

Scientific Report

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

The Effects of Super-Diversity in Europe

Tilburg, The Netherlands, October 26-28, 2009



Convened by:

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Executive summary of the workshop

The workshop was held at Tilburg University, and started with a lunch for the participants on 26 October 2009. All the participants had by that time arrived in Tilburg, and all were accommodated in the same hotel nearby campus. The ESF rapporteur had unfortunately cancelled his/her attendance, due to an airline strike in Spain.

The first session was intended to sketch the general lines of the workshop. The general welcome and introduction was given by Jan Blommaert on behalf of the co-organizers and on behalf of the Rector of Tilburg University. Consequently, two introductory papers were delivered. Jan Blommaert opened with a set of 'paradigmatic implications of superdiversity', followed by Steven Vertovec on 'conceptual challenges of superdiversity'. Both papers emphasised that superdiversity could be seen as a new, empirically grounded theoretical perspective on social structure, with far-reaching implications for a range of social-scientific approaches to developments such as globalization. These two papers were followed by a first 'applied' paper by Hans Siebers, who drew the implications of superdiversity for the study of institutions and social organizations. The session ended with an intensive discussion, which continued over dinner.

The second day, October 27, was structured into two sessions, one focusing on issues and challenges of superdiversity, the second targeting methodological fine-tuning in this new field. Throughout these sessions, the participants attempted to create clarity in the conceptual and methodological issues that arose (and there were many). Each paper was followed by comments of a pre-selected respondent, as a lead-in to the general discussion.

The issues and challenges were developed in three papers, one by Susan Gal, the second by Karen Phalet and the third by Sirpa Leppänen. Gal focused on the ways in which superdiversity needs to be seen as the outcome of longer historical processes in which 'regimented' models of diversity emerged and became enshrined in (mostly nation-state) institutions. Phalet, drawing on recent research in cross-cultural psychology, drew attention to the changing attitudes and patterns of behaviour among immigrants in Western Europe, noting that large-scale studies can (and must) be a crucial backdrop for more detailed ethnographic inquiries into social events and developments. Leppänen, finally, emphasised the impact of new technologies on the field of diversity, showing how the internet environment

creates new forms of social and cultural practice, as well as new informal learning environments, anchored in virtual time and space. Superdiversity, consequently, is something that exists both in material time and space as well as in the 'network society' created by new technologies, and this of course raises important analytical issues.

In the session on methodological fine-tuning, language was put central as a focus for demonstrating the relative merits of different approaches. Papers were presented by Ben Rampton, Monica Barni and Marco Jacquemet. Rampton showed how the microscopic analysis of social interactional events (using an ethnographically based conversation analysis) revealed large structural patterns of diversity reflected in the minutiae of everyday behaviour. His argument was that ethnographic case-study and micro-analysis are required instruments for an empirical study of superdiversity. Barni, using linguistic landscaping and geolinguistics, complemented this by a focus on the 'cartographic', macro-patterns of language diversity we can observe in neighbourhoods, cities and even regions. In Rampton's and Barni's papers, sociolinguistics in its current shape was put to the test, and both papers argued for a stronger interdisciplinary embedding of sociolinguistic analysis. Jacquemet's paper extended this argument. Drawing on linguistic anthropological and applied-linguistic methods, he argued in favour of an applied field of superdiversity. Based on work on asylum seekers in Europe, he showed how such materials contain both the micro- and the macro-dimensions that characterize superdiversity. The micro-moves in the discourse can only be understood when we look at their institutional encasing in 'regimes' (to use one of Gal's key terms).

The third day, October 28, was entirely devoted to discussion. Jan Blommaert and Steven Vertovec first attempted to bring together some of the lines of the discussion of the previous days, and reviewed some of the critiques of superdiversity. The group then broke up into three smaller panels, each panel addressing the question of how the paradigm of superdiversity could (and does) affect their work and the frameworks they used. This led to a productive concluding plenary discussion, in which the importance of the paradigmatic and innovative dimensions of superdiversity were underscored, and in which plans for future work and meetings were discussed.

The participants left Tilburg after a final, congenial lunch together.

Scientific content of the workshop

The workshop defined superdiversity as a *paradigmatic* intervention in attempts to understand the structure and development of contemporary globalized societies. This paradigmatic dimension is new, for until now, superdiversity has mainly been interpreted as an empirical statement on how post-1991 migration movements have altered the structure of Western immigrant countries such as Germany and the UK. The reasons for defining superdiversity as a paradigm, however, are compelling, because when a field of empirical objects undergoes dramatic changes, the analytical paradigms for addressing these objects must be adjusted to such changes.

