

*Sonderdruck aus*

Julia Dahlvik / Christoph Reinprecht /  
Wiebke Sievers (Hg.)

**Migration und Integration –  
wissenschaftliche Perspektiven  
aus Österreich**

Jahrbuch 2/2013

Mit 18 Abbildungen

V&R unipress

Vienna University Press

ISBN 978-3-8471-0187-1

ISBN 978-3-8470-0187-4 (E-Book)



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## **Chinatown's Spatiality, Ethnic Community and Civic Engagement: Amsterdam and Berlin Compared**

### **Introduction**

Chinatown—according to various media, especially in the USA—is generally perceived as a ‘dark corner’ of petty crime, exploitation and organised crime, isolated from mainstream society. The existence of a Chinatown within a city is assumed to hamper the integration of Chinese immigrants into mainstream society. Their segregation and spatial isolation is seen as the cause of this, and stereotypically the Chinese immigrants are described as close-knit, spatially concentrated communities with few ties outside of their own group.

This comparative study, conducted in two European capitals, challenges such views of Chinatowns; views that are primarily influenced by media images, reports and statistics on crime, and racist perceptions of ‘the Chinese’. Instead, it focuses on the civic engagement of Chinese migrants. Civic engagement may include voting behaviour and other forms of political participation as described by Putnam (2000, Chapter 2). But it also includes other voluntary activities in organisations and associations, whereby active membership and participation, rather than card-carrying membership, is what matters in terms of social capital and civic engagement (Putnam 2000, 58). This is hence what we focus on here.

The two capitals that we studied are Amsterdam, which has a thriving Chinatown, and Berlin, where after the destruction of the Chinatown during the Second World War, a new one was not constructed. The findings of the explorative study suggest that Amsterdam’s Chinatown activates the civic engagement of immigrants and stimulates inter-ethnic interaction with the native Dutch. In contrast, in the case of Berlin, where no Chinatown is present, Chinese immigrants show lower civic engagement than those in Amsterdam and seem to have fewer ties to non-Chinese. We hence suggest an exactly opposite logic to the common belief: the spatial concentration of Chinese organisations, shops and cultural societies, and the visibility of a Chinatown, do not hamper ties to mainstream society and civic engagement; on the contrary, they seem to provide a fertile soil for them.

This paper presents part of a study that focuses on the associational networks of Chinese immigrants in diverse spatial contexts. The purpose is to examine how spatial structure – here the presence and absence of a Chinatown – affects the network formation of Chinese immigrants, and how different network formations in diverse spatial structures affect what is often, though controversially, described as ‘integration’ in close connection to ‘social capital’. The more precise question we then ask is: do associational networks of Chinese immigrants in these cities differ in the social capital that they provide, and can such differences be linked to the spatial presence or absence of a Chinatown?

In the first part of our paper, we assert that the physical structure of Amsterdam’s Chinatown as a vivid visual form contributes to the development of association networks and facilitates voluntary engagement of the Chinese, which is not the case in Berlin. The findings indicate that Chinese immigrants in Berlin, despite their higher average level of education and younger age – factors often seen as predictors of civic engagement – have lower social and political engagement than those in Amsterdam, which, we argue, can be linked to the absence of a Chinatown.

In the second part of the paper, we examine whether the use of Chinatown by native Dutch and Chinese residents stimulates social interactions between them. The purpose of this part of the paper is to show how Chinatown as a space is socially and economically constructed by a multi-ethnic group of people. We maintain that Chinatown itself provides an important stage for integration by means of which the native Dutch (and city officials) can reach ‘the Chinese’ in ways unavailable in Berlin.

## Research methods

The research, which began in the spring of 2010, included semi-structured interviews, a survey and participant observation. We mainly focused on the use of urban space through individuals’ regular routines, and the means of networking through Chinese associations in different spatial conditions. Twenty five key persons were interviewed in Amsterdam and 30 in Berlin. Respondents returned 126 valid, usable questionnaires in Amsterdam and 107 in Berlin.

1. We employed a visual approach, with photographs and observations at different times of day – mornings, afternoons, evenings, workdays and weekends in the Amsterdam Chinatown and Berlin’s Kantstraße (Kant Street), where a Chinese enclave Chinese quarter used to be before the Second World War – to identify key use of space, variation of users at various times, interactions between users and their pedestrian routes.

2. Semi-structured interviews were held with key persons chosen from five groups: experienced volunteers and leaders of Chinese associations, principals of Chinese language schools, leaders of religious organisations and business owners of Chinese enterprises. The interviews mainly acquired descriptions of spatial transformations of some important locations, perceptions of the living environment and experiences in social engagement.
3. The respondents for the survey were chosen from the members of Chinese associations. The questions included four parts: (1) their immigration background, (2) their experience and participation in associations, (3) their attachments to mainstream society and (4) their use of urban space, transportation and public facilities.

## **Networks and network formation in urban space**

Although views on social capital differ – opinions vary widely as to how it should be empirically researched, and definitions are often vague – most scholars share its focus on networks and social relations in networks. Despite the different backgrounds of the three classical social capital theorists, Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam, John Field concludes that '[a]ll emphasise the power of networks' (Field 2008, 11) to provide 'ways [to make] our lives more productive by social ties' (Putnam 2000, 19). In *Bowling Alone*, for example, Putnam (2000) maintains that the effect of social capital being generated through the various interactions of associations' members in their networks exists. While it is possible to think of social capital as access to resources through membership of personal networks (Portes 1998), an approach often used in empirical studies (Blokland & Savage 2008), one may also opt to not measure what social capital does, but begin by focusing on how social capital can be brought about, for example, through associations.

