The established, the outsiders and scale strategies: studying local power conflicts

Maarten Hogenstijn, Daniël van Middelkoop and Kees Terlouw

Abstract

Established – outsider theory has been a useful tool for explaining the nature and course of local conflicts since its introduction in the 1960s. However, increased mobility and changing lifestyles have led to a change in the role of the local community in people’s lives. Established – outsider theory can still be very relevant in explaining the course of local conflicts, if combined with new insights on the relation between space and community and the geographical concept of scale. Then it becomes clear that groups can use a number of scalar strategies in order to win a local conflict. An analysis of local conflicts in the Dutch village of Amerongen shows the related character of these strategies.

Introduction

In post 9–11 western society, divisions between groups seem greater than ever. Ethnic and religious differences seem insurmountable, and fear of ‘the outsider’ runs deep. Yet an awareness of the ‘Outsider’ has a long history in social theory, and in this paper, we consider the contemporary relevance of one of the most important contributions to this literature, that used by sociologists Norbert Elias and John Scotson, in their classical study ‘The Established and the Outsiders’ (1965).1 In this paper we argue that a combination of their classical theory with more recent geographical insights related to the concept of scale, improves our understanding of local power conflicts and is worthy of further reflection.

The study by Elias and Scotson reflects the social sciences of that time. They tried to abstract as much as possible from the particular place they studied, to generate theoretical insights in social inequality in general. Also in line with their time, Elias and Scotson gave the concepts of space and scale a peripheral role in their study of the established – outsider figuration. While the expansion of social relations is crucial in much of Elias’ other work – for instance on the process of civilisation – the nature and role of relations across scales now needs elaboration. New insights on the relation between space and community
have to be taken into account. It is important to recognise, how, in conflicts at the local scale, local groups link up with groups and individuals at higher spatial scales. They can use a number of strategies to keep or improve their position on the local power balance. An analysis of several conflicts in Amerongen, a small village in the Netherlands, shows how these strategies work in practice.

We will first briefly address the original theory by Elias and Scotson and the main points of critique and additions it has received since 1965. We then look at both the geographical concept of scale and developments in urban sociology and explain how and why they should be incorporated in established – outsider theory. Using these concepts, we turn to the strategies that groups can use in a local conflict. We use the example of Amerongen to clarify how this works.

**The original theory**

In ‘The Established and the Outsiders’ Norbert Elias and John Scotson developed a model to study ‘social relations within and between communities which revolved around the concept of relations between ‘established and outsider groups’ (Van Krieken, 2001). They analyse a suburban neighbourhood on the outskirts of an industrial town, which they named Winston Parva.² It had less than 5,000 inhabitants who formed a compact community with its own factories, schools, churches, shops and clubs. A railway line separated it from other parts of the town (Elias and Scotson, 1965: 1). Winston Parva consisted of three neighbourhoods:

1. The middle class neighbourhood.
2. The ‘old’ working class neighbourhood, known as the Village.
3. The ‘new’ working class neighbourhood, known as the Estate.

In Winston Parva, residents of the middle class neighbourhood and the Village on the one hand and the residents of the Estate on the other hand, together formed a figuration. The first group was seen as ‘the established’, the second as ‘the outsiders’. The division between the two groups of residents was based on the ‘social oldness’ of the groups (length of residence in Winston Parva). The power sources of the ‘socially old’ established group were most effective in Winston Parva. Established group members held the powerful positions in the figuration. The established group had a strong internal cohesion and was able to stigmatize the outsiders. This led to status and power differentials that excluded the outsiders.

Elias expanded The Established and the Outsiders by adding a theoretical essay (Elias, 1994 [1976]). In this essay, he stresses that the division of power between groups should be central in any analysis of social divisions. Stressing other divisions, such as ethnic differences, leads away from the core of the figuration (Elias, 1994 [1976]: xxx). The power balance is the central concept in established-outsider theory. It is the outcome of the power relations between
established and outsiders. The position of groups on the power balance is related to the interdependence between the groups. Both groups have possession of certain power sources. The effectiveness of a power source is determined by the dependence of other groups upon it. The development of conflict is more likely when both established and outsider groups are striving for control of the same power sources. Two power sources are central in established-outsider figurations: group cohesion and key positions in institutions.

