

Disintegration and the 'Demise of Community'

1.1 Community, residential location and disadvantage

The Dutch authorities have become increasingly zealous in their struggle against disadvantage in old city districts. Like other European governments, they have tried since the late 1990s to solve the problem by diversifying the housing stock. They have added more expensive owner-occupied homes in neighbourhoods that had previously consisted mainly of cheap rental housing.

The strategy of combating disadvantage through housing differentiation is not unique to the Netherlands. Rather, it reflects the established international trend of dealing with social problems in inner cities through spatial and physical interventions. In *The Urban Villagers* of the 1960s, Herbert Gans noted that the problems of Boston's West End residents were not attributable to the neighbourhood. He disagreed with the planners and social workers, who advocated demolishing the slum where the people lived (1962: ix-x).

Widespread slum clearance has not occurred in the Netherlands since the 1970s and is waning in other European countries as well (although in Manchester, England, the entire district of Hulme was levelled for the second time in fifty years). Even in the United States, urban revival has taken on more subtle forms than heavy bulldozer operations. Approaches to big city issues, however, have changed little. Politicians, policy-makers, planners and media people constantly associate residential location with opportunities and lack of opportunities with disintegration. Inner city problems like

poverty, unemployment and crime thus become neighbourhood and district issues.

These depictions of disadvantaged districts reflect two general arguments. European politicians and policy-makers *first* mention the danger that a culture of poverty will emerge in socioeconomically homogeneous districts, referring to the American scholars William J. Wilson (1987), Oscar Lewis (1959, 1965) and in some cases Charles Murray (1984). *Second*, they discuss the disintegration of the inner cities, which they tend to relate to the increased ethnic diversity, the exodus of the native residents – often referring to Wilson – and the demise of the traditional neighbourhood community. These ideas are based on assumptions about neighbourhoods, neighbourhood residents and community.

A culture of poverty

The literature from the United States highlights the situation of African-Americans. Given their past of slavery, the special history of the American 'war against the poor' (Gans 1995) and the particular constellation of race and class in American society today, their position is not comparable to that of people in European slums. In their book *American Apartheid*, Massey and Denton note that 'race operates powerfully through urban housing markets, and that racial segregation interacts with black class structure to produce a uniquely disadvantaged neighborhood environment for African Americans' (1993: 220). European studies covering Germany, Sweden or the United Kingdom reveal that the American degree of segregation is virtually unheard of there (SCP 1995a; Musterd and Ostendorf 1998). However, in the most dismantled welfare states, such as the United Kingdom, researchers find that residential neighbourhoods have become less socially heterogeneous (Bentham 1985; Hamnett 1994). Even in the most comprehensive welfare states, such as the Netherlands (Murie and Musterd 1996), the poor and ethnic minorities tend to gather in certain districts, although in far lower concentrations than in America. But the vast discrepancies between the United States and Europe and between individual European countries are frequently overlooked. Dutch scholars often quote the authors mentioned above to illustrate the problems with concentrating the disadvantaged. They fear that a culture of poverty will result from excessive concentration of these people, who take unemployment and welfare benefits for granted and lack role models in their surroundings, as Charles Murray (1984) has

argued. Some scholars would prefer to relativize the perspectives of American authors from across the Atlantic (SCP 1995a). Few, however, elaborate their own perspectives as Europeans on the outlook for neighbourhood and community in European slums. Leading American scholars remain the chief sources of inspiration for policy visions regarding districts in European cities. Wilson's two concepts for describing the social transformations that he believed had affected American inner cities (cf. Katz 1993) – concentration effects and social buffers – have had a particular impact on policy views.

Wilson defined concentration effects as

the constraints and opportunities associated with living in a neighborhood in which the population is overwhelmingly socially disadvantaged – constraints and opportunities that include the kinds of ecological niches that the residents of these communities occupy in terms of access to jobs, availability of marriageable partners, and exposure to conventional role models. (1987: 144)

This concept has been embraced by others, who define the disadvantage problem in major European cities as one of concentration. In European policy views, popular but decidedly controversial theories explaining the American situation thus associate disadvantage, a culture of poverty and location with each other and identify location as an explanatory force and the concentration of disadvantage as the cause of perpetuation.

