



Why Cities Need a Public Life: A Revisionist Return to the Essence of the 'Casual' in Thinking about Social Capital



This talk explores how people get things done in urban settings. It returns to the old debate on social capital. Does it still make sense to think of social capital as embedded in social networks in an era of increased mobility, digitalization and the expansion of social networks across space? Does social capital theory as the central approach to how people access resources to get by and get ahead pay sufficient attention to the casual fluid encounters which *also* happen in urban life, especially in public space? Drawing on some core ideas in her book *Community as Urban Practice*, Talja Blokland explores these questions, arguing that urban public life – settings where people rub shoulders on their way to do something else – remains essential. Beyond the closure of preference-based algorithms and life-style bubbles, such 'absent ties' can provide access to resources, especially when they provide what she calls 'public familiarity'.

Professor Talja Blokland (PhD Amsterdam) is professor of urban sociology at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. She is interested in urban inequality and thinks a lot about how unintended consequences of intended behavior produce exclusionary social mechanisms, drawing on empirical work conducted in New Haven, USA, Rotterdam, Netherlands, and Berlin, Germany. She is author of *Urban Bonds* (2003, Polity), *Urban Theory in the 21st Century* (2014, with Alan Harding), and *Community as Urban Practice* (2017, Polity). Her work on community, belonging and place, everyday racism in urban neighborhoods, middle class activism and gentrification and the role of fluid encounters for getting things done in urban life has appeared in journals such as *Sociology*, *The Sociological Review*, *IJURR*, *Urban Geography* and *Urban Studies*.

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Friday, January 27, 2023

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