**Subsequent critique and evaluation**

The *Established and the Outsiders* received a modest welcome at the time of its first publication in 1965. After publication of the Dutch translation and the addition of a theoretical essay by Elias in 1976, the theory attracted more attention. The critique and additions in later reviews or applications of the established-outsider theory focus on three main themes:

1. **Dynamics**: the time dimension in the division between groups, their positions on the power balance and the relevance of this power balance
2. **Interdependence**: dependency relations between established and outsider groups
3. **Context and scale**: influences of (developments at) different spatial scales on a figuration

**1. Dynamics**

Many authors criticise the static nature of Elias and Scotson’s analysis of Winston Parva. Stephen Mennell, an admirer of Elias, concedes that “‘established’ and “outsiders” are perhaps not the most inherently dynamic of the terms he has introduced; they can easily lend themselves to carelessly static use’ (Mennell, 1989: 124–5). May describes the study as a ‘snapshot of a community in the late 1950s’ (May, 2004: 2164). Elias and Scotson themselves explicitly wanted to avoid this: ‘sociological problems can hardly ever be adequately framed if they seem to be concerned with social phenomena exclusively at a given point and time – with structures which, to use the language of films, have the form of a “still” ’ (Elias and Scotson, 1965: 11 – 12). The dynamic character of society is a central theme in Elias’ work (see for example Elias, 1970, 1974, 1977). The Winston Parva study analyses the social dynamics behind the emergence of an established–outsider figuration. Further analysis focuses on the stabilisation of this figuration over time through processes like stigmatisation, gossip, contact avoidance and exclusion from local institutions. This focus on the emergence and deepening of the power imbalance between established and outsiders neglects the changeable character of these figurations and leads to the static use of the terms ‘established’ and ‘outsider’ as warned for above.
Other researchers have stressed the need to look at an established-outsider figuration from a historic-dynamic point of view. They have given examples of power balances shifting (‘turning around’), of the blurring of divisions between the groups and of the disappearance of figurations (see for example Brunt, 1974; Verrips, 1978; Bovenkerk et al., 1985; Timmerman, 1990; Treibel, 1993; Bauböck, 1993).

Dutch case studies by sociologist Lodewijk Brunt and anthropologist Jojada Verrips most clearly illustrate a shifting power balance. Verrips describes the social relations in the village of Ottoland. He concludes that the shift in the relevance of power sources and the transformation of power balances ‘is connected to a transformation of the relationship between the village and the wider society (. . .) The power balance in the wider context that the village was part of, got more and more important for the relations between the villagers, instead of the power balance within the village’ (Verrips, 1978, p. 230, own translation). Brunt concludes for the village of Stroomkerken: ‘There used to be a hegemony of farmers. Because of (inter)national developments the farmers have slowly moved into a peripheral position. A power vacuum is the result, and to fill this vacuum a fight has started between different groups of autochthonous residents and newcomers’ (Brunt, 1974: 15, own translation).

Dutch geographer Lia Karsten gives a more recent example of changes over time that lead to a shifting power balance. She applies the established – outsider theory on the relations between Dutch and immigrant schoolchildren on playgrounds in different neighbourhoods in Amsterdam. She concludes that the Dutch children in the neighbourhoods changed from being the established to being the outsiders. This was mainly caused by the numerical dominance of the ‘new’ established (Karsten, 1998: 574–5).

Finally, sociologists Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst see the role of newcomers and the attachment to place in the era of globalization in a very different light. They propose to ‘fundamentally break from any lingering conceptions of local social relations as defined by the activities, values and cultures of those “born and bred” in an area’ (Savage et al., 2005: 29). On the basis of extensive field research in four areas of Greater Manchester, they conclude that a new group is locally dominant: those newcomers who ‘elect to belong’. ‘It implies a view of residential attachment that articulates a distinctive ethics of belonging that has nothing to do with the claims of history. It repudiates the claims of locals trapped in the past and also the transients who are here today and gone tomorrow. Rather, it is premised on the values of those who come today and stay tomorrow, who make a choice to live somewhere and make ‘a go of it’ (ibid: 53). Indeed, this is ‘a very different politics to that found in Elias and Scotson (1965)’ (ibid: 44).

2. Interdependence

Interdependence is a very central concept in established – outsider theory. Various researchers have elaborated on the need for a complementary
relationship between the groups as a precondition for the existence of an established-outsider figuration. If groups are not interdependent, there is no necessity for struggle over resources or even for interaction. In that case, an analysis in terms of established and outsiders is less useful. Mennell (1989) states that studying this interdependence ‘will lead directly to the central balance of power in the figuration the groups form together’ (p. 138).

In a work in which they compare the positions of women and homosexuals as ‘outsiders’, Van Stolk and Wouters (1980, 1987) show that a struggle for a better position as a group is very difficult if the established and outsiders do not ‘need’ each other. ‘Homosexuals as a group have no particular social task, and therefore have no social power source at their disposal. They can and do organize themselves but (. . .) have no obvious means of exerting pressure’ (Van Stolk and Wouters, 1987: 483). If established and outsiders do fulfil a need for each other, they are interdependent and connected (Elias even says ‘trapped’) in a double bind (Elias, 1994 [1976]: xxxi). However, this does not mean that the division of power is anywhere near equal and it does not automatically lead to confrontation between the groups. Van Stolk and Wouters have stressed the possibility of ‘harmonious inequality’ (1987: 484–5).

