

The changing relationship between civic engagement and paid work of women in a rural area in the Netherlands, 1993–2007¹

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Abstract

In “Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital,” Robert Putnam (1995) discusses the decline in civic engagement in the United States. According to Putnam, the increasing labor market participation of women is one of the main factors that explain the decline in civic engagement. This factor refers to the time availability hypothesis in social capital theory. A contrasting theory, the integration hypothesis, presupposes a positive correlation between participation in paid work and civic engagement. This article analyzes the changes in civic engagement and paid work of women in a rural area in the northern part of the Netherlands. Analysis is based on a survey and semi-structured interviews with women aged 18–50 in 1993 and in 2007. Over this period, the labor market participation of women increased substantially, while civic engagement decreased. Part of the decline in civic activity could be explained by the increasing participation in paid work, which is in accordance with Putnam’s time availability hypothesis. However, in 2007, civic engagement appeared to go hand in hand with participation in paid work, which is in line with the integration hypothesis.

Introduction

In his article, “Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital,” Putnam (1995) discusses the decline in civic engagement and social connectedness in American society. According to Putnam, the increasing labor market participation of women is one of the main factors that explain the decline in civic engagement. This relationship between

civic engagement and paid work involvement is in line with the time availability hypothesis (Mutchler, Burr and Caro, 2003): women spend less time on civic activities because they spend more time on paid work. Wilson (2000) formulates a contrasting theory, namely the integration hypothesis, that supposes a positive correlation between civic engagement and participation in the labor market because employed women have the skills and relations that form a prerequisite for civic engagement.

Both hypotheses are formulated in the context of American society. This article analyzes the changing relationship between participation in paid work and civic engagement of women in the context of Dutch society, a society characterized by a high level of civic engagement compared with other Western societies (Andersen, Curtis and Grabb, 2006). This applies to the rural parts of the country in particular (Steenbekkers, Simon and Veldheer, 2006). The labor market participation of rural women in the Netherlands has increased substantially in the last few decades (Gesthuizen, 2006). This raises the question of what the consequences are for their engagement in civic activities.

Civic engagement in social capital theory

Social capital is generally seen as the social interactions between people characterized by trust and norms of cooperation and reciprocity that bring individual and collective benefit (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lee et al., 2005; Nardone, Sisto and Lopolito, 2010; Putnam, 1993, 1995, 2000; Svendsen and Sørensen, 2007; Woodhouse, 2006). Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes the individual benefit, viewing social capital as a personal power resource available to people in a group in competition with each other. Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) sees social capital as belonging to a community for the benefit of people in that community. Benefit must be understood in terms of more effective government, greater economic prosperity and a higher quality of life in the community. In Putnam's work, civic engagement is at the center of the social capital concept. Social capital is "stored" in and mediated by a collection of civic associations—a variety of social, cultural, political and leisure clubs and organizations—in which a multitude of community members are active. Communities with a large number of these organizations and many active members are seen as communities with a high level of social capital "making democracy work," with greater economic prosperity as the ultimate outcome. A decline in social capital will therefore result in less democracy and less prosperity.

Other authors have criticized Putnam for what they see as circular reasoning, in which "more social capital results in more social capital" (Sutherland and Burton, 2011). Besser (2009) and Nardone et al. (2010) developed a model in which social capital—defined as social relations based on trust and shared norms of reciprocity—

results in high levels of civil engagement, which leads to the ultimate outcome of, for example, more effective government, greater prosperity and higher quality of life. Another point of critique of Putnam's work refers to the neglect of the "dark side" of social capital, i.e., processes of exclusion of marginalized groups (Shortall, 2004, 2008; Sutherland and Burton, 2011; Tonts, 2005). These authors identify women, ethnic minorities and newcomers in a local community as potentially excluded groups.