Disintegration and lack of community

Wilson's second concept is more compatible with the second line of argument in the public debates about disadvantaged districts. According to this view, these districts have become disintegrated and no longer form a community or social structure. These districts lack both economic and social capital and have therefore ceased to be sustainable communities (as they are known in the United Kingdom).

Wilson's term 'social buffer' refers to

the presence of a sufficient number of working and middle-class professional families to absorb the shock or cushion the effect of uneven economic growth and periodic recessions on inner-city neighborhoods. The basic thesis is not that ghetto culture went

unchecked following the removal of higher-income families in the inner city, but that removal of these families made it more difficult to sustain the basic institutions in the inner city (including churches, stores, schools, recreational facilities etc.) in the face of prolonged joblessness. And as the basic institutions declined, the social organization of inner-city neighborhoods (defined here to include a sense of community, positive neighborhood identification, and explicit norms and sanctions against aberrant behavior) likewise declined. (Wilson 1987: 144)

While Europeans worry that American-style ghettos will arise from a culture of poverty, they fear that social disintegration will lead to race riots as in Los Angeles, or crime and juvenile gangs, which are another problem in the United States.¹ Without exploring the specific changes there, Dutch policy-makers and politicians use arguments very similar to Wilson's to justify the need for an urban middle class in the disadvantaged districts. They expect such a presence to improve these districts in many respects and above all to make them more socially cohesive.

Some authors describe the city districts both as disintegrated and as bastions of a culture of poverty. In the Netherlands the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) is still deliberating the choice between the disintegration idea and the culture of poverty approach. According to one of the council's publications, the overly homogeneous population of certain city sections has led to a concentration of poverty. These districts need to become more diverse, because this situation gives rise to obstacles to improvement related to the lack of social cohesion (WRR 1990: 96). In the Netherlands, which is the geographical context for this study, the ambitious Social Innovation programme targeting emancipation, social cohesion and integration was launched in 1989 in keeping with this view (Boot et al. 1990: 39). The programme consisted largely of neighbourhood projects dedicated to restoring the sense of community. Policy-makers attributed the urban problems of street crime, failure to deal with those causing a nuisance, lack of communication between neighbourhood residents and interethnic tensions to disintegration or lack of community.

This assessment embodies a remarkable contradiction. On the one hand, policy-makers fear the emergence of a modern culture of poverty in the old city districts. Culture arises in part from social interaction and concerns *shared* values, views, actions and their institutionalization: it cannot exist without communication. On the

other hand, this conflicts with the view that nobody knows other neighbourhood residents in the older districts any more; that their tendency to go their separate ways has resulted in the disappearance of social control and the like. Such disintegration primarily reflects a lack of social interaction and communication.

The demise of community in working-class neighbourhoods

The idea that old city districts have lost something that needs to be restored also reflects the sense of a neighbourhood community in the past. In this respect, the European perspective on disadvantage differs from the American views.

In the United Kingdom, a rich industrial heritage and collective public memories of traditional workers' communities, reflected in the People's History Museum in Manchester or Quarry Bank Mill just outside the city, reinforce the impression of a local working-class culture which, though poor, had certain attributes that are lacking in poor neighbourhoods today. While the workers of the past had a hard life, they also had strong bonds of solidarity and compassion. People helped one another in those working-class neighbourhoods. In the text accompanying the exhibition at Quarry Bank Mill, the authors attribute the absence of labour unrest to good working conditions and excellent employer-worker relationships, rather than to oppression in the village where the workers lived or intimidation at the workplace.