This lack of interdependence can change over time. Opting in or out of an established-outsider figuration has become increasingly possible in present society with its increasing mobility and individualisation of communal relations. People are thus increasingly locally indifferent.

3. Context and scale

Elias and Scotson’s study of Winston Parva is basically confined to the local spatial scale. This was not uncommon at the time of publication: locality studies were a trend in (British) social science (Savage et al., 2003). Consequently, the role of the wider context and the relations with other spatial scales were neglected. This point of critique was heard from the very first publication of ‘The Established and the Outsiders’. Margaret Stacey reviewed the book in the geographical journal Urban Studies in 1968.3 She finds that the role of the larger social structure does not get enough attention: ‘Perhaps the point really is that the mechanisms through which this larger society intrudes are not spelled out. Thus the power of the elites in the established sector are made plain but their relative powerfulness or powerlessness in relation to economic, political and administrative institutions operating in the area is not dealt with.’ (Stacey, 1968: 96).

In much of Elias’ other work, the expansion of social relations plays an important role. This is already apparent in Elias’ analysis of the civilizing process (Elias, 1977 [1939]). This work is seen as Elias’ magnum opus, to the extent that ‘nearly all of the major pieces of work that Elias subsequently produced can be seen as an elaboration of both substantive themes and concepts first developed in The Civilising Process’ (Quilley and Loyal, 2005: 148 © 2008 The Authors. Journal compilation © 2008 The Editorial Board of The Sociological Review
The increased scale of regulation from the fragmented feudal society towards the modern Western civilisation plays an important role. The growing contacts within Europe through for instance the distribution of books on behaviour and the relations between the courts are part of this process. Different scales play a role in this civilizing process (Lindner, 1996). They range from the scale of the everyday life and socialisation of the individual, to the scale of the increasingly integrated state territory. The civilizing process is however about the overall increased regulation and the widening of the scope of society as a whole, rather than about the relations between social spaces at different scales. In his 1956 essay ‘Problems of involvement and detachment’ Elias elaborates on the existence of ‘systems with sub-systems on several levels’ (Elias, 1956: 249). He recognises that these levels have ‘a greater or smaller measure of autonomy’, but the scope for these actions ‘varies with the properties of the paramount system’ (ibid: 250). Elias recognises that social actions take place at different levels, but his analytical aim is to place these actions into the frame of ‘part-whole relationships’ and to conclude on the characteristics of the ‘over-all system’.

In work following the publication of The Established and the Outsiders, Elias did pose questions about community, context and scale. In his foreword to a book on the sociology of community, Elias asks: ‘Are there any functions left which still give a locality the character of a community when societies transform themselves into more and more urbanized nation-states where work is increasingly done with the help of machines driven by men-made energies? Are there, in other words, specific functional interdependencies which can bind, in these societies too, residents of the same locality more closely to each other than to groups outside?’ (Elias, 1974: xxvi). Earlier in this essay, he provides his own answer. He recognizes the changing scale and nature of society and its implications for communities: ‘. . . the scope for decisions at the community level shrinks in proportion to the growth and the effectiveness of integration and control at higher state levels’ (pp. xxv–xxvi). But his primary focus remains with the small-scale community: ‘Specific reciprocal dependencies of people having their home in relatively close propinquity within certain visible or invisible boundaries form, as it were, the primary common ground which relates communities of all kinds to each other’ (p. xix).

Notwithstanding the additions by Elias himself and others, later studies of established – outsiders figurations have still largely been confined to a single (mostly the local) spatial scale. In some established-outsider studies, the scale on which the analysis took place was not explicitly mentioned (for example Timmerman, 1990; Treibel, 1993; Ernst, 2003). This hinders the analysis, as the interpretation of group behaviour at a certain scale is also dependent on the portraying of similar groups at higher spatial scales. The position of ethnic minorities in a local community for example is strongly dependent upon the debate on the integration of those minorities at the national level. Some authors (ie Brunt, 1974; Bovenkerk et al., 1985) have stressed the ever-greater influence of developments on different spatial scales upon each other.
Scale as size, level and relation

It has now become clear that local conflicts cannot be studied in isolation. They are shaped by developments at other spatial scales. But what exactly is scale? According to Australian geographer Richard Howitt, scale should be seen as a process, rather than a concrete ‘thing’ that physically exists somewhere. He states that there are three ways to treat the concept of scale: *scale as size, scale as level and scale as relation* (Howitt, 2000, 2002).