Civic engagement and participation in paid work: Two contrasting hypotheses

Putnam (1995) used four factors to explain the decline in civic engagement and social connectedness in American society: increasing labor market participation of women, decreasing social rootedness in local communities resulting from an increase in residential mobility, an increase in the number of single-person households and the privatization of leisure—"bowling alone" instead of being active members of a bowling club. Andersen et al. (2006) focused on the first factor in a comparative four-country analysis of trends in civic engagement. They concluded that the decline in civic engagement in relation to an increase in the labor market participation of women clearly occurs in the United States, but not in the other cases studied (Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). The findings of Putnam and Andersen et al. are in line with the time availability hypothesis (Mutchler et al., 2003) or role overload hypothesis (Wilson, 2000). According to this hypothesis, people can spend their time only once. Therefore, when women spend more time in paid work, they have less time left over for civic activity. According to this hypothesis, non-employed women or women with a small part-time job are the most active in civic associations and volunteer work.

However, a contrasting theory, namely the integration hypothesis (Wilson, 2000) or complementarity hypothesis (Mutchler et al., 2003), presupposes that civic involvement correlates positively with participation in paid work because the latter provides people with the civic skills and social relations that are vital for access to and successful performance in civic associations (Rotolo, 2000; Rotolo and Wilson, 2003; Wilson, 2000). In accordance with this hypothesis, employed women are expected to participate more in civic activities than non-employed women.

Civic engagement and gender

Many studies refer to women as important pillars of civic associations (Mutchler et al., 2003; Putnam 1995, 2000; Rotolo and Wilson, 2003), especially in the middle

stage of the life course (Rotolo, 2000). Traditionally, women are seen as “community housekeepers” (Rotolo and Wilson, 2003), particularly in rural communities (Clope and Little, 1997; Henderson and Hoggart, 2003; Hughes, 1997; Little, 1986, 1987, 2002; Little and Austin, 1996). Caring for the community is seen as an extension of the domestic role of women (Bryant and Pini, 2009; Wilson, 2000). Little (1986, 1987, 2002) argues that the responsibility of women for the rural community forms an important aspect of the rural idyll:

The domestic idyll is central to the dominant rural ideology and to the imagery which surrounds the village as a social and physical entity. The “sense of community” which goes hand in hand with the beauty and peacefulness of the English landscape as a major attribute of rural life is itself derived from an accepted order within the village, an order which stems from the family and elevates the domestic sphere. Such an order places women very firmly within the home as a linchpin of the static community (Little, 1986:2–3).

In this order, women perform specific tasks in civic organizations. They are active in organizations that are oriented towards domestic issues (Rotolo, 2000), perform invisible, manual tasks and are underrepresented in decision-making (Lee et al., 2005; Little, 1987; O’Toole and Macgarvey, 2003; Wilson, 2000). However, other authors criticize the strict division between the domestic private sphere and the public sphere, arguing that women’s community involvement demonstrates the blurred boundaries between the two spheres (Fincher and Panelli, 2001; Martin, 2002; Midgley, 2006; Staeheli, 1996).

According to Little (1986, 1987, 2002), the dominant rural ideology prevents women from engaging in the labor market and encourages them to perform the domestic role of mothers, housewives and community carers. Furthermore, Little (1986, 1987) and Midgley (2006) demonstrate that the lack of child care and health care facilities and welfare institutions in remote rural areas forces women to care for children, the elderly and disabled community members, leaving little time for participation in paid work.

The central question in this article is therefore: What are the consequences of the increased labor market participation for civic engagement among rural women in northern Netherlands? Are they less active because they have less time available, or are they more active because they have acquired skills and social relations?

The research area: The municipality of Littenseradiel

In this article we explore the changing relationship between civic engagement and paid work of women in 15 villages in the municipality of Littenseradiel, a rural area in the northern part of the Netherlands, between 1993 and 2007. The last few decades

have witnessed a huge increase in the labor market participation of women in all rural areas in the Netherlands. In 1992, 38% of Dutch women aged 15–64 in rural areas in the Netherlands had a paid job; by 2003, this had increased to 53% (Gesthuizen, 2006). Within the highly urbanized country of the Netherlands, the municipality of Littenseradiel is one of the best examples of Dutch rurality. Littenseradiel can be regarded as the cultural heart of the Frisian countryside, with a landscape of meadows and small villages (Figure 1).