While the contemporary culture of poverty probably arose under difficult conditions, many authors note 'the tenacity of the human spirit' (R. Roberts 1971: 49). Even the factories offered a sense of community, 'not just an assortment of men and women at work': 'There was a constant joking, the gathering in the lavatories or the soot-flecked corner on summer days, the free physical contact, the touching and stroking of cloth, the seaside trips. A constant reaching-out for the communal marked the natural style of life' (Jackson 1968: 156). Social historians such as Davies, Fielding and Wyke (1992: 2ff.) have warned against adopting an overly static perspective. Depictions in various media, from British films like *The Full Monty* to television series like *Our Friends in the North*, to reports about the disintegration of neighbourhoods in Belgium and the Netherlands and reports about German cities like Hanover (Geiling and Schwarzer 1999), highlight two main ideas: first that once the working-class community that was equivalent to the neighbourhood did exist; and second that disintegration

in a European context means that such cohesive working-class neighbourhoods of the past have disintegrated.

Community as a concern of sociologists

The terms community, disintegration, integration and cohesion are widely used. Everybody applies these concepts and appears to understand their significance and consider them important. Many also believe that things used to be different. Media depictions of old city districts convey this sense of nostalgia. Dilapidated districts are believed to have been 'like villages' at one time. Such a village symbolizes the *Gemeinschaft*, where harmony, common bonds and solidarity prevailed. This image surfaces in the memories of some who inhabited such districts for many years, among the new middle-class residents who have moved there (Wright 1985; Allen 1980: 409) and in the restoration operations by professionals and politicians.

Sociologists have done their bit as well and have taken an interest in community and disintegration since they established their discipline. The concern of early social thinkers with disintegration reflected the rapid social transformations of their era. Classical sociologists, such as Weber, Durkheim and Tönnies, have given rise to the widely propagated idea that the *social cohesion* of the premodern *community* has been eroded (Nisbet 1980: 46).

Despite the sincere interest in the concept of community from the outset, Bell and Newby (1974: xlv–li) noted several decades ago that the concept was as commonplace as the description was vague. This has not changed. In some social theories community relates primarily to cohesion, common bond or togetherness. Nisbet (1980: 49) interpreted community as any relations with a strong measure of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral involvement, social cohesion and sustainability. Others associate community primarily with location. In 1955 Hillery identified ninety-four current definitions of the concept prevailing among Anglo-Saxon sociologists (Hillery 1955). The majority concerned people within a geographic region. Both meanings have become intertwined. Researchers of communities have long used geographic regions as their foundation. Regions may embody varying measures of community. If we find no community there at all, then the location has disintegrated. Neighbourhood and community thus became Siamese twins in sociology as well.

1.2 The Siamese twins of neighbourhood and community in the debate

Current policy issues considered with an American-style approach and conventional views of sociologists regarding community consistently reflect the assumption that neighbourhood and community are associated. The absence of bonds between city dwellers in a neighbourhood is thus equated with isolation, anomie or general anonymity. An implicit or explicit connection is established between the absence of a community that coincides with the administrative-geographical neighbourhood unit and the sheer absence of community. But is a neighbourhood indispensable for a community, and what is left of a neighbourhood if it is no longer a community?

The central question of this study treats the assumed connection of neighbourhood and community as problematic: what is the role of 'neighbourhood' for community in large urban settings? I also explore changes in the meaning of community and in the significance of neighbourhood for community over the past seventy-five years. My arguments are based on empirical findings from Hillesluis, a disadvantaged district in the Dutch city of Rotterdam (see the annex p. 217 on my research approach). Showing that this district is not one single community is fairly easy. I subsequently review three less straightforward aspects of the central issue.

First, I examine whether the absence of one neighbourhood community means that there is no community at all. Does the absence of neighbour relations imply disintegration? Or are neighbourhood and community less inextricably linked?

Second, I investigate whether the statement that the neighbourhood is not one community at present implies that it was in the past. Since its construction around 1920, has the site of Hillesluis ever been the equivalent of one community?