In order for these associations organised around ethnicity and culture to form and sustain, one may assume that some physical proximity is needed. Of course, contemporary media make it possible to have associations stretched out geographically, even globally, and modern social media play their role too. However, casually learning about the need for support by and information from others is much harder to imagine within such virtual networks than within networks where people actually meet face-to-face, converse with various others briefly and overhear conversations with others. A cocktail party and a chat room may have some commonalities, but they do remain different. Moreover, face-to-face encounters, and maybe especially those between people who do not know each other personally but who have similar positions (Bourdieu 1999) and meet in a context of shared interest, may provide a network in which social capital can

flourish as the by-product of doing something else, an effect that is hard to achieve without physical proximity.

Moreover, locations are not just sites where social life takes place. Spatial arrangements, built structures, traffic possibilities and the like help to structure associational networks and their qualities. We can refer to this as what Herbert Gans has called the difference between the potential environment and the effective environment (Gans 1990, 24 – 32). Writing in the 1960s against the spatial determinists of the time, urban planning can, according to Gans, prevent social life from happening if it is badly done. But it cannot induce social events: “the physical environment is relevant to behaviour insofar as this environment affects the social system and culture of the people involved or as it is taken up into their social system. Between the physical environment and empirically observable human behaviour, there exist a social system and a set of cultural norms through and with which people define and evaluate portions of the physical environment relevant to their lives and structure the way they will use (and react to) this environment in their daily lives.” (Gans 1990, 25) How, exactly, spatial arrangements and the built environment are relevant to social capital has not been extensively addressed in the literature.

In other words, there is spatiality in social capital that may not so far have had the attention that it deserves. More precisely, we need to ask how networks are formed in different spatial contexts and what social capital effects, if any, can be found which influence (disadvantageously or advantageously) the effect of social capital.

As new arrivals in unfamiliar places, immigrants cannot rely on slowly growing connections to existing institutions (Zhou 2009). Indeed, they must invent and create those connections so that the actual place where they are can be said to have a particular, possibly even stronger, importance that differs from place connections with those who have never migrated, and especially from the connections of those who are long established in particular cities or neighbourhoods. The Chinese institutions and the streets of Chinatown are two types of such places that we have therefore taken as our empirical starting point to explore associational networks.

## **Networking in different spatial contexts**

The associational infrastructure of any overseas Chinese immigrant community consists of four sets of institutions: (1) the Chinese catering industry, (2) Chinese language schools, (3) various Chinese associations based on age, gender, occupations and hobbies and (4) religious organisations, such as a Buddhist temple or the Chinese Christian church. The four institutions can be seen as the

nodal points for the building of personal networks and arranging of social life routines by individuals in their new city.

### **Amsterdam's Chinatown: a Chinese ethnic enclave shared by multi-ethnic groups**

The Chinatown in Amsterdam is the oldest on the European Continent. It is located to the north of one of the most famous retail and tourist streets of the city and lies close to the central railway station. With its main street being a low-traffic zone, it is a convenient cut-through for pedestrians and cyclists on their way to work or to the university buildings to the south. The red light district, one of Amsterdam's famous sightseeing areas, is situated to the west of Chinatown. The southern and eastern sides of Chinatown consist of mixed use streets comprising small retail and residential buildings along the canals. Its central locality, its function as a throughway for pedestrians and cyclists, the intermingling with the red light district which makes it an attractive tourist destination, the presence of students who frequent the low priced restaurants, as well as the central although decreasing function that the area has for the street drug trade (primarily heroin) makes it a truly socially mixed place where very diverse people rub shoulders constantly.

For the Chinese, it is a place to go where they know there will be other Chinese. While they may by no means all be known to each other, the Chinese in Amsterdam nevertheless have a physical location where they can 'do' community. Like identity, community is, as Jenkins (1990) has argued, above all a public doing. Such public doing needs a physical site, and is helped when such a site is not just organisational or virtual, but provides a way to conduct everyday routines that are acts of ethnicity, and possibly community, as the outcome of doing; practices, rather than abstract ideas of what ethnicity may mean or political ways of expressing it. As the literature demonstrates, there are various ways to understand community; it does not make sense to assume *a priori* that ethnicity alone constitutes community. For a symbolic community to be meaningful in practices, and hence be sustained through such practices, Lynch (1960) emphasised the importance of clear physical images that strengthen the social organisation through common experiences and common memories. The built environment and physical street layout of Chinatown in Amsterdam fulfils this role.

Moreover, community can be understood in a lighter sense as well as in the version of the 'thick' sense of belonging, solidarity and togetherness. In its lighter form, community is being acted out when people who do not know each

other come from some other place to the same location so regularly that they start to recognise each other and are no longer strangers. This does not mean they have to talk to each other or get to know each other more than just from seeing: they become familiar in a public space, or, in other words, the setting provides them with public familiarity. This public familiarity enables the creation of social ties once people do start communicating with others whom they have met before in the street, and discover shared interests. And it enables a form of social capital that is often ignored because it is hard to capture due to its casual character: access to information and resources which comes about casually and not as the product of intended exchanges.