1. *Scale as size* is the oldest and easiest way of looking at scale. It suggests that concepts of scale imply a hierarchy of ‘orders of magnitude’. Going to a larger or smaller scale in this definition simply means looking at a smaller or bigger area.

2. More often however, scale is treated as a level. The idea of *scale as level* is often conflated with scale as size, with a common implication of a ‘nested hierarchical ordering of space’. Wider scales are understood to encompass greater amounts of complexity (divisions of labour, administrative reach, cultural diversity etc.) and to achieve greater geographical scope. Upscaling, for instance from ‘local’ to ‘national’ or ‘international’, implies not just larger areas, but a domain in which more complexity is encompassed by specified relations in society, space and time (Howitt, 2000).

3. Taking *scale as relation*, scale boundaries are represented as interfaces. Not only do larger scale entities (global or national) contain smaller scale entities, but the larger scale entities are at the same time contained within smaller scale entities. So the national scale is made up of several local or regional scales and is influenced by these smaller scales while at the same time the national scale is influencing the ‘smaller’ scales.

Scale as size, level and relation cannot be treated as equal concepts. Scale as size and scale as level are clearly different *aspects of* the concept of scale, while scale as relation should be seen as an *approach to* the concept of scale. Neil Brenner (2001, 2004), who draws on the work of Howitt, strongly emphasizes the importance of the relational approach to scale. The construction of scale is a process and therefore scale ‘cannot be construed adequately as a system of territorial containers defined by absolute geographic size (a “Russian dolls” model of scales). Each geographical scale is constituted through its historically evolving positionality within a larger relational grid of vertically “stretched” and horizontally “dispersed” sociospatial processes, relations and interdependencies’ (Brenner, 2001: 606).

Using the relational approach, we see scales as spatial constructions of differing size and complexity, which should be analysed in their relation to each other. The crux of the concept lies with the boundaries of areas: the construction of scale. Scale is always constructed by people, as boundaries of areas are defined by people. This implies that there is a dimension of power and politics in the concept of scale. Formal power is more or less tied to certain
scales. Groups that want to achieve or maintain power can focus on these scales. The way scale is constructed or organized ‘empowers some actors, alliances and organizations at the expense of others’ (Brenner 2001: 608). In established – outsider terms this means that the scalar organisation of power can give a group an advantage on the power balance. Therefore, the question whether or not to reorganise the location of power at certain scales can itself be the cause of conflict between established and outsiders. As Swyngedouw puts it: ‘the continuous reshuffling and reorganization of spatial scales is an integral part of social strategies and struggles for control and empowerment’ (1997: 141).

**Space and community**

Related to this rescaling of power relations is the changing relation between space and community. In the traditional conceptualisation of community, space and community overlap. The stable local community is the background against which the decline of communal relations under modernisation is analysed. In research based on this conceptualisation, space is only the area covered by a community. It is used to stress the stable, authentic and homogeneous character of local communities. It is seen as the safe haven threatened by the changes in the outside world (Massey, 2005: 138–42). This nostalgic image of a homogeneous and tightly knit community is now increasingly dismissed as a reconstruction of the past to criticise the present (Blokland, 2003: 191–207; Harvey, 2001; Savage *et al.*, 2003: 116).

Elias’ ideas only partly fit in the traditional conceptualisation of community. Although he also regards community and space as overlapping, he acknowledges the divisions and conflicts in local communities. The dynamic relations of interdependence in figurations form the core of his established-outsiders theory. But in *The Established and the Outsiders* Elias and Scotson pay very little attention to the fact that important social relations cross the boundaries of the neighbourhood. They do not take into account Winston Parva’s place in the urban network of the ‘large and prosperous town in the English midlands’ of which it is a ‘suburban development’ (Elias and Scotson, 1965: 1, see also Stacey, 1968).

Not only the spatial spread of relations, but also a change in types of relations complicates the relation between space and community. The increasing individualisation of social networks decreases the overlap between networks. Not only the spatial form, but also the social content fragments. Multiple ties of different instrumental and sociable relations used to connect a few, but very close individuals. Different specialised networks linking more individuals replace this, further fragmenting the relation between space and community. The collective use of space is privatised into an individualised use of space. Individual choice, rather than collective conventions and spatial proximity determine social networks (Blokland, 2003). Despite the growing
importance of instrumental types of relations, individuals still value and need the sociability of attachments and bonds. ‘We do not determine individually what is good, reasonable or proper. Nor have we stopped identifying with others.’ (Blokland, 2003: 153).

Space can have an important role in the identification process. It helps to categorise individuals with whom one identifies. Even without interaction, reference groups linked to spatial elements like neighbourhood can still generate a sense of belonging. This affinity makes communities that are more changeable. They differ from the affection in tightly knit communities and are more instrumental and fluid (Bauman, 2001). Especially conflicts can temporarily strengthen communities.

