Being Young in Brussels. Findings from the Brussels JOP-Monitor

Nicole Vettenburg, Mark Elchardus and Johan Put

The present text is the translation of the concluding Chapter 13 of the book Being Young *in* Brussels*. Findings from the Brussels JOP-monitor (p. 406-426)[1]. The Brussels JOP-monitor was administered in 2010 as a survey in Dutch-speaking secondary schools in Brussels (N=2513).*

The Jeugdonderzoeksplatform (Youth Research Platform) (JOP) is an interdisciplinary interuniversity cooperation between the Research line Youth Criminology of the Leuven Institute of crimininology (LINC) (University of Leuven), the Department of Social Welfare Studies (UGent), and the Tempus Omnia Revelat Research Group (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). The JOP was created in 2003 to address the need for a greater structural focus on youth research. It was set up on the initiative of the then Flemish minister for Internal Affairs, Culture, Youth and the Civil Service.[2] Since 2007, the JOP has been integrated into the Policy Research Centre for the "Culture, Youth and Sport" theme.

1. Introduction

Brussels is characterised by a rich socio-cultural diversity. Migration flows have turned the Belgian capital into a multicultural city in which over 170 nationalities and people from different cultural backgrounds are living together. Internal as well as international migrations not only make Brussels a gateway to the world, they have also transformed it into a young city. Unlike Flanders or Wallonia, Brussels is characterised by a general

---

[2] The supervisors of the Youth Research Platform are: J. Put (University of Leuven), M. Elchardus (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) and N. Vettenburg (UGent). Coordination is ensured by Nicole Vettenburg from the Department of Social Welfare Studies, UGent. The researchers were: D. Cardoen, D. Cops, O. De Clerck, S. Herbots, L. Roggemans, J. Siongers and H. Op de Beeck. The core mission of the JOP consists of two activities: a systematic analysis of existing research in Flanders, and the development of recurrent measurements for charting young people's social world and its evolution. In order to analyse Flemish research, youth research is inventoried and synthesised within the JOP. For each finished study, a detailed research form containing all the relevant information is drawn up. These forms are made available online on the JOP website www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be – for English summaries, see: www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/eng/index – and constitute the basis for the syntheses.

rejuvenation, 31% of the population being 25 or younger. In addition to its cultural diversity and its young population, Brussels is also characterised by widespread poverty. More than other Belgian cities, the Belgian capital is facing an alarming socio-economic situation and multiple big-city problems. In Brussels, 28% of the population is living below the poverty line. This is a substantial difference with Flanders and Wallonia, where 11% and 19% respectively of the population are living below the poverty line. Reports in the media tend to focus on these problems. The perception of young people in Brussels is dominated by negative themes such as insecurity, unemployment or poverty. Terms such as "alarming", "threatening" and "frightening" are feeding the social debate. In spite of this extensive media coverage, evidence about the subjective life-world, the behaviour and the life-course of young people in Brussels remains scarce, although such knowledge might help to put this negative perception into its proper perspective. The aim of this book is to fill this gap, drawing on the results of the Brussels JOP-Monitor.

The Brussels JOP-Monitor was carried out in the spring of 2010 among pupils in Dutch-speaking secondary education in Brussels. In twelve chapters, this book describes the main results from this school survey in detail. The present chapter summarises the main findings in three themes, namely pupils' subjective life-world, their behaviour, and their course of life. The "subjective life-world" theme comprises three topics, namely young people's perception of their school, multiculturalism, and the unsafe city. The second theme covers pupils' behaviour and discusses their participation in associational life, the city as a breeding ground for problem behaviour, and identity development through consumption. The final theme explores the way young people view their life-course.

2. The subjective life-world of young people in Brussels

The Brussels JOP-Monitor has delivered a wealth of information about young people's subjective life-world, enabling us to present a picture in three topics: how do youngsters perceive their well-being at school (De Clerck & Vettenburg, Chapter 2); how do they view groups with a different ethnic origin and philosophy of life and to what extent do they seek to engage with these "other" groups (Siongers, Chapter 6; Siongers, Chapter 7; Elchardus, Chapter 8); and how unsafe do they feel in the capital (Cops & Put, Chapter 12).

2.1 School well-being in Brussels

The wide ethnic-cultural diversity in Brussels is reflected in education as well. Brussels schools are attended by pupils from different cultural, linguistic, religious and socio-

economic backgrounds. The multicultural and multilingual environment in which these young people live clashes in various respects with the values and ideas transmitted via school. As a consequence, some young people can hardly relate to school, if at all. This makes this group less likely to feel at home at school, whilst they are more likely to perform worse and to develop problem behaviour. These problems are given considerable attention and fuel debates about whether the specific composition of the population in the Brussels schools does not endanger the quality of Brussels education. In spite of this public interest, empirical research into Brussels pupils' school well-being is rare. How do Brussels pupils themselves perceive their school? Should we worry about the educational situation in our capital or should we rather put the issue into its proper perspective? The second chapter seeks to answer these questions.