### **Berlin: Chinese community in a spatially dispersive context**

The situation is very different in Berlin. The only location that comes close to some sort of Chinese community presence in the built environment and urban infrastructure is the area around the Kantstraße, once a Chinese quarter in Berlin, but destroyed during the Second World War. No new Chinese enclave has since been developed in Berlin. However, it still has a relatively high concentration of Chinese ethnic businesses, more in the area around Kantstraße than in other areas.

When Germany experienced a second wave of Chinese migrants in the 1970's, not many new immigrants chose to go to Berlin because of its uncertain political situation and economic and geographical isolation. Most Chinese preferred to settle with their businesses and families in other major cities in West Germany. Furthermore, in order to prevent residential immigrant concentration in West Berlin, the local government forbade Chinese immigrants to settle in certain districts.

These historical and political factors led to the fragmentation of the Berlin Chinese community in comparison to other major cities in West Germany. Nowadays, some Chinese shops are concentrated on Kantstraße near the Zoologischer Garten station (formerly West Berlin's central railway station). The slightly visible concentration of Chinese business, comprising Chinese restaurants, Chinese supermarkets, massage parlours and acupuncture practices and Chinese furniture stores, however, is much less marked than that in Amsterdam's Chinatown, and stretches out over a long part of the busy, wide, two-lane street. There is, furthermore, no symbolic marker of a Chinese identity, such as that provided by the Buddhist Temple in Amsterdam's Chinatown. Nor, nowadays, is there any significant residential concentration of Chinese in the surrounding district. No clear concentration of Chinese immigrants in any one area is apparent in the statistics of Berlin; unlike Turkish, Russian, Arab and

Vietnamese immigrants, the Chinese do not stand out in any particular neighbourhood. They have this in common with African immigrants in Berlin: while one of the neighbourhoods in the city has a slightly visible concentration of African shops, societies and hairdressers, this does not coincide with a very strong statistical presence. For these groups that have a long history in the city, generally longer than the groups who came as labour migrants in the 1960s and 1970s, their presence is above all one of an ethnic enclave at most, not of a residentially concentrated neighbourhood. Yet this is true for Amsterdam as well, where few Chinese actually live in Chinatown. As mentioned above, the physical concentration, as well as the symbolic representation of the Chinese in Amsterdam, is much more present than it is in Berlin: here the Chinese businesses are scattered over a long street, and alternate with other shops and businesses.

### **Chinatown and association networks: from individual shopping-routes to organisations**

What can we say then about how the presence and absence of a Chinatown affects the weekly routines of Chinese individuals and, as such routes and routines structure the possibilities of everyday encounters, may consequently lead to different network possibilities? Figure 1 shows the weekly routine of Chinese immigrants in the two cities. The locations where the Chinese must go weekly in the two capitals are generally similar. The main shopping zone and some locations, such as the Chinese supermarkets, are obviously vital for their daily life in both cities. However, the difference in the percentage of those attending Chinese associations is notable. The data in Table 1 show that the Chinese in Amsterdam go to associations more often than those in Berlin, and that the engagement in associations in Amsterdam has a stronger voluntary character. Only one fifth of the respondents in Berlin have experience with voluntary engagement in Chinese associations, while twice as many of those in Amsterdam do.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of association memberships in the two capitals

	Amsterdam (N= 126)	Berlin (N= 107)
Percentage of Association Membership	79 %	61.4 %
Percentage of Voluntary Engagement	41 %	20.2 %
Average Association Memberships per Person	2.37	1.81

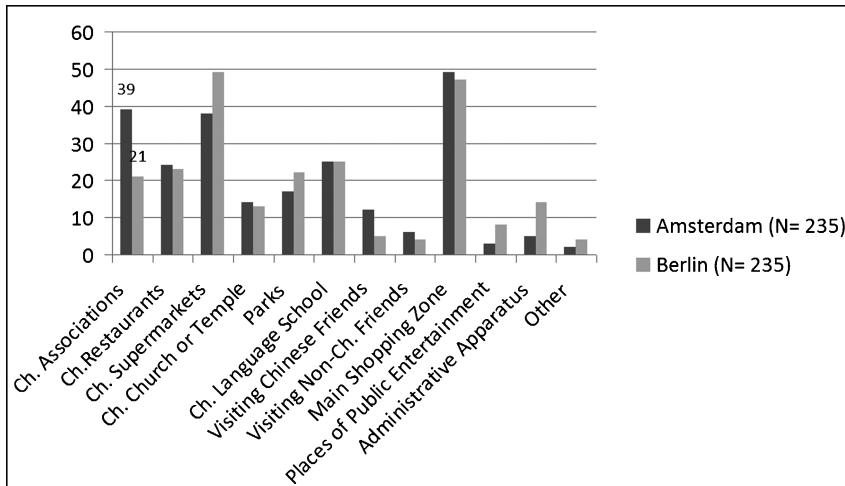


Figure1 Weekly must-go places of the Chinese in Berlin and Amsterdam

One explanation for this may be that in Berlin the associations and various other Chinese services are distributed over a broad area in the city, while in Amsterdam they are all located in or near Chinatown. There are two reasons why this is relevant. First, it means that access to information about associations and their activities and possibilities for engagement are more readily available in Amsterdam. In carrying out their everyday routines, people encounter the organisations and may be asked to join. Second, the geographical concentration of shops and organisations means that people only have to leave their homes once, since they can connect to their organisations while on their way to do something else. No active decision to actually make time available to become joiners is needed: the concentration makes it easier to integrate participation in the organisations into daily life.

