This includes rules to avoid extensive levels of violence for all group members. Those rules may include the regulation of the use of weapons in fights, the number of members to a fight or when a fight should stop. Naturally, the level of violence and the rules can vary between macro-contexts, such as nations, but weapons provide a level of security if a community is not able or willing to react.

However, this picture has been cobbled together by empirical findings in urban and criminal studies, but not examined in a broader setting yet. Thus, some questions remain open. We cannot be sure how the interplay between social spaces, peer groups, and violence-related norms work. Furthermore, we need to clarify how the use of violence for solving problems, on the one hand, and the possible widespread middle-class values within those neighborhoods, on the other hand, are perceived by residents of risky neighborhoods and juveniles in particular. Also, moderating effects, such as of the peer group or of the public space as simultaneously a safe and dangerous area, are unclear. This study aims to shed light onto these questions.

In all, risky neighborhoods are defined as social spaces where groups might come into conflicts without or with the reduced probability of sanctioning for violence by the community. The survival within such a risky neighborhood is guaranteed by the development of coping strategies within the neighborhood and social rules of behaving in violent situations as a specific kind of street culture. This has empirical implications. We propose that, first, the higher the level of disorder is, the clearer the level of perceived threat. Second, the lower the perceived sanctioning of a local community toward violence, the clearer the informal rules of how to cope with the risky neighborhood becomes. Third, the clearer the informal rules of how to cope with the neighborhood, the clearer the rules of how to act in violent situations. Conflicts between juveniles in risky neighborhoods are characterized by *symmetric conflicts*, which means that even if a young male enters into a fight, he and his enemy know specific kinds of rules of fighting that limit the probability for serious injuries. In contrast to this, *hostile spaces* are those where only one group is in power and the local society accepts the violence of that group, but sanctions violent behavior of the other group. Those conflicts are *asymmetric* and without informal rules. Xenophobic violence is such an example (Kurtenbach 2018). The third type of social space with a specific kind of tolerance for conflicts is *self-regulating spaces*, which have a high level of collective efficacy (Sampson et al. 1997). In those places, residents follow so-called middle-class values and recognize that in each other, which builds trust among each other. Those social bonds help to intervene when deviant behavior occurs in the neighborhood to ensure that collective norms are upheld, independent of ethnicity or age of the deviants.

To extend the theoretical basis for the study, the state of the art about violence-related norms and the code of the street is reviewed further below as well. The concept of risky neighborhoods serves as a spatial framework of the analysis, the code of the street as the group-based framework for analysis. The combination of both might provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics beyond youth violence and prove the claim of the code of the street as a general concept as a means to analyze and understand youth violence in risky neighborhoods or will show its limitations.

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