Sociable types of relations are usually mobilised when interdependencies – one of the instrumental types of relations – cause conflicts. These can be abstract interdependencies affecting a locality as a whole, like economic or territorial municipal restructuring (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 30; Savage et al., 2003: 56). Smaller scale local issues and concrete interdependencies between neighbours also generate local conflicts. Despite the decline in the localised nature of social relations, neighbours are still in many ways interdependent. Living together in space makes neighbours interdependent for their quality of life (Blokland, 2003: 78–9). Proximity, propinquity (Amin and Thrift, 2002), or throwntogetherness (Massey, 2005), are at the basis of many conflicts.

The place of residence is an important and very visible aspect of individualised lifestyles (Blokland, 2003: 157). Individuals sharing the same lifestyle also frequently cluster in space while lifestyle enclaves facilitate through their critical mass the expression of sub-cultures (Savage et al., 2003: 119–20). Places are defined not as historical residues of the local, or simply as sites where one happens to live, but as sites chosen by particular social groups wishing to announce their identities (Savage et al., 2005: 207).

Space helps identification: sharing the same site of interaction promotes familiarity. ‘It promotes bonding through potential relations to be activated during crises’ (Blokland, 2003: 123). Even without knowing each other, the shared memories of changed places create a collective memory. This not only gives a sense of community for those sharing these memories. It also excludes newcomers who are strangers to the local history. Newcomers not only threaten the local norms of behaviour (Elias and Scotson, 1965), but also threaten the collective memory (Blokland, 2003: 198–99). ‘Fear that one has to surrender power to define a situation seemed a particularly important source of conflict’ (Blokland, 2003a: 10).

The locally indifferent

One consequence of the individualization of networks and bonds is particularly relevant for the use of established – outsider theory in explaining developments on a local power balance. Most individuals do not belong to tightly
knit communities, but form individualised networks. This is most clearly the case for their affective relations. Despite this privatisation of community, individuals still feel related to, but do not necessarily have relations with, similar individuals (Blokland, 2003: 86).

Individuals can become largely detached from the local level. They become locally indifferent. In established – outsider figurations, these locally indifferent form a new category. The locally indifferent see their local area as a place of residence and possibly recreation, but have most of their social relations outside the local area. This makes them less vulnerable to local power sources.

However, despite the indifference of these individuals to most local issues, they are still, by definition of them living there, part of the local figuration. Often these individuals have networks outside of the community that can be of great influence on the local power balance if used. Their power sources can be activated if they are mobilised into the conflict, for example when their personal position is threatened.

But even if they remain passive, they represent a potential power source that can be ‘claimed’ by the active groups in the conflict. Claiming their support might make the ‘core groups’ of established and outsiders seem stronger. Therefore the groups of established and outsiders have an interest in mobilizing these indifferent individuals into a local conflict.

Scalar strategies

How does this work in practice? People can only be identified as member of a group of either established or outsiders in a conflict situation. Groups are formed, coalitions are made and power is used. The analysis of local conflicts shows how groups try to keep or gain power in a figuration.

The territorially bounded local scale is the starting point. ‘Authors such as Brenner and Swyngedouw may talk about scales being fluid and relational but (. . .) the power to make a decision (. . .) rests with a particular jurisdiction which remains territorially bounded’ (Cidell, 2006: 200). The scalar articulation of the conflict can be purely local, or it can involve relations to higher spatial scales. These can be higher administrative levels, or non-territorial individualised social networks. We identify two strategies ‘within scale’ and three strategies ‘jumping scale’ that groups can use in local conflicts.

If one of the groups can ‘win’ the conflict just by employing their local power sources, they will employ strategies ‘within scale’. They can try to expand their own group and/or try to exclude the other group from their power sources. The first strategy we call expanding within scale. Within the boundaries of the figuration, groups can strive for a strong position based on their absolute and relative group size. They can do so by trying to claim and/or mobilize the indifferent. If the conflict becomes a threat to their personal interests like property or well-being, people lose their indifference. By claiming to defend their interests, groups can then try to include the formerly
indifferent. The second strategy is excluding within scale. In order to gain power in a conflict, people form groups with others who share similar interests. Groups will try to limit access of others to arenas where power is located.