### **Amsterdam Chinatown: the effect of spatial concentration**

The two most important reasons to go to Amsterdam's Chinatown are shopping and meeting acquaintances, combining consumption and socialising. Furthermore, Chinatown's surroundings strengthen the intensive and regular use of Chinatown. The spatial proximity to various major shopping streets, central railway station and other public facilities, and the intention to finish all daily tasks in one trip, motivates the Chinese to go to Chinatown more frequently than their counterparts in Berlin.

Chinatown, as a fixed point, attracts Chinese immigrants with dispersed

residence across the city and its suburbs to gather in and make associations in Chinatown. People get to know each other better gradually and know when their friends will normally be going to Chinatown, so they can meet each other the next time they go there. Their route is influence by acquaintances and determined unconsciously by the occurrences of social activities within Chinatown. The result is that people do the same thing in a fixed place without a prior arrangement; this is the first precondition of getting organised.

As stated previously, most Chinese organisations and associations are located in or near Chinatown, so that most of the activities or events of Chinese associations are held in Chinatown. Mrs. Chang is the leader of a Chinese women's association. According to Mrs. Chang, Chinatown contributes to social networking, and the social activities in Chinatown promote the construction of associational networks:

All our activities take place in Chinatown, because everyone is familiar with Chinatown. When we plan for a one-day tour into the suburbs, we still meet at Chinatown first and start off together. After the activities or meetings, they purchase some Chinese ingredients here and then go home. It encourages people more or less to join our activities, because they can finish all tasks conveniently here and chat with friends in passing.

The spatial proximity and regular meetings provide opportunities to exchange information and resources that advance the development of mutual help networks and voluntary engagement. Mrs. Yeh is an experienced volunteer in the Chinese women's association. She described how Chinese women spontaneously devote themselves to volunteer services.

The volunteering is a natural consequence of intensive and regular meetings. People meet here regularly and then begin to help other people. The unemployed women can devote themselves to volunteering. Some volunteers read letters from authorities or newspapers for elders who don't know Dutch, or they accompany people who don't know Dutch for official facilities. If there were no Chinatown, where could they offer their volunteer engagement and how can people who need help find someone to help them?

Chinatown, therefore, not only offers the advantage of an intense making of Chinese association networks but also stimulates the mutual-help network and volunteer engagement.

Furthermore, all business owners in Chinatown know each other very well. They, so interviewees said, had reached a consensus that the only way "to make a win-win situation is through cooperation and mutual help". A Chinese restaurant owner described the relationship with other Chinese as "inextricable":

We all are friends and members of associations as well. The social contact in Chinatown is very important. If a Chinese business owner doesn't make contact with others, his

business in Chinatown normally can't go very well, because he lost the opportunity to get some information and help from others. We negotiate for the price of our products because everyone realises that if we get into destructive price competition, the only result is that we all die.

The friendship between the business owners and the public familiarity that comes from regular use of the streets and shops, getting to know each other and their customers, creates, at least superficially, a concern with the definition of common interests and mobilising around local issues such as parking limitation rules, crime problems and housing policy. The spatiality of the Chinese community in Amsterdam provides a basis for sociability, civic engagement and collective action based not just on an ethnic, but a rather clearly spatialised ethnic, identity that is linked symbolically to the area.

The Buddhist Temple, 'He-Hua', also called 'the heart of Chinatown', provides the Chinese in Chinatown with a sense of security, and strengthen the collective identity of Chinatown. In the 1990s, the site used to be a meeting place for drug addicts. The Chinese believe that the building of the He-Hua Temple has helped them shake off the bad image of Amsterdam's Chinatown of the 1980s and 1990s, and revive the business activities there. While the local authority implemented strict measures to combat the crime problems and drug dealing of the 1990s, Chinese activists appealed for the building of a Buddhist Temple to evoke a peaceful atmosphere in Chinatown. Miss Yang, one of the activists at that time, described how the temple changed Chinatown.

People from urban authority told us, 'this ground gathers a lot of drug addicts, totally out of control. Just take it, if you want'. We purchased it from the government at a low price and easily got the permission to build this temple. And then, I feel this street revivified. The Chinese working here feel more peaceful and safe. Some prostitutes working in the red light district threw coins through the railings early in the morning to pray for spiritual peace. The drug dealing here is getting less and less since then.

Together with the efforts of the Chinese activists, all the streets in Chinatown have been given elegant Chinese names, which are displayed under the Dutch street nameplates. Chinatown's main street 'Zeedijk' (Sea Dike), for instance, has been given the Chinese name of 'Benevolence–Virtue Street' to change the bad image into a positive one. The Buddhist Temple and Chinese street names not only strengthen the vivid image of Chinatown physically but also contribute to emotional self-identification. Lynch asserts that "[a] vivid and integrated physical setting, capable of producing a sharp image, plays a social role as well. It can furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication" (Lynch 1960, 4).

Finally, with regard to the perception of Chinatown, the Chinese interviewees working in Chinatown do not feel discriminated against or isolated from Dutch

society. On the contrary, they consider Chinatown to be a 'place of our own' and are simultaneously provided with a multicultural atmosphere. The Chinese shop and restaurants owners in Chinatown asserted that the number of Dutch and non-Chinese customers has been increasing in recent years.