If we accept that superdiversity has changed the demography and the social stratigraphy of migration (leading to small groups of people from more countries, migrating to more countries – as opposed to many people from a few countries migrating to a few countries, as in the pre-1991 migration patterns), this means that (a) we are meeting *more* forms of diversity now, and are effectively facing a *fragmented* population; (b) which in turn means that we can not *presuppose* much about the backgrounds of these people, nor about their life trajectories and their migration trajectories, motives and histories; (c) that, consequently, the idea of *stability* in social formations can no longer be presupposed either; (d) which ultimately means that we encounter difficulties with some of social science's key concepts, all of which presume stability in social formations. In fact, the notion of 'community' and all its derivatives (e.g. 'speech community') is open for critical re-examination now. The same goes for notions that suggest large and stable collectives, such as 'culture' and 'language'. A *fundamental* recasting of central social-scientific concepts is in order, because the question is not just one of method (how to best describe these new phenomena), but also one of deep theoretical apparatus – of paradigms.

While the workshop in effect grouped scholars from a variety of disciplines, the main burden of it was carried by people concerned with language in society. This bias had clear advantages: it allowed us to focus on a more or less unified complex of objects – language-related objects – and inquire into the various methodological angles which could be used in addressing superdiversity. Two main directions emerged. The first one is an *ethnographic* direction. Given the unpredictability and complexity of social phenomena in a context of superdiversity, the description of such objects is in itself a major challenge. Ethnography

offers a *theorized description* of social events; it enters into small details and does not avoid or reduce the complexity of events and developments, but takes complexity as its object. The workshop made a clear appeal to an ethnographic approach towards superdiversity. At the same time, and this brings us to the second direction, this ethnographic approach ought to be complemented by an analysis of *macro-structuration* in societies. The changes we observe are historical and layered; concrete objects (e.g. asylum applications) have clearly intertwined aspects of instability (each case is unique) and stability (each case develops in a uniform institutional frame). The study of superdiversity needs to address both the instability and the stability of its objects, lest it returns to an anecdotist and extreme-relativist approach often associated with the worst instances of postmodernism. It is the combination of a thorough ethnographic analysis of situated events with a clear contextualization of these events in terms of larger patterns and movements that constitutes the option chosen by this workshop.

While the work done during the workshop was conceptual and methodological, the workshop also expressed a keen awareness of the wider relevance of the issues it addressed. Superdiversity is something that has an immense importance for the ways in which societies manage diversity in their systems: education, welfare, the labour market, health care, the immigration and integration policies, and so on. The new structure of contemporary globalized societies – their superdiverse appearance – creates a wide range of problems in several European states, notably in the domains mentioned above. Governments and authorities are struggling with the same problems as the ones that occupy us. The conceptual and methodological development on which we embark needs to be fed back to applied domains, for the benefit of everyone.

Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

All participants felt that the workshop has achieved more than was anticipated at the outset. It was an ESF *Exploratory* Workshop, and we feel that we have done more than just explore the issues on the agenda.

1. The work clearly achieved a major clarification of the conceptual and methodological challenges of superdiversity, and thus made a major move towards understanding superdiversity as a paradigmatic development. In particular, the option to combine an ethnographic approach with a structuration approach allows us to continue work in a way that enables accurate description and interpretation, as well as theoretical extrapolation and generalization. This is a major shift compared to where we started from, and in that sense the workshop was extraordinary successful.
2. The workshop also established a network of scholars, committed to this emergent paradigm and intent on continuing to collaborate. It grouped scholars from a variety of backgrounds, most of them of considerable distinction, certain to carry this work forward in a variety of directions. In order to facilitate this, the Babylon Network on Language and Globalization (an electronic workspace) will be used as a platform for continued collaboration among the participants and a wide group of interested scholars worldwide.
3. The workshop facilitated cross-institutional collaboration, notably between the Max Planck Institute and a number of European centers for the study of language in society. A consortium of European centers will be formed, with the intention of intensifying work in this field, stimulating joint funding applications, exchanging research students, and joining forces in research training. One immediate result is that a team led by Ben Rampton and Jan Blommaert will bring an ESRC-funded Research Development Initiative on 'Ethnography of Language and Communication' to the Max Planck Institute in March 2010. More joint activities are in the planning stage.
4. Finally, the workshop also yielded numerous plans for follow-up publication and meetings. The convenors are currently investigating the possibilities to turn the papers of the workshop into a high-level publication. In addition, provision planning is underway for a follow-up meeting in the second half of 2010, and there are suggestions to bring this topic and its speakers to panels at international conferences. The workshop will, thus, yield high-impact and highly visible academic results.