Third, I discuss how we might study community while relativizing its spatial dimension. If we cannot presume that neighbourhood and community are closely related, then can we learn from the approaches based on this assumption, which have been paramount in sociological research for so long? And what is the alternative to this approach? Does it provide an adequate framework for studying communities? Or do the sociological theories on this subject need to be updated?

Alternative perspectives

Two traditions in empirical research and theorization about community – social ecology and the network approach – have defined the debate on urban sociology and will be addressed more extensively later in this book. Still, these approaches do not monopolize the community issue.

Political and social theory embodies the debate about the significance of community, as expressed through communitarianism. In her review study about trust, solidarity and community, Misztal illustrates how many sociological debates are based on the premise that solidarity and cohesion were obvious and spontaneous. She disagrees with this assumption. The current complexity in rapidly changing, globalizing societies contradicts this premise. Misztal explains the revival of interest in themes such as solidarity, trust, community, cohesion and civil society: 'the revitalization of the idea of civil society is, in essence, nothing more than an attempt to theorize more concrete and meaningful criteria of trust in modern, rationalized and highly differentiated societies' (1996: 6).

The issues in this book are closely related to the ones that Misztal's work addresses. I agree with her that social relations are an important cohesive force in our society. But while she explores the significance of trust and its role in relationships, my book is mainly about community and the kinds of relations that are significant to community. I will attempt to show that this knowledge enhances our insight into collective dimensions of coexistence. My approach is different as well. Rather than embracing communitarianism, I base my theories on empirical evidence. In the process I consider recent criticism from urban sociologists and geographers regarding the Siamese twins of neighbourhood and community.

In recent years social geographers such as David Harvey and Doreen Massey have objected to the self-evidence of 'places' in geography and have recommended discarding their miraculous, supreme explanatory validity in geographical scholarship. The method they advocate relates closely to sociology, where spatial constellations are analysed primarily as expressions of power relationships (as Lefebvre attempted to do in 1974 in *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1995)). Harvey has argued:

To write of 'the power of place' as if places (localities, regions, neighbourhood, states etc.) possess causal powers, is to engage in the

grossest fetishisms; unless, that is, we confine ourselves rigorously to the definition of place as a social process. In the latter case, the questions to be posed can be rendered more explicit: why and by what means do social beings invest places (localities, regions, states, communities or whatever) with social power? (1993: 21)

Previously, in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), Harvey presented a 'grid' of four 'spatial practices' to discuss how the experiences of space, of the constructed surroundings, of a landscape or of a neighbourhood are not static properties but active practices. These practices change over time, as well as for different people:

the grid of spatial practices can tell us nothing important by itself. To suppose so would be to accept the idea that there is some universal spatial language independent of social practices. Spatial practices derive their efficacy in social life only through the structure of social relations within which they come into play. . . . They take on their meaning under specific social relations of class, gender, community, ethnicity, or race and get 'used up' or 'worked over' in the course of social action. (Harvey 1990: 222–3)

Massey, too, favours alternative interpretations of 'place', where 'what gives place its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus' (1993: 66). These geographers and others have thus focused on the significance of 'place' and on challenging ahistorical, static notions of it. Their theoretical approaches may shed new light on the neighbourhood as a location element of the Siamese twin. This information reveals how a neighbourhood that is not a community can still serve this purpose for all kinds of people through procedures to attribute meaning, as will be shown in this book from chapter 7 onwards. But these authors provide little information about community as such.

Within this most recent body of thought, Manuel Castells has addressed community somewhat more extensively. Castells noted that social scientists originally viewed community as the outcome of urbanization and subsequently as that of suburbanization. Many did not situate it in the network society of internet, media, travel and globalization. He refers mainly to the research by network analysts (to be addressed in chapter 3), which has

dispelled the notion that space and culture, location and community converge. People interact with each other where they live and establish network relations there. Location, however, does not intrinsically produce community: 'locally based identities intersect with other sources of meaning and social recognition, in a highly diversified pattern that allows for alternative interpretations' (Castells 1997: 60). As a result, 'local environments *per se* do not induce a specific pattern of behavior, or, for that matter, a distinctive identity.'