Two dimensions in school well-being, namely "school perception" and the "relationship with teachers", are distinguished. In general, we found that most pupils in Dutch-speaking secondary education in Brussels are satisfied with their school and their education, and that they appreciate the relationship with their teachers. The multiple regression analyses show that both dimensions are largely determined by the same factors. The anti-social behaviour committed by a pupil at school is the main predictor. Pupils committing anti-social behaviour at school feel less at home and are less satisfied with the relationship with their teachers. Boys, migrants and pupils with less fortunate parents have a weaker sense of school well-being. Conversely, pupils having a positive view of the future, a positive self-image or a responsive father or mother have a more positive sense of school well-being. Remarkably, however, the educational track appears to have a limited impact: young people having an irregular educational track (repeaters, or pupils having a "B-Certificate"[3], which offers pupils the choice to move on to the next grade but in a different study direction, or to repeat the grade) and young people in vocational secondary education (BSO) or technical secondary education (TSO) appear to have no lower sense of school well-being than pupils with a regular educational track or pupils from general secondary education (ASO). The multilevel analyses show that the school well-being of Brussels pupils differs between schools. However, the factors we investigated at the school level – the concentration of migrants at a school, the percentage of pupils who do not speak Dutch with their mother, and the percentage of pupils having a lower-educated mother – have no effect on pupils' school well-being.

---

[3] This certificate is given to students that fail the year in a certain educational direction; they must then choose between repeating the year, or, going on to the next year in a different study direction. See: Spruyt, B. (2008). *Non-collective educational choices as mechanisms of social reproduction of educational inequality.* Steunpunt Studie en Schoolloopbanen, SSL-rapport nr. SSL/OD2/2008.09, Leuven.

Given this multicultural and multilingual urban context and the less favourable social background of pupils in Brussels, we assumed a lower school well-being among Brussels pupils compared with Flemish pupils. Our analyses confirm this assumption. Brussels pupils have a less positive school perception and are less satisfied with the relationship with their teachers than Flemish pupils. Nevertheless, the school well-being of Brussels and Flemish pupils appears to be essentially determined by the same factors. We also found that the family's financial scope influences the school well-being of only the Brussels pupils. This factor reflects the situation of deprivation in the big city. In other words, the big-city context manifests itself in a lower school well-being among Brussels pupils, and in particular among boys, immigrants, pupils from poor families, and pupils committing anti-social behaviour at school.

2.2 A multicultural city: solitary or solidary?

Brussels is a crossroads of cultures: multiple linguistic communities, a wide variety of nationalities, lots of ideological groups, etc. This cultural diversity is leaving a clear mark on Brussels and the Brussels people, both positively and negatively. Colourful neighbourhoods, such as the Congolese Matongé district and the *Rue de Brabant*, and colourful markets in Molenbeek, Sint-Gillis and around the Midi Station, give Brussels a genuine southern look. Conversely, this multicultural environment also regularly becomes the scene of – generally minor – street rows among young people with different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic prejudices and racism, or the perception of being the victim of such attitudes and behaviours, have a strong impact on the people concerned. The way in which the different cultural identities confront and handle each other is therefore a significant factor for the viability of a city such as Brussels. That is why this book extensively covers the attitudes of young people in Brussels vis-à-vis other ethnic and ideological groups. Using a variant of the Borgardus Distance Scale, Chapters 6 and 7 investigate the intimacy one is prepared to tolerate or approve in the interaction with members of other groups *(out-groups)*. Chapter 8, investigates anti-Semitism, building further on the finding that prejudices against Jews are on the rise in European countries. These three chapters examine the prejudices and attitudes among "indigenous" as well as "immigrant" young people. Previous research already revealed indigenous young people's prejudices and gave us a fairly good insight into the explanations for these attitudes. However, we know next to nothing about the attitudes of indigenous young people living in big cities, and about the attitudes of immigrant young people vis-à-vis the "others".

Chapter 6 draws a distinction between four groups of young people: those having a Belgian, Moroccan, Turkish and South European origin. For each of these groups, the

willingness to engage socially with sixteen different ethnic and ideological groups was investigated. The analyses show that Brussels is characterised by a multicultural "LAT" or living-apart-together relationship among the different groups: not *together* with, but *next to* each other. In spite of the great heterogeneity in ethnic origins in the Brussels Capital Region and in Brussels schools, it appears that young people very much wants to stick to their own group in terms of national origin and/or religion and to maintain a fair social distance to other groups. In line with the findings of virtually all studies into social distances between groups, we found that one's own group is preferred when it comes to social contacts, especially when more than friendships are involved. This applies to young people having a Belgian origin as well as to those having a Moroccan, Turkish or South European origin. In addition to this marked preference for one's own group, Brussels young people of a Belgian, Moroccan, Turkish and South European origin are also unanimous about the groups with which contacts should be avoided, or at least should not be taken too far. Bulgarians, Kurds and Roma gypsies obtain the lowest preference within each of the groups.

Many studies have revealed the following hierarchy when it comes to engaging socially with other groups: North Europeans first, followed by South and East Europeans and then Asians; Africans occupy the lowest positions. This hierarchy is also found to a certain extent among young people in Brussels, although this result must be qualified. Across the four groups there is a broad consensus about the tail of the ranking, and in terms of the main divisions it appears that – irrespective of one's own group – West and South European countries are ranked higher than the countries or ethnic groups from other continents. However, as far as the out-groups are concerned, no clear line can be drawn, and we find significant differences among the four different groups. Young people of a Moroccan and Turkish origin show larger distances with almost all out-groups compared with young people of a Belgian or a South European origin. The former appear to show larger social distances especially vis-à-vis non-believers and Jews. A similar difference is found for young people's ideological preferences. Young Muslims, and especially Muslims who obey the religious doctrine strictly, are most averse to relationships with people having another ideology, and most of all with Jews. The issue of anti-Semitism is explored in depth in Chapter 8.