## Berlin: the effect of spatial dispersal

In contrast to Amsterdam, the locations of Chinese associations in Berlin are scattered across the whole city, with a small concentration on the Kantstraße. This spatial distribution of important locations leads to dispersed routes for individuals. The meeting places for economic (shopping) and social activities are clearly spatially separated. None of the Chinese associations are located on or near Kantstraße. The absence of Chinese associations on Kantstraße fails to generate opportunities for longer stays and regular social contacts on this street. The economic activities of individuals are rarely related to social activities of Chinese associations.

In contrast to the Chinese in Amsterdam, public familiarity among business owners on Kantstraße is weak. None of the business interviewees is aware of common interests or even feel they are responsible for them. Mr. Kwan, owner of a restaurant on Kantstraße, described the relationship between these Chinese business owners as 'not familiar' and explained his attitude to associational engagement.

Of course, we know each other, but mostly we concentrate on our own business. It is difficult to organise Chinese people here to do something. Two preconditions must be available – a lot of time and a lot of money. Neither a lot of time nor a lot of money do we have. In this condition, social engagement is impossible. I think the religious associations are capable to gather more people together, but they are not here.

Although the Buddhist Temple in Berlin is bigger than the one in Amsterdam, it is situated in a residential district in the north of Berlin away from the Kantstraße and any other sites of Chinese associations. The spatial distance between these meeting points of economic, social and religious activities obstructs connections among the associations and hampers cooperation among members from different associations.

Finally, with regard to perception of the absence of a Chinatown in Berlin, the perception of Berlin's interviewees is obviously different from the Chinese interviewees in Amsterdam. The explanations of interviewees revealed a relatively negative impression of Chinatown, and some of them worry about being stigmatised if there were a Chinatown in Berlin. Mrs. Zhou argued:

They (Urban government) don't want us gather together. They don't want a Chinatown in the city. (Questioner: Why do you think so? Have you ever heard that the Berlin government or any politician officially claimed that?) No, but I feel that from their policy and the arguments of politicians. They want us to integrate into mainstream society. Actually, I don't think the Chinese need a Chinatown. All we need can also be purchased somewhere else. There are a lot of Chinese supermarkets and Chinese restaurants here as well. Chinatown is regarded as an overcrowded mess and an unwelcome place suffered from much crime problem, and it is true. As a result, Chinatown is stigmatised by others.

It is notable that despite the same cultural characteristics, in the case of Berlin, the perception of the living circumstances and explanation of their lifestyle differs explicitly from those that pertain in Amsterdam. The business interviewees in Berlin, for example, believe that people give themselves to social engagement only when they have a lot of money and plenty of time, whereas the interviewees in Amsterdam's Chinatown regard social engagement as an obligation, because it is what everyone in Chinatown does. It means that Chinese immigrants' subjective perception of physical circumstances, lifestyle and attitudes in relation to public issues are strongly influenced by their life experiences in different circumstances. As a result, the Chinese develop different local dispositions and diverse habits in different urban contexts, although the Chinese in these two capitals have a similar cultural background. This links back to the theory of social capital: as Putnam (2000, 21) has pointed out, "a society characterised by generalised reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society, for the same reason that money is more effective than barter. If we don't have to balance every exchange instantly, we can get a lot more accomplished." Our cases suggest that the Chinese in Berlin do rely on social ties, but of a person-oriented nature in which favours are directly returned to the same person and no expectations are held regarding overall support from other Chinese. In contrast, in Amsterdam we have found indications of a generalised reciprocity that facilitates the community more broadly.

## **The relation between spatial concentration and civic engagement**

Although many studies show that social capital is not constrained by space, in these two cases, we argue that intensive and regular face-to-face contact is still an important precondition for collective action in modern society, especially for immigrants. Figures 2 and 3 indicate that the Chinese in Berlin have obviously higher education levels and are, on average, younger than those in Amsterdam. However, occupational ranking in the two capitals, as Table 2 shows, are the same. Even though students and recent immigrants (under 3 years) were ex-

cluded in the selection of interviewees and questionnaire respondents, part-time employed and the unemployed still have a high percentage of representation. Furthermore, the option 'Education', in the third place, mainly represents part-time teachers in a Chinese language school, which should not be defined as employed persons, but rather as volunteers. The lower social engagement in Berlin, therefore, may not be strongly related to occupational factors, because the employment status in the two capitals is not significantly different.