Groups can also try to ‘win’ the conflict by a strategy of ‘jumping scale’: upscaling or downscaling. Cox (1998) calls this process ‘constructing spaces of engagement’, and provides five case studies which show that ‘to accomplish their goals agents, either as individuals or through organisations, have to construct a network of links with other centers of social power’ (p. 15). Actors form temporary coalitions to achieve a common goal, but within this process different actors can act at different spatial scales. We identify three strategies of ‘jumping scale’. By upscaling the figuration groups use their links with powerful groups or individuals at higher spatial scales to advance their position locally. In many cases, a local figuration is connected to, or even derived from, a similar figuration on a higher spatial scale. If a group has a stronger position at higher spatial scales, it can try to use this position to increase their local power, and thus win the conflict at the local scale. Upscaling the conflict is a related strategy that is commonly used by a locally weak group. They try to refer the conflict to a higher spatial scale, where they have a stronger position on the power balance. In this way, the relevance of the local power sources of the other group diminishes. Downscaling the conflict weakens the other group’s position by restricting the conflict to a smaller area. A group might try to ‘blur’ the general picture of a conflict by focusing on small parts of the conflict one at a time.

These scalar strategies can be separated conceptually, but are not used in isolation during local conflicts. The following discussion of a number of conflicts in a village in the Netherlands illustrates this.

Shifting power balance between established and outsiders and scale strategies in Amerongen

Amerongen is a village located in the centre of the Netherlands about 30 kilometres southeast of Utrecht. It was founded in the 8th century and currently has approximately 5,000 inhabitants. The masters of the castle of Amerongen actively influenced political and social life until the 1960s. Since then the rural village has been transformed into a largely suburban village, which is economically heavily dependent on the neighbouring towns of Veenendaal and Utrecht (and the wider Randstad region).

The village can be divided in two distinct areas (see figure 1). One half is called the ‘old village’. It consists of many historical buildings, a castle and beautiful old houses. This old part of the village was renovated from the 1970s on, and since then house prices have gone up significantly and it has become a popular place of residence. The other half is called ‘New Amerongen’. It consists of neighbourhoods built in the 1960s and 70s and is located north of the ‘old village’.
The local figuration consists of two groups. The inhabitants born and raised in Amerongen form the group of ‘real Amerongers’. They are oriented inwardly towards their own group. Until the 1950s Amerongen was a small rural village where many people earned a living growing tobacco. Although the rural background of the real Amerongers is often mentioned, the traditional domination of village life by the castle is said to have had a stronger influence on their ‘social characteristics’. The other group is the so-called ‘import’. This is a diverse group with a low level of internal cohesion, formed by those who are not born in Amerongen. The ‘real Amerongers’ traditionally controlled most power sources. They had, and still partially have, a strong position in local politics and local organisations. They (try to) deny the ‘import’ membership from their group as well as from power positions in local politics and local organisations. They do so by local means.

This excluding within scale strategy of the real Amerongers was initially very successful, but the import started to question the status quo as their numbers grew. One of their first attempts to do so took place in 1994, when some members of the import group published a report on the favouritism among the political elite of the real Amerongers. This report was made public through the local newspaper, in which a public discussion about Amerongen’s political structure was held consequently. The writers of the report were clearly newcomers who ‘elected to belong’ (Savage et al., 2005) in Amerongen. They were concerned about their own interests in what they regarded as ‘their’ new village.

By publishing this report, the writers tried to expand within scale and mobilise other members of the, until then, quite indifferent import. The real Amerongers successfully countered this strategy. They augmented their traditional strategy of excluding within scale with the strategy of downscaling the conflict. They dismissed and stigmatised the report as the action of just a few individuals who were personally disadvantaged by decisions of the municipality. The authors of the report then changed strategy and successfully upscaled the conflict by addressing the provincial administration who supervises
municipalities and national media which subsequently reported widely on the ‘feudal political ways of Amerongen’. The affair had a huge impact in Amerongen and diminished the ways real Amerongers could use their positions in local politics to influence proceedings in the village.

The clash about the report was the first time the conflict between real Amerongers and import was played out in the open. It was a clear sign that the position of the import on the power balance had improved significantly. The shifting of the power balance has been an ongoing process since the end of the 1970s. In that time import started to buy and renovate many of the historical houses in the old village, until most of the real Amerongers had disappeared from this part of the village. Many real Amerongers resented, and still resent, this. Their spatial dispersion further loosens the social relations within their traditional community. However, their collective memory of their lost village is now an important element in their identification with the old village as the central part of their community. Still, their use of space in their collective memory cannot compensate for their power loss in the space of the municipality: ‘When I was young, people in the old village sat in front of their houses every evening and everyone knew each other. But this is over now, I know nobody there anymore, the people are strangers to me. The managing director of the Scottish insurance bank now lives in the farm where I used to work’.

The historically strong power base of the real Amerongers is quickly eroding. The power loss of the real Amerongers is partly caused by the fact that the import now exceeds the real Amerongers in numbers within the municipality. An at least equally important reason however is the fact that the majority of the import has higher income and education levels than the real Amerongers, giving them better access to power sources outside the municipality. This enables them to upscale the conflict. They used this possibility in a recent conflict about whether the municipality of Amerongen should merge with adjacent municipalities and thus lose its political autonomy.