That chapter compares three groups (indigenous young people, non-Islamic immigrant young people, and Islamic immigrant young people) in their attitude vis-à-vis Jews and seeks explanations for anti-Semitism and for the differences between the groups. Both general explanations of xenophobia and more specific explanations of anti-Semitism were examined. The degree of anti-Semitism again illustrates that young Muslims differentiate themselves strongly from young non-Muslims. Of the young non-Muslims, about 10%

agrees to the anti-Semitic statements that are submitted to them, whereas among young Muslims about 50% agrees. Self declared religious identity thus appears by far to be the most significant factor explaining anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is noticeably more prevalent among believers, among believing and practising Christians as well as among Muslims. It is clear that theological anti-Semitism is still playing a role. Nevertheless, even if this element is taken into consideration, there is a striking difference between believing Christians and Muslims.

Among non-Muslims, the socialisation environment, the pursuit of individual autonomy, and social malaise appear to play a more prominent role. Among both indigenous and immigrant non-Muslims, anti-Semitism appears to be stronger when the feeling of insecurity is stronger. Prejudice, including anti-Semitism, is therefore partly a response to a feeling of threat. In the case of anti-Muslim feelings or Islamophobia this is to be expected, since people often associate Muslims with criminality, whereas this association is not made in the case of Jews. The effect of the feeling of insecurity on anti-Semitism may thus reveal a general mechanism which translates feelings of vulnerability and threat into negative feelings vis-à-vis groups which are considered foreign in whatever way. Moreover, anti-Semitism is stronger among indigenous and non-Islamic pupils in TSO or BSO. Among indigenous pupils, anti-Semitism is also stronger to the extent that the belief in the possibility of achieving personal autonomy is more strongly present. This means that the rejection of authority and of constraints on one's own feelings, ideas and actions increases the likelihood that deviant, censured attitudes will be cultivated. This effect does not come into play among immigrant non-Islamic pupils. This may suggest that they do not have the same figures of authority as the indigenous pupils and that they do not have the same perception of what is expected of them in terms of correct thinking. However, it was impossible to verify this suggestion on the basis of the available data. Among non-Islamic immigrant pupils, anti-Semitism is stronger to the extent that linguistic skills – the extent to which they succeeded in completing the questionnaire – are weaker. We are again unable to verify this on the basis of the available data, but the phenomenon might be attributed to the specific origin of these pupils: anti-Semitism is typically stronger in East European countries, and a large part of the non-Islamic immigrant pupils is of an East European origin.

Among young Muslims, anti-Semitism is determined by the feeling of insecurity and media preference, but it is influenced significantly less by social factors than with non-Muslims. The Muslims' anti-Semitism is to a lesser extent determined by vulnerability and in terms of the estimated models correlates more strongly with identifying oneself as a Muslim. It is probably intensified by theological anti-Semitism, but also by the international context, the Middle East conflict, and the fact that many young Muslims live

in an environment (family, friends and media) where anti-Semitism is not curbed. This type of prejudice is especially widespread among the young Muslims in our schools. In view of the education towards democratic citizens, this aspect therefore deserves special attention.

Chapter 6 shows that relationships between the two dominant groups in the Brussels area, the Belgians and the Moroccans, are far from optimal. Several authors suggest that more and better contacts between these groups are necessary in order to improve ties. Although Brussels has a large number of foreign-origin people, this does not lead to an equal degree of contact with all inhabitants of Brussels. Ethnic groups live in concentrations in specific districts, and young people of a non-Belgian origin are also strongly concentrated in specific schools. Chapter 7 investigates the degree to which social contacts with other cultures actually reduce ethnic prejudices and encourage the willingness to establish inter-group contacts. To this end, in the dataset we selected on the one hand the children having two Belgian parents, and on the other the children from families in which at least one of the parents is of a Moroccan origin. In the former group, we checked the willingness to engage socially with people from Islamic countries, in the latter group the willingness to engage socially with people coming from West and South European countries. The analyses involved information about inter-ethnic contacts at the level of the school, the school neighbourhood and the district and municipality in which the respondents themselves live.

Contrary to expectations, the school context proved to be less significant. For young Belgians, none of the indicators at school level appears to have an impact on the degree of social distance vis-à-vis people associated with Muslim countries. For the young Moroccans, the presence of a higher percentage of Belgians at school slightly encourages the openness towards West and South Europeans, although this factor was found to be no longer significant when checked on the indicator "living inside or outside Brussels".