Lines of argument like the one advanced by Castells, who presents a wealth of material from several disciplines to discuss global changes in various social subsections, or highly abstract studies, such as the one by Harvey, leave little room for a very specific contemplation of crucial aspects such as the relationship between neighbourhood and community. The contributors to *Living the Global City* (Eade 1997) deal with this issue more specifically, basing their statements on their empirical research in London. While the social-scientific discussions about globalization have remained fairly general, the contributors to this book explore the impact of globalization on the everyday lives of the residents in one of London's older districts. They argue that the diversity that increases with globalization precludes a one-to-one relationship between neighbourhood and community, and that different social spheres – Albrow calls them 'socioscapes' – reveal spatial overlaps. But because this study comprises several smaller studies with differences in their theoretical approaches, the contributors do little more than note that neighbourhood and community are not equivalent, that the meanings of neighbourhoods vary among different people, and that people use a multiplicity of methods to construct their identities through imagined communities. By failing to address the social relations people use in sufficient depth, this work does not offer a thorough conceptual elaboration of 'community'. Moreover, as we will learn, the authors are too quick to assume that the Siamese twins of neighbourhood and community have only recently been affected by microglobalization. Here I trace the changes in the relationship between neighbourhood and community over a more extended period. The most recent trends concerning social movements, modern media, travel and the like have not instigated the changes in the relationship between neighbourhood and community. Rather, the origins of these changes date back much further.

1.3 Structure of this book and research perspective

Structure

Two other perspectives – social ecology and network analysis – have figured so prominently in sociology and so closely approximate the view that many policy-makers and practitioners take of neighbourhood and community that they merit far more extensive consideration.

The social ecology of the Chicago School has long guided urban sociologists in their research on communities. In chapter 2 I explore this perspective and question whether it is suitable for examining social relations among city dwellers. What can we say about heterogeneity and homogeneity, and how has the situation changed over time? By social-ecological standards, was Hillesluis ever a homogeneous community, or were there always traces of heterogeneity? To answer these questions, we will briefly review the history of the district as a working-class neighbourhood where migrants settled from elsewhere in the Netherlands during the heyday of industry and shipping in Rotterdam. I associate these historical findings with the disintegration thesis. While Hillesluis today is regarded within the Netherlands and the European Union as a prime example of disintegration and social decay (the district was highlighted in an EU project to eliminate disadvantage), it is viewed as if it had been a cohesive neighbourhood community until the mid 1950s. While the fear of disintegration existed in this period as well, it was related to urbanization. The juxtaposition of such representations of traditional community and modern disintegration is thus less historically determined than contingent on the moment of speech. I will show that this fear of social decay was also deeply ingrained in the Chicago School.

In chapter 2 I also maintain that although some insights of the Chicago School still apply, the concept of neighbourhood is an indispensable addition to this perspective. To this end we learn about Hillesluis through an imaginary 'walk' through the district. Our observations lead us to explore the relationship between statistical and visible diversity. The empirical evidence will suggest that, although the statistics identify 'residence' as where people sleep at night, it is where their daily activities take place that matters most to the question of community. Categorical differences between

people, such as age, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity, gender, education and income, are rough indications of the use of neighbourhood in such daily life activities, but they are far from decisive and need to be considered in combination with one another.

The Chicago School theories are of limited use for understanding neighbourhood and community. The influential Canadian-American sociologist Barry Wellman and other network analysts have identified at least five shortcomings in such an approach. Chapter 3 opens with a discussion of their findings. These scholars note that relations need not be local, that these local relations do not make the neighbourhood an integral community, that bureaucratic neighbourhood units are not automatically social units, that spatial determinism lurks, and that the normative connotation of community in this approach leaves much to be desired. The alternative that they propose defines community as relations in the egocentric network that are sociable and provide social support. No network relations in Hillesluis have undergone systematic review. In this chapter I show empirically that although a genuine quantitative network analysis is impossible, the qualitative data indicate that social networks affect the meaning of neighbourhood in community, and that they differ significantly. Using the concepts presented by Ulf Hannerz, who described networks as 'segregated', 'integrated', 'encapsulated' and 'isolated', we meet several Hillesluisians and explore the importance of neighbours in their networks.