The discussion about political autonomy was not new. Two times before, in 1985 and 1997, the provincial authority had proposed a merging of Amerongen with other municipalities. In these instances however the (political) power base of the established real Amerongers was still strong and the local council voted against the proposal both times. The provincial government subsequently decided to shelve the proposal. With import gaining influence, the council was split over the most recent proposal. The local council had thirteen members divided over five different parties. Two Christian parties, with six council members in total, represent the real Amerongers. The other three parties with seven council members mainly consist of import.

At the start the conflict remained limited to the political arena, with the parties representing the real Amerongers opposing the incorporation of Amerongen into a larger municipality and the parties representing the import in favour. The majority of the population, whether real Ameronger or import, was not very interested in the matter. Most people did not support the idea of
merging with other municipalities, but this did not result in people or organisations actively protesting.

In 2002 the national government decided that municipalities can only merge if there is sufficient support by the local population. But in the legislation it remained unclear how this support should be measured. Nonetheless, the national government’s decision did place local support for the reshaping process on the political agenda, turning the locally indifferent into a potential power source. Public discussion in Amerongen focused on whether or not the population of Amerongen was in favour of merging with other municipalities.

Both parties representing the real Amerongers actively tried to claim the mainly indifferent population, stating several times that the population of Amerongen as a whole was against reshaping. Their strategy was to expand within scale by mobilising indifferent individuals to increase their local power base. They also tried to demobilise and stigmatise the supporters of the opponents. One council member claimed that when import would vote in favour, this would be treason to the group of real Amerongers: ‘This is very difficult for the people of Amerongen. To agree with this proposal is similar to betraying a large part of the population. Those people living here for only a short time who are trying to sell out the village should be deeply ashamed’.

The strategy by the real Amerongers of expanding within scale by claiming the indifferent was not successful. The import could relatively easy counter this strategy. Their counter strategy of upscaling the conflict was more effective. The decisive actor on the intermediate scale, the provincial authority, was strongly in favour of rescaling to increase the organisational power of the involved municipalities. The import politicians managed to ‘link up’ with this provincial authority, thereby upscaling the conflict. The strength of this relation across scales was based on its reciprocity. The import and the province not only strived for the same outcome of the conflict, but also depended on each other for this outcome. Both the import politicians and the provincial authority stated that the local council in itself was a representation of the population. Therefore, support for rescaling in the council alone would be enough. The expanding within scale strategy of the real Amerongers was rendered useless as a result.

The real Amerongers lacked the possibility to find allies on higher spatial scales once the conflict was scaled up. Political parties were hopelessly divided in all five municipalities involved. The Christian parties had council members in the councils of the other municipalities, but many of those were actually in favour of reshaping. They could not therefore join forces to make a stronger case against the provincial authorities.

On 27 October 2003, the council of Amerongen voted on the issue of merging with four other municipalities. The seven members of the ‘import’ parties voted in favour and the six representatives of the ‘real Ameronger’ parties against. The provincial authorities welcomed the narrow majority in the council of Amerongen. For them, it opened up possibilities to employ a strategy of upscaling the figuration. As Amerongen voted in favour, there was only one municipality left that was against merging. The provincial authority
could now state that since four out of five municipalities were in favour, there was a clear majority for merging in the area as a whole. They consequently reasoned that local support in each single municipality was no longer needed. From then on, the merger issue was consequently referred to in its regional context of the five municipalities together. The alliance between the import and the provincial authority thus proved instrumental in transforming the problem of support at the local level to support at the regional level of the municipalities that were to be merged. Amerongen officially became part of a larger municipality consisting of five former municipalities on the 1st of January 2006.

**Concluding remarks**

The example of the shifting power balance in Amerongen shows the explanatory value of the concept of scalar strategies in local conflicts. These strategies were developed by combining the sociological established – outsider theory by Elias and Scotson with the geographical concepts of scale, community and space. The scalar strategies we identified can be used simultaneously in practice, but separating them analytically sheds light on the how and why of the course of a conflict.

Within the local situation, we identified a new category of people: the locally indifferent. They are residents, newcomers or locals, whose networks are individualised and not focused on their place of residence. These individuals did not ‘elect to belong’ (Savage et al., 2005) in their local area, but they are still relevant in a local conflict situation as a potential power source. Established and outsiders can try to gain this power source by claiming or mobilising the locally indifferent.

Apart from this strategy ‘within scale’, upscaling or downscaling strategies can be a highly effective way to ‘win’ local conflicts. Cidell concluded in a very different context: ‘Unless individuals are able to jump scale, they are almost certainly doomed to lose’ (Cidell, 2006: 200). For established and outsider groups, the effectiveness of ‘jumping scale’ depends on the specific local figuration and the links and interdependencies of local actors with powerful groups at higher spatial scales. Especially when interests across scales coincide, like between the province and the import in Amerongen, local power positions – in this case of the ‘real Amerongers’ – can quickly evaporate.