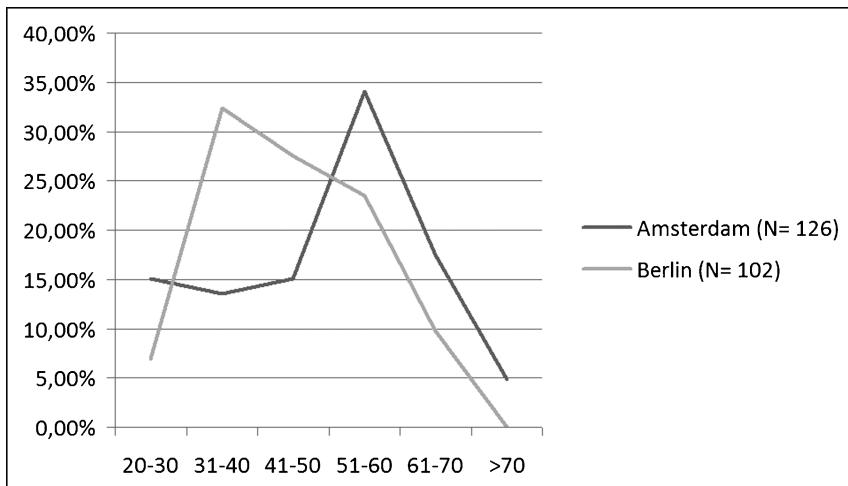


Figure 2 Age distribution of the Chinese in Amsterdam and Berlin

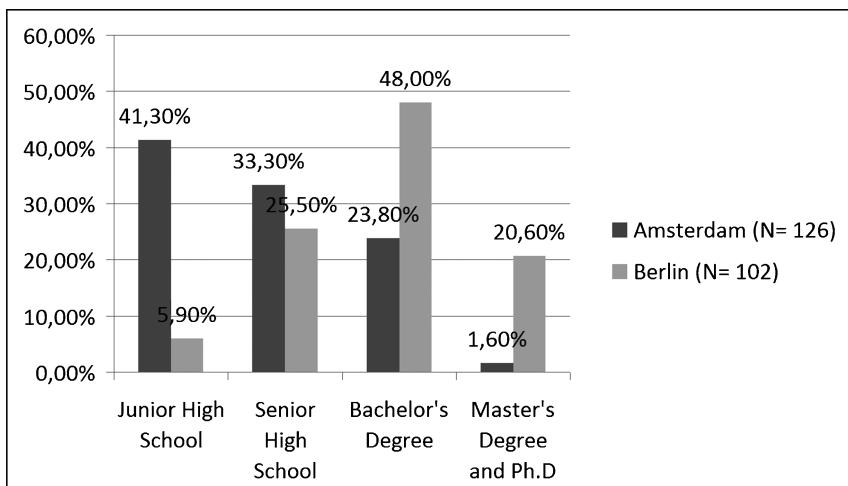


Figure 3 Education level of the Chinese in Amsterdam and Berlin

Table 2 Occupational ranking in Amsterdam and Berlin

Place	1	2	3
Amsterdam	Catering Industry 38.5 %	Housewife 13.1 %	Education 6.2 %
Berlin	Catering Industry 26.7 %	Housewife 13.8 %	Education 9.5 %

One might assume that the Chinese in Berlin, who are younger and have a higher level of education but no strong difference in occupational status, are in a more advantageous position from which to develop social engagement than those in Amsterdam. Having said that, the quantitative findings show the significance ( $\text{Sig.} = 0.012 < 0.05$ ) that the Chinese respondents in Amsterdam show higher social engagement.

The findings from interview materials display consistency. Each of the 25 interviewees in Amsterdam, leaders of Chinese associations or activists, claimed that they either had constant contact or a cooperative relationship with non-Chinese associations, or that they had experience in negotiations with urban government and knew someone from the urban authority. However, only three of the leaders of Chinese associations (10 %) interviewed in Berlin said that they have ever cooperated with non-Chinese associations, and none of them claimed to have had constant contact or a long-term relationship with other non-Chinese associations or urban authority. This is not to say that a higher education level contributes to higher political and social engagement of immigrants, but the absence of a fixed place for combining social and economic activities seems to disadvantage the development of a civil component with which to build attachment to urban authority.

Lynch discusses how a vivid image contributes to people's social organisation. "This image is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience and it is used to interpret information and to guide action....[O]bviously a clear image enables one to move about easily and quickly....it may serve as a broad frame of reference, an organiser of activity or belief or knowledge" (Lynch 1960, 4). From what has been discussed above, the two main reasons for going to Chinatown – shopping and social contacts – give rise to an intensive overlapping of individual life routines, which motivates the Chinese to be organised more easily and subsequently strengthens public familiarity and local identity. Consequently, associational networks and volunteer engagement develop.

Conversely, the lower social engagement in Berlin might be connected to the absence of a Chinatown. The three factors, lack of a legible vivid form for the development of local identification, the lack of a fixed place where economic and

social activities can proceed simultaneously and the spatial distribution of Chinese associations, obstruct the development of a sense of community, which subsequently disadvantages civil engagement. Although many Chinese in Berlin go to the Kantstraße to shop, they find no place for longer and permanent social contacts. The intensive overlapping of individual daily routes and the attachments to other people are hardly available, largely due to the spatial distribution of the associations and the clear spatial division between the locations for economic and social activities.

### **Mixed usage by multi-ethnic groups in Chinatown**

One characteristic of Amsterdam's Chinatown which makes it different from most Chinatowns in the United States is its mixed usage by multi-ethnic groups. The mixed use for working and residence by different ethnic and social groups in Chinatown is the crucial factor in inter-ethnic interaction. Most Chinese working in Chinatown do not live there, while most residents are not Chinese. The Chinese leave Chinatown after shop closing time, but the tourists and local residents are still using the streets. These different ethnic groups complement and contribute to the effective use of the streets in Chinatown.

Furthermore, despite the Chinese business owners' complaints about the crowded space in Chinatown, the short and narrow walking streets strengthen the public familiarity between the business owners and residents from different ethnic backgrounds. Chinese business owners hear more or less from the Dutch proprietor who owns a restaurant near them, even if they do not know him very well. All working residents rapidly get to know about everything happening on this street. The residents here prefer to rely on services from Chinese shops because they are located at hand. Public familiarity in Amsterdam's Chinatown is based on the interactive service network. Mr. Lau, who owns a copy company in Chinatown, described how opportunities to interact with the non-Chinese have increased in recent years.