Consistently with the contact hypothesis, it was found that the Belgian young people are more open towards social contacts with Muslims if they live in Brussels, whereas among young Moroccans, living outside Brussels leads to a greater willingness to engage socially with the other group. Indeed, both situations increase the possibilities for contacts with the out-groups. In line with other recent research, Chapter 7 has found that inter-group contacts can curb ethnic prejudices among young Belgians mainly if they occur in neighbourhoods showing a balanced distribution of indigenous and immigrant people, and if these contacts are perceived as positive. A neighbourhood with predominantly non-Belgians encourages tolerance just as little as a neighbourhood with hardly any immigrants. This finding comes in support of a housing policy aimed at achieving a greater diversity within the districts, complemented by a focus on the "degree of

viability". In Brussels we found that people of a Turkish or North African origin are strongly concentrated in certain districts of the city; this entails social segregation and is not conducive to inter-ethnic social contacts. Achieving a balanced ethnic mix can benefit inter-ethnic contacts. However, among young Moroccans no differences were found as to the perception of the neighbourhood they live in and as to their positive or negative experiences with inter-ethnic contacts. The contact hypothesis thus appears to apply most to white majority groups and much less to other cultures.

We already have a basic insight into the ethnic prejudices and judgements of white majority groups with regard to "other" groups. The analyses of tolerance presented in this book once again reveal that little is known about the attitude of minority groups/immigrants vis-à-vis the indigenous population as well as vis-à-vis other ethnic groups.

2.3 The unsafe capital!?

The situation of (un)safety in Brussels is a recurrent topic on the political and social agenda. More and more Brussels neighbourhoods appear to be entering a negative spiral of increasing unviability and danger and are perceived as areas with high levels of public nuisance and criminality. This debate traditionally approaches young people as the source of danger and public nuisance, especially in the Brussels context, where (immigrant) young people are commonly associated with danger and problem behaviour. However, young people's own perception of their social and physical living environment, their feelings of insecurity, and the relation between their perception of the living environment and insecurity, remain largely neglected topics. This finding constitutes the starting point of Chapter 12.

Our analyses show that young people living in Brussels on average feel more unsafe, report more public nuisance in the neighbourhood, perceive the overall social quality of the neighbourhood as less positive and experience more intolerance vis-à-vis young people from the local adult residents than young people who do not live in the Brussels region but go to school there. However, these differences are relatively small. Living in a big city therefore appears to put pressure on the social relationships and the physical appearance of neighbourhoods, but it would be imprudent to completely ascribe these differences to urban problems. A remarkable finding, however, is that the relationship between the above-mentioned neighbourhood factors and the feeling of insecurity appears to be different for young people living in the Brussels region and young people living outside this region. Only in the first group do the neighbourhood factors appear to influence the feeling of insecurity, and a more negative perception of the social quality of the neighbourhood and a more strongly perceived intolerance vis-à-vis young people

correlates with a stronger feeling of insecurity. The perception of public nuisance, in contrast, appeared to have no direct effect. This is somewhat surprising, given the strong correlation that is usually observed between these factors. However, there appeared to be an indirect effect, showing a stronger perception of public nuisance correlating with a less positive assessment of the social quality of the neighbourhood, a more strongly perceived intolerance vis-à-vis young people, and a higher prevalence of victimisation. These factors in their turn directly influence the feeling of insecurity.

3. The behaviour of young people in Brussels

In addition to the subjective life-world, many chapters of this book also address the behaviour of young people in Brussels. We will now summarise the main findings. First the participation of Brussels young people in associational life will be charted (Herbots, Chapter 3). Next, we will describe the problem behaviour committed by Brussels pupils (Cops & Op de Beeck, Chapter 9; Op de Beeck & Put, Chapter 10; Cardoen, Berten & Vettenburg, Chapter 11). Finally, we will examine how young people develop their identity through consumption behaviour (Elchardus & Herbots, Chapter 5).

3.1 Brussels young people and associational life

In the past few years, a widespread fear of an "overall deterioration" of social participation has developed in both academic and political circles. Findings from the Flemish JOP-Monitors were comforting, both studies suggesting that the vast majority of young adults in Flanders participate in associational life. Nevertheless, these Flemish findings do not automatically imply a similar positive trend in our capital. "Root-taking" or "engagement" are expressed differently in (big-)city and municipal contexts because of the strongly divergent demographic, socio-economic and cultural compositions. Solidarity and cohesion in cities is a frequent cause for concern. Many people are convinced that spontaneous and solidary inter-human contacts are less easily achieved within such a context than within smaller communities. As a result, the "city" is often depicted as a meeting place of anonymous individuals who feel no need to engage with each other socially, who do not know each other and who do not seek close forms of living together. In this context, reference is often made to the "every man for himself" mentality and the lack of security and solidarity in the big-city context. Are these concerns well-founded? Do empirical data confirm the existing concerns or not? Does the participative behaviour of Brussels pupils differ from that of Flemish pupils? This is what Chapter 3 sets out to explore.

The analyses show that sports clubs, the organisation of music festivals or parties, and youth movements are the most popular types of associations among young people in Brussels. Although about two thirds of young people in Brussels currently participate in associational life, either actively or passively, we do find that the degree of participation among young people in the Flemish region is higher in all types of associations, i.e. sports clubs, youth associations, part-time art education, hobby clubs, amateur arts, municipal youth-work initiatives, Third World action groups, initiatives for underprivileged youth, and the organisation of music festivals and parties. For some of these types of associations, the differences in the degree of participation are even relatively large. Moreover, there are types of associations in which the degree of participation of Brussels young people is higher than of Flemish young people: religious associations, environmental and wildlife action groups, associations linked to a pub, neighbourhood and community work, youth houses or clubs, and youth exchange programmes. However, the differences in the levels of participation are relatively small here. In general, we thus find that the degree of participation among young people in Brussels is lower than the degree of participation among young people in Flanders.