This suggests that 'neighbourhoods' are not intrinsic organizational forces. Depending on the network compositions of the residents, neighbourhoods are the setting for some of the roles of the residents and consequently provide the foundation for some of their identifications. This line of argument, which regards community as a personal network in keeping with the view of the network analysts, equates neighbourhood with community when (a) the networks of residents greatly overlap, and (b) the networks are restricted to relations within the neighbourhood. This is definitely not the case in a disadvantaged district like Hillesluis. Nor is the network approach entirely satisfactory. The work of a maybe unusual combination of authors (Richard Jenkins, Benedict Anderson and Charles Lemert) leads me to wonder at the end of this chapter whether the network approach can encompass two chief aspects of community: people's sense of social identity, and their patterns of social identification with others.

Chapter 4 shows first of all that the conventional use of the term community comprises all normative connotations of a sense of

belonging together that the network analysts wish to omit. Issues of identification with others and of social orientation figure prominently in the common-sense meaning of community but remain invisible in the network approach, as intended by authors such as Wellman. I waive this option and propose restoring the close link between neighbourhood and community as Jenkins has done. In this chapter I recommend exploring the meanings of social relations in more depth than either of the perspectives under review and examining the range of these ideal-typical dimensions.

Weber's description of social action and social relations serves as the foundation in this chapter for a two-dimensional grid relating the spectrum of rationality to non-rationality to that of instrumentality to sociability. The four quadrants that these dimensions constitute are four fields, which I will identify as fields of transactions, connections, interdependencies and bonds. The grid is a conceptual framework for determining which social relations people value when they identify with each other socially and form communities, and which ones are less important to them.

We will also see that, contrary to what is generally assumed but in keeping with what Philip Abrams and Martin Bulmer have written on the subject, neighbour relations are an exception. While many relations belong in a specific quadrant when considered as ideal types, those between neighbours do not. Physical proximity, rather than social characteristics, distinguish them from other relations. As Abrams explains, physical proximity is indeed a specific context for social relations but is nothing more than that. The Hillesluisians provide empirical examples that illustrate this point. While some people consider neighbours largely in terms of interdependence (an interdependence that is hardly social any more), others, like the Hillesluisians in peer groups, maintain strong local ties. In still other cases, what I will later describe as substantial rationality determines people's sociability with their neighbours. While for some relations we can more or less indicate their potential for social identification and community experience, we cannot do so for relations with neighbours. This is precisely why a neighbourhood is not the same as a community. At most, communities make use of the location to varying degrees.

If neighbourhood provides a specific context for forming such relationships, we need to explore this context, as I do in the following two chapters. I argue that aside from the grid of social relations, two additional theoretical constructions define the relation between neighbourhood and community, and especially the changes that

have occurred there. These constructions are the spectrum of privacy and the spectrum of access, as discussed in chapter 5.

The spectrum of privacy conveys individual control over information about oneself and ranges from anonymity through familiarity to intimacy. The access spectrum reflects an arbitrary individual's access to a specific social space and runs from public through institutional to private. In this chapter I use empirical information about the Hillesluisians to show that a large measure of public familiarity enables people to apply otherwise rational transactions and interdependencies within an environment like a neighbourhood for imagining their communities. They use 'we' and 'they' mechanisms as reference groups and base social distinctions on their knowledge of others. This approach enables them to divide these others according to 'we' and 'they'. Historically, as the stories of older Hillesluisians in this section illustrate, such public familiarity was considerable in daily practice. Life followed a set pattern – the weekly visit to the bathhouse, scrubbing the pavement and the like. These practices intensified neighbourhood use and made running into the same people commonplace. Such encounters did not necessarily lead to congenial, pleasant contacts. Nonetheless, the resulting public familiarity helped people establish social distinctions and circumscribe their communities with respect to others.