Fifteen years ago, 95 % of my customers were Chinese. Since then the Dutch and non-Chinese customers are getting more and more. Now, 70 % of my customers are Dutch or foreigners. They are either local residents or owners of shops near. I realise, although there are always lot of Chinese shops here, Chinatown is actually getting more and more international.

Figure 4 illustrates the Chinese immigrants' access to making friends with the Dutch or Germans. For the respondents in both capitals, the workplace is an important location to make social connections with the Dutch or Germans; for example, the Chinese barkeepers know their regular Dutch/German customers.

It is notable that an obviously higher percentage of respondents in Amsterdam (36 %) make friends with Dutch residents of the neighbourhood than those in Berlin did with Germans (20 %). The option 'Neighbourhood' refers not only to the surroundings of their place of residence, but also to the neighbourhood of their workplace. In contrast, the respondents in Berlin show a slightly higher percentage in the categories 'School', 'German Spouse' and 'Hobby Club' than those in Amsterdam. The option 'School' refers widely to the schools their children or grandchildren attend, the language schools and the adult education centres. It seems that the social circles with Germans are arranged to a slightly greater extent by personal daily activities and personal preference in the case of Berlin, while in Amsterdam, more Chinese immigrants make friends with the Dutch as a result of the socio-spatial proximity in the neighbourhood. As a neighbourhood of Chinese working residents, Chinatown provides Chinese immigrants with more opportunities to build social connections with the Dutch.

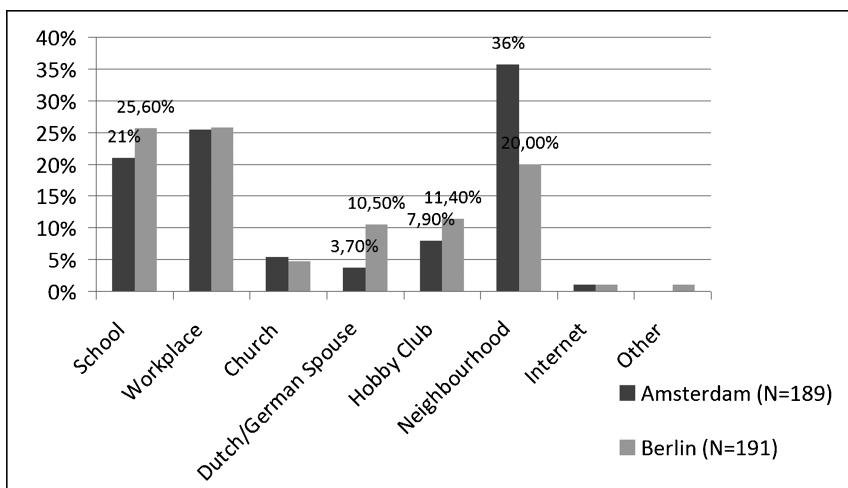


Figure 4 Access to making friends with Dutch/Germans

### **Chinatown as a potential location for social and political integration**

As an ethnic enclave, the Chinatown in Amsterdam offers a possibility for facilitating inter-ethnic communication. It does not stand in the way of integration, but generates potential for it.

Amsterdam's Chinatown transformed an abandoned area suffering from crime and drug dealing in the 1980s into a fascinating tourist attraction after the 1990s. The Chinese business owners and local residents of Chinatown ascribe Chinatown's successful revitalisation to three factors: (1) efficacious housing

renovation, (2) crime reduction and (3) the He-Hua Temple and Chinese street names. These three, according to most interviewees working in Chinatown, revived economic activity and re-attracted not only the Chinese, but also local citizens and tourists to this area. The mixed and effective use in Chinatown and its multifunctional surroundings have the potential to attract a variety of users, which prevents Chinatown from being isolated and generates possibilities for interaction between the Chinese and Dutch residents. Despite the vivid Chinese image, the Chinese are not the dominant users of Chinatown. The products and services in Chinatown provide easy access not only for the daily needs of Chinese immigrants, but also for the Dutch living in and around Chinatown.

The socio-economic texture, composed of different ethnic groups, contributes to the political empowerment of Chinese immigrants, because business owners with different ethnic backgrounds are bonded by local common interests. Mr. Wu, the former leader of the Chinese business association in Chinatown, described how the interactions with other ethnic groups provoke the political engagement of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown.

Short of parking space, crime problems and the new regulations concerned with Chinatown impact not only the businesses of Chinese, but also the livelihood of other ethnic groups in and near Chinatown. Here, we heard easily how the Dutch and Turkish talk about these public issues related to everyone here, and observe how they take actions. Then, we perceive Chinese also have no reason to keep silence. It's also advantageous for these local activists when Chinese stand with them, because Chinese face the same problems. They invite us to join and exchange information with us. Finally, we learn spontaneously from the associations of other ethnic groups how to deal with the public problems and how to negotiate with urban authorities.

Furthermore, Chinatown offers the possibility of linking urban authority and function as a platform for upward and downward communication between the Chinese and urban government in both official and unofficial ways. Ms. Lee, the former leader of He-Hua Temple, remarked on the unofficial relationship between Temple and police.

Once any police newcomer arrives, the older take him here to let him know the temple. The police contact the people in temple, if they need translation or any other helps to deal with anything about Chinese immigrants.

In addition to the long-term cooperative relationship with the police, Ms. Lee felt the relationship with urban authority is harmonious.