Next, we examined whether this non-participation is prevalent in specific subgroups of the Brussels youth population. The most vulnerable group is undoubtedly formed by the young Muslims and immigrants living in Brussels: they appear to be strongly underrepresented in the majority of the types of associations examined. This can mean two things: either the existing offer in Brussels associational life largely fails to mobilise young people from different backgrounds and from different environments, or certain groups of young people are attracted to other types of leisure activities. Moreover, it was found that the likelihood of social participation in different groups of young people is influenced by different factors: while social background plays an important role for the indigenous young people and the young immigrant non-Muslims, this does not apply to the young Muslims. The parents' employment situation – which is a strong determinant of participation for both the indigenous young people and for the non-Islamic young people – has no effect on the participation behaviour of young Muslims. The same applies to the type of education: pupils following general education (ASO) are on the whole more strongly represented in associational life than pupils in vocational education (BSO) (and, to a lesser extent, pupils who follow technical education (TSO)). However, this correlation is not observed among Muslim pupils: in this group, ASO pupils have as many (or as few) chances of participation as BSO pupils. Note that some types of associations succeed better in attracting young people from different sections of society than others: associations with an altruistic nature (such as environmental or Third World action groups, or associations helping others) have the largest democratic reach and recruit members from widely different backgrounds. However, there are types of associations

which appear to be exclusively reserved for a specific segment of youth population: youth movements, youth houses, hobby and sports clubs recruit mainly indigenous young people from two-income families who attend general education and who do not live in one of the 19 Brussels municipalities.

3.2 The big city: a breeding ground for problem behaviour?

The debate about youth violence and youth criminality in our capital has become more and more intense, as the Brussels municipalities have frequently been the scene of problem behaviour committed by young people in the past few years. Not a day goes by without the media reporting about such behaviour: a 17 year old teenager was stabbed to death for his MP3 player, street violence dispels an industrial college in Anderlecht (a Brussels district), youths throw things at the police, immigrant youths murder a 22-year-old in the Brussels subway, bus and subway drivers are being harassed, etc. In short, the negative reports prevail. Rightly so? Is our city really a breeding-ground for juvenile crime, youth violence and alcohol and soft-drugs abuse? Three contributions in this book seek to answer these questions.

The first contribution provides an extensive description of the offences committed by the Brussels youth as well as the victimisation they experience. As far as offending is concerned, it is found that petty offences such as fare-dodging, petty theft and vandalism are committed most frequently by Brussels youth. More serious offences such as carrying a weapon, burglary and drugs trafficking are much less frequent. To find out whether there is more juvenile delinquency in Brussels than in Flanders, two separate analyses were conducted. On the one hand, data from the Brussels JOP-monitor were compared with data from the "Young People in Flanders. Measured and Counted" database. On the other hand, within the data from the Brussels JOP-monitor, respondents who live in Brussels were compared with respondents who do not live in Brussels. These comparisons show that young people who attend school in Brussels commit more violence than Flemish youth (this finding applies to all Brussels pupils, including those who do not live in Brussels themselves). Another remarkable finding was that more Brussels pupils were reported by the police for the offences they committed than Flemish youth. Victimisation also appeared to be a frequent phenomenon among the respondents of the Brussels JOP-monitor; only a minority of the Brussels pupils had not been the victim of any of the offences listed in the questionnaire. Victimisation of property offences occurs most often. However, compared to other studies, Brussels youth also report relatively high rates of victimisation of offences against the person . With regard to the distribution of victimisation, the results deviated slightly from the traditional findings. The analyses show that boys in general report a higher prevalence of victimisation, with the exception of harassment in the streets, which is reported more

frequently by girls. This gender effect appeared to be attributable to a difference in the degree of high-risk leisure activities and offending; boys have a higher risk of victimisation because they commit more offences and have higher-risk leisure activities than girls. The analyses also show that a large part of the Brussels youth is already confronted with victimisation at a relatively young age (12-13 years), whereas other studies (such as the JOP-monitor 2) show a gradual increase in victimisation throughout adolescence. Finally, this chapter presents an in-depth exploration of the relation between offending and victimisation. Separate analyses with offending and victimisation as dependent variables showed that high-risk leisure activities increase the likelihood of offending and that offending exposes young people to a bigger risk of victimisation.