This public familiarity diminished over time and gave way to broader social processes, such as technological innovations, economic change, secularization (which was more pronounced in the Netherlands than in the United Kingdom or the United States) and urban renovation. Chapter 5 concludes with an analysis of how such changes affected neighbour relations – both empirically in Hillesluis and in theoretical respects.

Theoretically, I argue, the main consequence of the decline of public familiarity is that *Vergemeinschaftung* – or the process of relationships becoming 'communal' – of transactions has become rarer. Relating this trend to Weber's theory of rationalization raises a question that Weber asked but did not answer, namely whether substantial rationality disappeared or was merely restricted to private life. We may therefore conclude that communities perceived as imagined communities have indeed undergone privatization.

In chapter 6 I explain that the changes in social relations discussed in chapters 4 and 5 have given people considerable discretion in structuring their relations with their neighbours. While neighbour relations used to be inevitable and exacted a heavy toll

if they were bad, they have become far more varied and have become a matter of personal choice. Complaints in public debate about lack of neighbourliness suggest that people care less about each other than they did in the past and are less willing to help than their forebears were. In this chapter I attribute the decline more to the increased freedom to structure relations with people who happen to live nearby. Accordingly, I also address institutionalization in this chapter and explore how categorical differences become institutionalized. These processes lead to social rifts between groups who contrast 'our' way of life with 'their' customs and habits and begin to perceive 'our' lifestyle as normal. Freedom of choice thus becomes embedded in categorical fields in which connections with 'us' and separation from 'them' gradually emerge.

Although the current fascination with varied, fluid and flexible identities may suggest otherwise, such processes are obviously not new. They have occurred throughout the history of Hillesluis, especially with respect to religious and class differences. Such categories were used for the social construction of collectivities. Statements such as 'we are Catholic, they are workers', which invoked distinctions between religion and class, highlight the complexity of such constructions, as I will illustrate through stories of Hillesluisians over the years until around 1950.

Next, I discuss the deinstitutionalization of institutionalized categorical differences: how class and religion became progressively less explicit and pronounced in the circumscriptions of 'we' and 'they' and people's social identifications. I will show that the multiplicity of standards and values in neighbourhoods today, combined with minimal public familiarity, have complicated categorizations and the association of communities with this process. In this respect communities have also become privatized, as Durkheim already anticipated. Our orientations towards others have become progressively less collective and increasingly focused on other individuals.

I conclude that communities have become privatized in various ways, and that neighbourhoods are not by definition equivalent to communities – not at present and not in the history of a district such as Hillesluis. Once we have understood, however, that the relevance of neighbour relations depends on form and content and not on physical proximity, what significance do neighbourhoods retain? Are neighbourhoods devoid of meanings for communities? In chapter 7 I investigate this through the two concepts of practical neighbourhood use – as was basically observed in chapter 2 – and

symbolic neighbourhood use. Neighbourhoods then signify a combination of a geographic-historical location and the emotional involvement that Hillesluisians relate in their stories. Examples from Hillesluis show that some have lived there for lack of anywhere else to live and have had little practical or symbolic use for the neighbourhood. Others, such as the peer groups, have had a strong local orientation. They have experienced neighbourhoods as platforms for expressing their group memberships and for perpetuating the group and its standards by criticizing what they saw happening in the neighbourhood around them. In turn, neighbourhoods perpetuated groups by serving as treasure troves of memories. Even Hillesluisians who determined their social position largely according to the status of their residential surroundings, like the founders of the residents' association Common Sense, used the neighbourhood symbolically. The Hillesluisians known in this book as 'modern urbanites' valued their neighbourhood as an expression of lifestyle but had little appreciation for social orientations. Their very enchantment with the district's 'popular' attributes reflected their social distance from other neighbourhood residents.