PROGRAMME

Monday, 26 October 2009

Morning	<i>Arrival at Tilburg and registration</i>
12.00-14.00	<i>Get-together, lunch, informal (Tilburg University, Dante Building, foyer)</i>
14.00-14.10	Welcome by the convenor of the ESF Exploratory Workshop Jan Blommaert
14.10-14.30	Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF) Javier Esparcia Pérez (ESF/Standing Committee for Social Sciences (SCSS))
14.30-18.00	Session 1: Framing superdiversity in Europe Chair: Ingrid Gogolin
14.30-15.20	Presentation 1 “The paradigmatic effects of super-diversity” Speaker: Jan Blommaert Respondent: Steven Vertovec
15.20-16.10	Presentation 2 “The conceptual challenges of super-diversity” Speaker: Steven Vertovec Respondent: Jan Blommaert
16.10-16.30	<i>Coffee / Tea Break</i>
16.30-17.20	Presentation 3 “Contested culture: Super-diversity’s consequences for our understanding of a key concept in social sciences and humanities” Speaker: Hans Siebers Respondent: Massimiliano Spotti
17.20-18.00	Plenary discussion
19.00	<i>Dinner</i>

Tuesday, 27 October 2009

- 09.00-12.30** **Session 2: Issues and challenges of super-diversity**
Chair: Dominique Caubet
- 09.00-09.50 **Presentation 1 “Linguistic regimes and ‘Super-Diversity’”**
Speaker: **Susan Gal**
Respondent: **Marco Jacquemet**
- 09.50-10.40 **Presentation 2 “Ways of being Muslim: Religious identities of second-generation Turkish Muslims in seven European cities”**
Speaker: **Karen Phalet**
Respondent: **Fons van de Vijver**
- 10.40-11.00 *Coffee / Tea Break*
- Chair: Aitor Ibarolla**
- 11.00-11.50 **Presentation 3 “Linguistic and generic hybridity in web writing: the case of fan fiction”**
Speaker: **Sirpa Leppänen**
Respondent: **Martin Ehala**
- 11.50-12.30 **Plenary discussion**
- 12.30-14.00 *Lunch*
- 14.00-18.00** **Session 3: Working toward methodological fine tuning**
Chair: Sari Pietikäinen
- 14.00-14.50 **Presentation 1 “Super-diversity and social class: The view from interaction”**
Speaker: **Ben Rampton**
Respondent: **Guus Extra**
- 14.50-15.40 **Presentation 2 “A new challenge for research and policy: describing linguistic ‘super-diversity’”**
Speaker: **Monica Barni**
Respondent: **Constant Leung**
- 15.40-16.00 *Coffee / tea break*
- Chair: Sari Pietikäinen**
- 16.00-16.50 **Presentation 3 “Asylum and Superdiversity: The Search for Rigid Designators in Transidiomatic Institutional Settings”**
Speaker: **Marco Jacquemet**
Respondent: **Jan Blommaert**
- 16.50-17.40 **Plenary discussion**
- 19.00 *Conference Dinner*

Wednesday, 28 October 2009

09.00-12.30	Session 4: Conclusions and outlook Chair: Brian Street
09.00-09.50	Conclusive remarks Jan Blommaert
09.50-10.40	Conclusive remarks Steven Vertovec
10.40-11.00	<i>Coffee / Tea Break</i>
11.00-12.30	Plenary discussion on follow-up activities
12.30-13.30	<i>Lunch</i>
13.30	<i>End of Workshop and departure</i>

List of participants

	Name	Affiliation
1.	Monica Barni	Università per Stranieri di Siena Italy
2.	Jan Blommaert	Tilburg University the Netherlands
3.	Dominique Caubet	INALCO (Institut des Langues et Civilisations Orientales) France
4.	Martin Ehala	Tallinn University Estonia
5.	Guus Extra	Tilburg University the Netherlands
6.	Susan Gal	University of Chicago USA
7.	Ingrid Gogolin	Hamburg University Germany
8.	Aitor Ibarrola	Universidad de Deusto Spain
9.	Marco Jacquemet	University of San Francisco USA
10.	Sirpa Leppänen	University of Jyväskylä Finland
11.	Constant Leung	King's College London United Kingdom
12.	Karen Phalet	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Belgium
13.	Sari Pietikäinen	University of Jyväskylä Finland
14.	Ben Rampton	King's College London United Kingdom
15.	Hans Siebers	Tilburg University the Netherlands
16.	Massimiliano Spotti	Tilburg University the Netherlands
17.	Brian Street	King's College London United Kingdom
18.	Steven Vertovec	Max-Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity Germany
19.	Fons van de Vijver	Tilburg University the Netherlands

Statistical information on participants

Gender	N	%
Male	12	63
Female	7	37
	19	100

Countries of origin	N	%
Belgium	2	10.5
Estonia	1	5.3
Finland	2	10.5
France	1	5.3
Germany	1	5.3
Italy	3	15.7
Netherlands	3	15.7
Spain	1	5.3
United Kingdom	4	21.1
USA	1	5.3
	19	100