The second contribution examined whether violence committed by Brussels pupils might have a contextual cause. The focus was on the school context, the central question being whether school characteristics have an effect on individual aggressive behaviour *regardless of* any compositional effects. The theoretical basis for this idea was the *Social Disorganisation Theory*: it was assumed that schools having a large number of pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged families have an independent effect on individual aggressive behaviour, as pupils in these schools run a greater risk of developing lifestyle risks, a more tolerant attitude towards violence and/or weaker ties with the school. The analyses did reveal an independent school effect: young people attending a school where more pupils feel financially limited have a higher risk of committing aggressive behaviour. Other than limitation of financial means, no socio-economic variables at the school level were significantly correlated with aggression. On the contrary, it was even found that young people with a high-educated mother were more likely to commit aggressive behaviour. Based on this finding, the correlation between socio-economic variables and aggression might be redefined: it appears that instead of socio-economic disadvantage in the broader sense, it is strictly a lack of financial resources that constitutes an important factor in the explanation of aggression. A second notable finding was that the effect of limited financial means at the school level is *not* completely mediated by lifestyle risks, a tolerant attitude towards violence or a weak tie with the school. Accordingly, it can be argued that school effects may be caused by factors that were not included in these analyses, or that school influences may even have a direct effect. Indeed, aggression may also occur within the school environment itself, and from this perspective the mere presence of a pupil at a school where aggression rates are high may in itself increase the likelihood of becoming involved in a violent offence. The third and final main finding of this chapter is that certain factors at the individual level may be protective against negative school effects. It was found that a strong, positive relation with the teacher(s) has a stronger protective effect in schools with a higher number of pupils who experience limited financial means. Furthermore, it is suggested in this

chapter that religious beliefs at the individual level too may protect pupils against negative school contextual influences. Based on this chapter, it can be concluded that the school context *does* have an impact on individual aggression, but that this impact is most prominent among people who are individually more vulnerable to this. Individual explanatory factors thus remain most important in the explanation of aggressive behaviour; school effects are secondary.

The third and final contribution focused on the use of alcohol and soft-drugs by young people in Brussels. To this end, we examined the consumption of light alcoholic drinks, strong alcoholic drinks and soft drugs during the month preceding the survey. Consistently with expectations, more Brussels pupils consumed a light alcoholic drink (40%) at least once than a strong drink (29%) or soft drugs (12%) in the course of the month preceding the survey, and twice as many respondents regularly (i.e. more than three times) consumed such a drink (16%) than another product (i.e. strong alcoholic drinks or soft drugs). A comparative study of substance abuse by Brussels pupils in the first three years of secondary education with data collected in the cities of Ghent and Aalst suggests a dual trend. Whereas we counted less users, and less frequent users (i.e. more than three times), of light alcoholic drinks in Brussels, we registered more users, and more frequent users, of strong drinks and soft drugs in our capital city than in Ghent and Aalst. In addition, we investigated the differences in consumption patterns according to respondents' gender, age and type of education. This analysis reveals that boys consume light alcoholic drinks, strong drinks or soft drugs more than girls, and also more regularly. The prevalence and incidence of the consumption of alcoholic drinks and soft drugs increase stepwise between the ages of 13 and 18. As for the type of education, the most notable finding concerns the differences in incidence between the consumption of strong drinks and soft drugs between pupils in (part-time) vocational education and in the other types of education. In the first degree, pupils from the B-class (remedial class) consumed strong drinks and soft drugs more frequently than their peers from the A-class. In the second and third degrees, pupils in (part-time) vocational education smoked cannabis more regularly than the pupils in the general and technical tracks.

Secondly, we investigated the effect of "societal vulnerability indicators" on the use and the frequent use of substances by Brussels pupils. Although the "societal vulnerability theory" can rely on empirical evidence with regard to persistent delinquent behaviour, this appears to be much less the case for the relationship with the use of alcohol and soft drugs. For instance, only the influence of the indicators "perception of public nuisance", "mother's responsiveness", "relationship with the teacher", "type of education" and "B-Certificate" was consistent with the expectations raised by this theory. The influence of the indicators

"negative future perspective", "value orientation of the school", "comfort", "feelings of insecurity", "repeating", "parents' level of education and employment situation", "follow-up by parents", "father's responsiveness", "self-image", "subjective purchasing power" appeared to be either not significant, not strong enough, or in contradiction with the expectations raised by the "societal vulnerability theory". This smaller explanatory power may be explained by the definition of what is or is not socially accepted: whereas persistent delinquent behaviour is clearly labelled as "socially unacceptable", this is less the case for the use of alcohol and soft drugs as measured by this study. The "societal vulnerability indicators" investigated may become really important only in case of substance use which is perceived to be problematic. This requires further research. Differences in the effect of "societal vulnerability indicators" in function of the size of cities were not found.

3.3 Consumption dependence: an "identity of things"

In virtually every street, on every wall, on buses, on the Internet, on television, at the pub, on the radio, at the cinema and in newspapers, we are constantly subjected to advertising messages or showcases trying to "seduce" us. In today's society, buying and consuming are no longer (exclusively) aimed at the gratification of primary needs but have become pleasant leisure activities which make it possible to buy identity and status. This also applies to young people, who use their consumption behaviour as a way of distancing oneself from the world of children and adults and of gaining their own place in society. Indeed, young people's street credibility is all about the brand of clothes they wear, the drinks they drink, and their tuned, turbocharged cars. Brands stand for a successful lifestyle and bestow a comprehensive identity. "Being up to date" has more than ever become a prerequisite for individuality and authenticity. In spite of this, research which examines consumption in young people's ideological world and life-world is scarce. Our analyses aim to change this.

