



Vital Cities
and Citizens

How civil society in Rotterdam negotiates super diversity

Report of a workshop with Prof. Steven Vertovec

Professor Steven Vertovec is widely-known for his conceptual and empirical work on the concept of superdiversity. During a workshop organized at the end of 2022, several scholars from Erasmus University Rotterdam discussed their research on how civil society in Rotterdam negotiates diversity and relates to terms like superdiversity and inclusion with him. In this workshop report, researchers Maria Schiller and Isabel Awad from Erasmus Initiative Vital Cities and Citizens share the most important learnings.

Remapping Rotterdam

We kicked off the workshop with a presentation on our [Remapping Rotterdam project](#). The main goal of this research project is to take stock of organizations working on diversity and inclusion in Rotterdam, to capture the links between these organizations, and analyze the dynamics of their interactions and relationships. Steven Vertovec raised here relevant questions about how the landscape of organizations and their relationship maps to their clientele and also how a different governance configuration may impact the lives of people in Rotterdam.

The role of civil society in the field of diversity and inclusion

Then we moved on to a broader discussion of the role of civil society in the field of diversity and inclusion as well as how this could be linked to analytical notions and ongoing conceptions surrounding concepts of superdiversity.

Research assistants Nena Ackerl and Wiebke Aepkers presented initial findings from a discourse analysis of interviews with civil society organizations (CSOs) from the Remapping Rotterdam project. They found that CSOs primarily use superdiversity for fulfilling the funding requirements of the municipality and that they rather draw on notions of inclusion and intersectionality to define their own mission and normative position. They asked Steven Vertovec how, in his experience, civil society organizations have related to the notion of superdiversity, also in other contexts. Furthermore, they enquired what in his view would be the main differences and what would be synergies between superdiversity and intersectionality as analytical notions?

Vertovec's answers were very helpful in this regard and very much on this point, observing that the notion of superdiversity has also been used in ways that he had not intended. Sometimes policymakers, including CSOs, would use the term descriptively to communicate something like "lots of ethnic groups", which for him comes down to a form of "superdiversity light". Furthermore, Vertovec gave important cues on his take on the potential uses of the superdiversity and intersectionality literature to interpret the findings from our discursive analysis of interview data with civil society actors in Rotterdam. We learned that Vertovec does not view superdiversity and intersectionality as competing concepts or alternatives for each other. For him, what the concepts have in common is that they employ a multidimensional perspective that allows for the coming

together of multiple categories. Vertovec also mentioned that traditionally intersectionality focused on the intersection between race, class and gender. However, the term superdiversity takes more dimensions into account. Lastly, Vertovec argued that there is a third term that should be brought into the conversation; complex inequality as discussed by Leslie McCall and Sylvia Walby.

Superdiversity and power

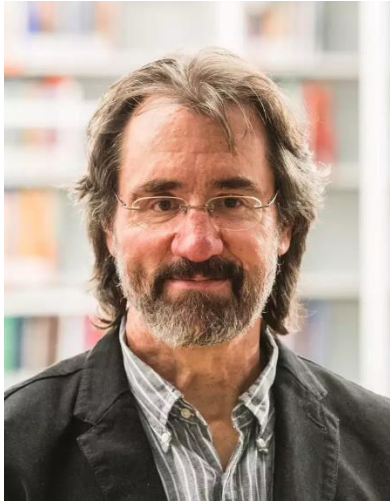
Workshop participants Lieke van Veer (Post-doctoral researcher, EUR) and Kathrine van den Bogert (Assistant Prof, University of Utrecht) added some important observations on the imbalances in power relationships, for instance between society actors and asylum seekers or between local governments and local civil society initiatives, challenging Vertovec to reflect if and how conceptual notions of superdiversity can be useful for making sense of and elucidating such power imbalances.

Vertovec acknowledged that superdiversity has been criticized for initially being blind to power differences and that more generally, structural power dynamics need more proper addressing. This is also captured in his new book 'Superdiversity' with one chapter addressing popular criticism towards the term and providing his response. At the same time, he also pointed out that people who criticize superdiversity for concealing inequality have not properly understood his work. He argues that inequality stems from stratification which the term superdiversity does address.

Overall, the seminar was a great opportunity to discuss our first article in progress with Steve as well as getting his views and positions regarding the use of superdiversity and intersectionality for the development of our planned second article.

The workshop was organized on November 22 by Maria Schiller and Isabel Awad, theme leaders of "Inclusive Cities and Diversity" within the Erasmus Initiative Vital Cities and Citizens.

Biography: Professor Steven Vertovec, Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen and Germany, is an expert on migration-related diversification and next to his earlier work on transnationalism and multiculturalism widely-known for his conceptual and empirical work on the concept of superdiversity.



<https://www.mmg.mpg.de/steven-vertovec>

<https://migrationresearch.com/experts/steven-vertovec/1921>