They (urban authority) know that the Chinese celebrate Buddha's Birthday in May in Chinatown. They trust us, although they never give us subvention to support our activities, but help us through other ways. They permit us to use the public place to celebrate our big traditional events and inform all vendors at weekend market for

stoppage of business. Police conduct the traffic during our events. They give us conveniences to support our events.

The presence of a Chinatown in Amsterdam does not obstruct, but rather facilitates the political integration of Chinese residents. On one hand, Chinatown as a fixed place for Chinese immigrants stimulates the development of common interests and social organisation. On the other hand, it is a platform to make connections between the Chinese residents and urban government. Mr. Chen, one of the activists and speakers for Chinatown, was planning to contest for the Chinese city councillor in the future.

Our intention is to find a young man speaking Dutch fluently, well-educated and knows Chinese and Dutch society well to speak for Chinatown and for us. We have got the best candidate, he has also the will. We are planning to support him to run for city councillor.

As with Amsterdam's Chinatown, some conditions for mixed usage by multi-ethnic groups do exist on Kantstraße. Kantstraße is surrounded by a main shopping zone, a former central railway station (Zoologischer Garten) and is close to a number of tourist attractions. It is also one of the meeting points of Berlin's citizenry where the co-existence of local and ethnic enterprises can be seen. In contrast to Amsterdam's Chinatown, however, the absence of a Chinatown does not stimulate Chinese immigrants in Berlin to integrate better into the mainstream society. From what has been discussed, the social contacts between the business owners and the public familiarity on Kantstraße are weak. Also, the interview materials show that attachments to other local compatriots are weak as well. Mr. Wu, who was once a waiter working in a Chinese restaurant on Kantstraße said:

Contact with Germans, as I know, is mostly only with the landlord and maybe some regular customers. But I don't think the business owners have friendly ties among neighbours. Everyone here concentrates only on his business.

Mr. Wang has always been active in Chinese associations, but has a negative attitude to the Chinese community in Berlin. He believes that political integration is inconceivable if the situation does not change.

We don't even know how to find information and access to get connections to the government, but even if we know, who can do that? Young people speaking German well have no will to speak for Chinese community. Few people who may have the will are not able to do it. Most people pay no attention to common issues of Chinese. Even they never think about it. Chinese in Berlin is like a heap of loose sand.

These two cases suggest that a social organisation in a fixed place gives Chinese immigrants more opportunities to generate attachments with others. The strong, vivid Chinese image, higher associational organisation and stronger

cohesion in Amsterdam's Chinatown do not cause the Chinese to be stigmatised or isolated; on the contrary, interactions with the Dutch and with urban authorities are obviously stronger in Amsterdam's Chinatown than those on Berlin's Kantstraße, even though the Chinese population there have a lower educational level and a higher average age.

## Conclusions

The qualitative and quantitative findings consistently show that network formation of the Chinese in Berlin, in comparison to the Chinese in Amsterdam, tends to be more person-oriented, whereas the Chinese in Amsterdam are more highly organised through Chinese associations in Chinatown. In Berlin's case, the dispersive locations where the Chinese in Berlin must go weekly lead to equally dispersive personal life routes; the daily route is more often determined by personal choice, whereas the daily routes of Amsterdam's Chinese are more likely to be determined by their social activities. The intention to shop in Chinatown combines with the intention to make social contacts and conduct associational activities. The ethnic enclave and its distinctive image contribute not only to the formation of association networks, but foster the development of social and political engagement.

The absence and presence of an ethnic enclave, as well as the spatial concentration and distribution of these meeting points, strongly affect the network forming of Chinese individuals and determine how social capital is created. Although Figure 1 shows that the weekly usage of some locations in the two capitals is generally similar, the absence of a Chinatown in Berlin prevents the development of a mutual support network, or even of public familiarity. Although the four institutional foundations of overseas Chinese communities – Chinese restaurants, associations, language schools and religious organisations – are the most important ways to build personal networks in both cities, they are by no means the crucial factors for generating associational networks. The Berlin case suggests that the synthetic effect of good social capital, which stimulates the Chinese to develop their civil engagement, fails to be activated if a fixed place is absent, even if the four associational foundations are in existence and the education level is superior to that found in Amsterdam. This study cannot offer any strong evidence to prove that the social capital of the Chinese community in Berlin is less than that in Amsterdam, but we conclude that the effect of social capital in the spatially dispersive condition in Berlin is obviously limited, even though all preconditions for making good social capital are present.

In the second part of this chapter, these two cases suggested that spatial

concentration of immigrants and a representational, exotic image of Chinatown are not *per se* destructive to integration, but instead are beneficial, at least for creating public familiarity, and possibly also ties with others. Similarly, the absence of one does not necessarily contribute to integration; instead, it more probably contributes to the failure of Chinese immigrants to build daily attachments with local people, resulting in their being more socially and economically isolated. This study demonstrates that Chinatown, as an ethnic enclave, is not bound to cause disintegration, but rather functions as a potential location for the social and political integration of Chinese immigrants.

Theoretically, then, we have used these cases to show that social capital has an important spatial dimension deserving of more attention from scholars interested in how social capital comes into existence, and how it functions once networks are there. It has also demonstrated that the role of ethnicity, if strongly linked to place, whereby thinking about the role of ethnic enclaves rather than ethnic residential communities, may present us with interesting strategies for further research.

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