According to the literature, a consumption-related identity or consumption-dependence can be measured in three different ways. First, by checking the extent to which certain consumer goods are felt to be a condition for happiness. Second, by checking the extent to which consumer goods are viewed as an expression of who or what one really is, of the self, of one's own authenticity. Third, by checking the extent to which goods are deemed necessary in order to belong. The present research followed the third approach. About 30% of the interviewed pupils may be considered as strongly consumption-dependent, 30% as moderately dependent and 40% as weakly dependent. Among the strongly consumption-dependent young people, this identity appears to exert a serious

pressure: they feel a very strong need for certain goods that give them a feeling of belonging and of not being excluded.

We first examined which young people are consumption-dependent. Various hypotheses found in the literature were checked. The more young people feel they should be themselves, without any social pressure, the more they become dependent on consumer goods in order to belong. Consumption dependence is also increased by being confronted with an advertising-rich environment and commercial leisure activities. This dependence decreases as one grows older; it is heavier with boys than with girls, and it is hardly affected by socio-economic or socio-cultural background.

Finally, we also investigated whether consumption dependence causes deviant behaviour and whether this correlation becomes stronger if heavy consumption dependence is associated with low purchasing power. This correlation does exist, and it is relatively strong for a positive attitude vis-à-vis violence and the frequency of anti-social behaviour at school; however, it applies to a lesser extent to delinquency. Many of these correlations can be explained by the relationship between consumption dependence, the pursuit of autonomy, commercial leisure activities, and gender. Still, even after taking account of these factors, consumption dependence keeps having a direct effect on the tolerance of violence and anti-social behaviour at school; in the same way, the discrepancy between consumption dependence and purchasing power has a direct effect on the acceptance of violence and delinquent behaviour. The capitalism of desire exerts a strong pressure on about one third of young people, and whoever feels this pressure runs a greater risk of committing anti-social and delinquent behaviour.

4. The ideal life-course of Brussels youth

This section describes the findings regarding the ideal life-course of pupils in Dutch-speaking education in Brussels (Roggemans, Chapter 4).

The transition of youth to adulthood is characterised by social transitions which the vast majority of young people go through. These social transitions often cause a revolution in young people's lives and determine both their professional career and their family life. Major transitions within the professional career are graduation, finding a first job, and retiring. Transitions within family life are the first sexual contact, the wedding, and having the first baby. Research into the ideal timing is important in that it can largely predict which choices young people will make when composing their family. In Europe and in Flanders, almost no data are available on how young immigrants view their life-

course. What age do young people in Brussels consider as ideal for the major life-course transitions? And do young people in Brussels share the same ideal image of a life-course as viewed by Flemish young people?

Socio-economic factors have an impact mainly on the ideal ages for work-related transitions such as the ideal age for graduating or for starting to work. Cultural and religious elements become more preponderant when it comes to the ideal ages for the family-related transitions. Young Muslims ideally have their first sexual contact later than non-Islamic young people. They also wish to marry their partner and have their first baby sooner. The ideal sequence of family-related transitions also differs widely between young Muslims and non-Muslims. Living together with a partner before marriage is accepted by non-Islamic young people as a fully-fledged phase in life. This is less the case with young Muslims, who prefer to postpone living together with their partner and having their first sexual contact until after marriage. The same applies to having an extramarital child. Indigenous young people see nothing wrong with the birth of an extramarital child, and they often even perceive this situation as ideal. Young Muslims have a different point of view and prefer having children within marriage.

These analyses should not make us conclude that, like with young Flemish people, there exists such a thing as a shared ideal image of a life-course among all young people in Brussels. It is more correct to say that there are two different life-courses: an ideal life-course for the indigenous young people in Brussels which does not differ from that of young people in Flanders; and an ideal image for young immigrants who, as a result of both socio-economic and cultural differences, undergo various transitions at a different moment and in a different sequence than the indigenous population. Religion plays a decisive part in this respect: young Muslims put forward a different ideal than young Christians or non-believers.

5. Life as it is: young people in the capital

In the introduction to this chapter, we already pointed to the negative image enjoyed by Brussels, and by Brussels youth in particular. Negative news reports and representations of the multicultural and young nature of the city inform the social debate and influence public opinion. People talk about juvenile crime, unemployment, poverty and security problems, but positive aspects such as the numerous opportunities for contacts, the availability of services or the wide range of cultural activities which are inherent to the socio-cultural diversity in the capital are rarely mentioned. In spite of the massive media attention for young people in Brussels, little objective information is available about their subjective life-world, their behaviour and their expectations for their later lives. We may

rightly wonder whether the prevailing ideas about Brussels and the young people living in our capital are correct. Do young people in Brussels think and feel differently and do they have different expectations of the future than Flemish young people, or are there more similarities than we suspect? We have endeavoured to answer these questions in this book. To this end we compared, to the extent possible, our findings regarding Brussels youth with those on Flemish youth. The next section gives a short overview of the results of this comparative study. To conclude, we will reflect on the research findings which underscore the cultural differences among young people in a multicultural capital.

5.1 Brussels and Flanders

Given the big-city problems facing Brussels, we assumed that Brussels pupils would score less well than their Flemish peers in various areas. This assumption was largely confirmed by our research.