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**Notes**

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, in Stockholm, Sweden, 5–9 July 2005. We wish to thank Mike Savage and four anonymous referees for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.
The publication history of ‘The Established and the Outsiders’ is somewhat complicated, and so reviews are also spread out over time and references differ. Summarized:
1976: publication of Dutch translation: ‘De Gevestigden en de Buitenstaanders – een studie van de spanningen en machtsverhoudingen tussen twee buurten.’ Translated by Cas Wouters and Bram van Stolk (Dutch sociologists). A theoretical essay on Established and Outsiders was added, written in English by Elias and translated by Wouters and Van Stolk (original English version was not published).
1990: publication of German translation: including theoretical essay and essay written by Elias in 1990 on ‘Wider facets of Established- Outsider figurations: the Maycomb model’ (both translated into German)
1994: reprint of original work in English, now including for the first time the original English version of theoretical essay (but not the Maycomb essay). London: Sage publications
2002: reprint in German of 1990 edition in series ‘Norbert Elias – Gesammelte Schriften’ (collected works)
In this paper we refer to the original work as Elias and Scotson 1965, and to the theoretical essay as Elias 1994 [1976].

Winston Parva is a pseudonym for the area of South Wigston, a suburb of Leicester. The empirical part of ‘the Established and the Outsiders’ is supposedly rooted in the Master’s thesis by John Scotson, one of Elias’ students. However, we were unable to verify this as a copy of his thesis, supposedly called The comparative study of two neighbourhood communities in South Wigston, could not be found.

The first edition of the book (published in 1965) attracted short reviews in a number of journals, such as New Statesman, Times Literary Supplement, Social Research and American Sociological Review. Generally the reviewers were mildly positive about the work, although they criticized Elias’ methodology, which did not fit well in a time when the quantitative approach was the accepted way of doing research in the social sciences. Stacey’s review was a bit more thorough and critical than the other early reviews.

The word ‘scale’ appears a couple of times in the theoretical essay to ‘The Established and the Outsiders’ (Elias, 1994 [1976]), but the concept is not developed. Elias simply refers to figurations on ‘small’ scales and on ‘larger’ scales. He stresses both should be studied, but does not use scale as a relational concept. Elias (1970) discussion of different power balances at different levels goes somewhat in that direction. However, these game models focus on the power sources of individuals and the levels discussed are social and not spatial.

This is based on a wider PhD research project. Amerongen is intensively studied since the end of 2003, by visiting important events and meetings, reading the local newspapers and talking to residents. Between January 2005 and March 2006, 28 ‘official’ interviews were held with key informants. These interviews were taped and transcribed. This case study is based on a preliminary analysis of our data.

The map was drawn by the authors. The part to the left of ‘New Amerongen’ that is labelled ‘ind’ represents an industrial area.

The term ‘real Amerongers’ is not attached to this group by the researchers. It is a term used by the real Amerongers themselves as well as by the other inhabitants of Amerongen. The same applies to the term ‘import’ in this paper.

This was not an official report, but a collection of grievances by members of the import group, which became known during the conflict as ‘the black book’ (het zwartboek).

Translated excerpt from an interview with a 78 year old male real Ameronger.
The municipality Amerongen was slightly bigger than the village of Amerongen. Two other small villages, Elst and Overberg, were also part of this municipality, bringing the total population of the municipality to 7,000 instead of 5,000. One of these three parties, consisting of one council member only, also has a Christian signature. The council member himself is clearly part of the ‘import’ group though. He mainly votes in line with the other parties (liberals and labour party) who represent the ‘import’.

Statement made by a council member for Christian party, real Ameronger, during a public meeting.

Over the last decades Dutch municipalities have been given an increasing number of tasks as a result of decentralisation at the national and provincial level. Small municipalities are often seen as lacking the organisational capacity to deal with this increased number of tasks. In Amerongen this was further strengthened by the 1994 conflict over the black book described earlier in this paper.

Besides Amerongen the municipalities Doorn, Driebergen, Maarn and Leersum were involved. Driebergen got involved in the process at a later stage. The Christian party that occupied four seats in the council of Amerongen voted in favour of reshaping in three of the municipalities and voted against in two. The smaller Christian party occupying two seats was in favour in one municipality and against in three. They were not represented in Maarn.

Even though the decision to merge was already taken in 2003, it took more than two years before the actual merging process took place. Discussions about the way in which the municipalities had to merge took place after October 2003. In these discussions the same ‘divide’ between the import and real Ameronger parties was evident.

References