At the end of the seventh chapter, this description leaves unresolved two issues in which location and community are interrelated. In some cases Hillesluisians applied incidental and flexible new categorical distinctions based on ethnicity to resolve conflicts over the significance of location. They also used the neighbourhood as a constructed setting to create collective memories and found that it replaced frameworks for social identification that were missing from the contemporary neighbourhood.

Chapter 8 reviews the Dutch perception of ethnicity according to four empirically based patterns of interethnic relations. These patterns reflect variations with respect to ethnicity, definition of ethnicity and significance of conflict and contact. I discuss the work of classical conflict theoreticians such as Simmel and Coser to reveal how ethnic parameters serve to resolve conflicts over the attribution of meaning to the neighbourhood and the role of both realistic and unrealistic conflicts.

In chapter 9 I discuss how collective remembrance of the neighbourhood is conducive to establishing and perpetuating communities. Four empirically based aspects of such collective remembrance and the relation to location are covered: location jogs the memory; social distinctions are associated with such memories; geographic references to the past give rise to a shared history if one does not already exist; and memories of the location are often memories of

childhood, when neighbourhood use was at its peak. This observation helps us understand the origin of the connection between location and nostalgia.

In this chapter the connection between neighbourhood, memory and nostalgia proves to be contingent on neighbourhood use and network composition. Neighbourhoods are therefore used, conquered or remembered to perpetuate and establish communities. This defines their existence: not as an ecological natural area, not as a unit of solidarity and only in part as an organizer of personal networks. Neighbourhoods are not, never have been and never will be communities. Still, people use them as a practical and symbolic means of establishing and perpetuating all kinds of communities.

Finally, in chapter 10, I conclude with a summary of these findings. I present a more general version of the model from the fourth chapter as a theory of social relations and demonstrate the importance of transcending the traditional frontiers of sociological paradigms in examining the community issue.

My approach: some introductory remarks

Below I will use empirical material to substantiate theoretical arguments. The empirical material is derived from a case study of the Rotterdam district of Hillesluis, which I will illustrate in more detail in chapter 2 through a guided tour. I gathered empirical material during a year of fieldwork (September 1994 to September 1995), when I lived in the quarter and participated, observed, observed as a participant (see Gans 1962: 336ff.), conducted interviews and explored archives. In the annex I describe the research methods in depth. In the following text, all Hillesluisians have been given pseudonyms, followed by their year of birth in parentheses.

My choice of Rotterdam as the site of my fieldwork is fairly arbitrary. The origins of Dutch social innovation policy in Rotterdam, however, as well as my previous research experiences with policy and quantitative study in that city, justified this decision. To ensure that my research would be based on social continuity, I selected a district in Rotterdam that was built in the early decades of the twentieth century and had not been levelled by Nazi bombings in World War II. In addition, I wanted a district where the urban renovation process was well advanced but had not yet been covered extensively by other researchers. That left Hillesluis as the most attractive research option.

I have written this study from the perspective of a group that has become a numerical minority in the neighbourhood: Dutch Hillesluisians (the ethnic Dutch), who in this increasingly immigrant district account for 20.4 per cent of the residents in one section and for 36.4 per cent in the 'whitest' part of the neighbourhood. Accordingly, this study does not concern Hillesluisians as neighbourhood residents in general but focuses on the question of the relationship between neighbourhood and community from the perspective of Dutch Hillesluisians. As a result, historical changes figure in the discussion, and I understand the people I am writing about well enough to feel confident that my interpretations are accurate. My linguistic command and social and cultural insight and knowledge are insufficient to claim such competence for the Turkish and Moroccan Hillesluisians and in somewhat lesser measure for the Surinamese ones. This book is therefore neither about nor a depiction of Hillesluis. Instead, it is a search for the meanings of community and the role of 'neighbourhood' in this context.