The school well-being of Brussels pupils obtains a relatively positive score but is lower than the school well-being of pupils in Flemish schools. Brussels pupils feel less at home at school and are less satisfied with the relationship with their teachers than Flemish pupils.

Two thirds of the Brussels young people participate actively or passively in associational life. This is a good result, but it is lower than that of Flemish youth. Flemish pupils participate significantly more in sports and youth clubs, part-time art education, hobby clubs, amateur art activities, municipal youth-work initiatives, Third World action groups, initiatives for deprived young people, and the organisation of music festivals and parties. For some types of associations, Brussels youth score slightly better than Flemish youth: hobby clubs, religious associations, environmental and wildlife action groups, associations helping others, associations linked to a pub, courses and workshops, and youth exchange programmes.

We also found differences in problem behaviour. Pupils at Brussels schools commit more violence than Flemish pupils, while fare-dodging is also more frequent among Brussels youth. The differences in fare-dodging can be explained mainly by big-city factors such as the broader availability of public transport in Brussels. This means that we should not automatically conclude that Brussels young people commit more delinquent behaviour. The prevalence of drugs sales and vandalism is equal in Brussels and in Flanders. We observed differences in victimisation among pupils in Flanders and Brussels. For instance, Brussels pupils are frequently confronted with victimisation even at an early age (12-13 years), while in Flanders a gradual increase is found. As far as the use of alcohol and soft drugs is concerned, we counted less users, and less frequent users (i.e. more than three times), of

light alcoholic drinks in Brussels, but we registered more users, and more frequent users, of strong drinks and soft drugs in our capital city than in Ghent and Aalst

Finally, there is a difference in the way Brussels and Flemish youth view their ideal life-course. Among Brussels youth, there is no shared ideal image of a life-course, whereas this *is* the case among Flemish youth. Among Brussels youth we found two different ideal images: an ideal image of the indigenous Brussels young people comparable to that of the Flemish young people, and an ideal life-course for the young immigrants who, as a result of both socio-economic and cultural differences, undergo a number of transitions at different moments and in a different sequence than the indigenous population.

However, we should nunciate the differences found. Indeed, for some of the investigated aspects we found no differences at all. For instance, the prevalence of drugs sales and vandalism among Brussels and Flemish youth, and the ideal life-course of indigenous Brussels and Flemish pupils appeared to be similar. Any differences found often involve the same explanatory factors. This applies to for instance school well-being, the use of alcohol and soft drugs, and the participation behaviour of Brussels and Flemish youth. Moreover, the comparison we made is not complete. In some cases, no information was available for comparing the Brussels and the Flemish situation. In addition, we examined only certain aspects of the life-world and the behaviour of young people in Brussels, whilst other themes were left out of consideration. Finally, the differences in the research methods applied also require a cautious interpretation. While we collected the Brussels data by means of school surveys, the Flemish data were generally collected by means of postal surveys[4].

5.2 From multiculturalism to interculturalism

Although Brussels pupils in some ways differ from Flemish pupils in their attitudes, feelings, behaviour and life-course, the differences we found need to be qualified. In contrast to what the news reports about Brussels suggest, the differences remain fairly limited and the Brussels pupils are doing relatively well. A lower degree of school well-being, a lower degree of participation in associational life, more problem behaviour, and victimisation at a younger age are phenomena which often correlate with factors of economic and socio-cultural inequality. In a global city characterised by a concentration of poverty and a diversity of cultures, this inequality is felt even more strongly and is reinforced by the differences arising from a larger cultural and religious diversity.

---

[4] More details on the differences in the two data-collecting methods can be found in the chapter "Brussels Youth Examined" (Elchardus, Roggemans & Siongers, Chapter 1)

In the past few decades, the explanation of the social exclusion of certain groups not only relied on socio-economic factors, but increasingly involved cultural factors as well. The present research underscores the importance of these cultural factors in a multicultural and poor capital city. The differences found between culturally and religiously distinct groups are substantial and cannot be explained by socio-economic factors. This is expressed in for instance the willingness to engage with other groups, and in young people's life-course expectations. Young Muslims and the secularised indigenous population have a different ideal life-course and a different view of the future. They share the deprivation and the unfavourable social circumstances but are divided by their different cultural backgrounds. This cultural difference is felt in their perceptions, their behaviour and their future outlook.

We found that diversity in Brussels is interpreted according to the "Living Apart Together" principle: people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds do not live together but live apart from each other, at the level of the neighbourhood, the school and associational life. If we are to achieve an integration involving greater social equality, diversity needs to be given a dynamic interpretation in quest of a society in which all groups can partake in social life, through consultation and negotiation, irrespective of ethnic origin, cultural background and status. In this perspective, interaction is the starting point of interculturalisation. The conceptualisation of diversity as "living together" offers countless opportunities. For instance, it appeared that inter-group contacts and a balanced ethnic mix at the neighbourhood level may curb prejudices and enhance interhuman tolerance. The stimulation of contacts between young people at school, in the youth movement or in neighbourhoods lays the foundation of a more solidary (and less solitary) society. Moreover, an attitude of consultation and negotiation will counter the stereotyping and discrimination of certain groups in society. The chapters of this book make it clear that it is no longer justifiable to ignore the cultural differences. The recognition of these differences constitutes the first step towards mutual recognition.