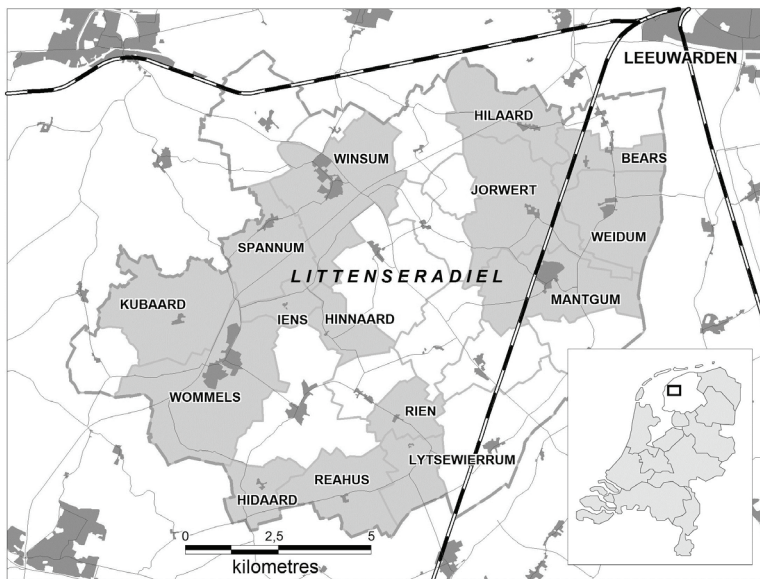


Figure 1. The research area: 15 villages in the municipality of Littenseradiel.

Dairy farming is the dominant land use type, although, at the moment, less than 20% of the local active population is employed in agriculture. The culture of farming has almost disappeared from the Frisian countryside (Mak, 2000), and farmers as a social group have had to contend with a considerable loss of power (Verrrips, 1978). Within the municipality of Littenseradiel, a geographical differentiation exists between small villages (1,000–2,200 inhabitants) and very small villages (fewer than 1,000 inhabitants), as well as villages which are near to or far from the main urban center of Leeuwarden (the provincial capital). Even the central village of Wommels has no more than 2,200 inhabitants. Many of the very small villages have no facilities apart from a village hall and a church. The bigger villages usually have one or more primary schools, several shops, general practitioners and sports and other leisure facilities. Even the smallest

communities have several leisure clubs and interest groups and a population that is highly active in volunteer work, caring for members of the local community and other forms of civic activities (Provincie Fryslân, 2006, 2011; Steenbekkers et al., 2006; Thissen and Droogleever Fortuijn, 2012). The Frisian language, the official second language of the Netherlands, is relatively important in all villages and is used by many of the inhabitants at home, at work and in social contacts. Related to English, Frisian is used as a second language at local village schools. However, all village inhabitants are also able to speak Dutch. The Frisian language and living in small villages are seen as important aspects of the Frisian identity, together with specific Frisian sports, like *kaatsen* (a ball game), long distance skating and *fierljeppen* (long jump).

Data and methods

The data originated from field work performed with undergraduate students in human geography at the University of Amsterdam. In 1993, we conducted a study in the municipality of Littenseradiel based on the following research question: How is the social participation of women in different stages of the life course influenced by personal factors such as social class, age and place of origin, and opportunities and restrictions of the local residential context in which they live (Droogleever Fortuijn, Ostendorf and Thissen, 1994)? During one week of field work, students performed a survey and conducted qualitative interviews. The students were trained in several types of interviewing techniques as part of a research methods course. A random sample of 458 women aged 16 and older was taken from the municipal register, and these women were then asked to participate in the survey. The response rate was 66.2% (303 respondents). Eighteen respondents, selected in order to represent a maximum variety in terms of stages of the life course and residential contexts, were also interviewed in a more qualitative manner. The survey included questions on participation in education, housework, paid work and civic activities; personal characteristics; and satisfaction with various aspects of the local residential environment. In the qualitative interviews, respondents were invited to tell their personal story of social participation and to reflect on issues of participation in the context of the place in which they live.

In 2007, we returned to Littenseradiel with a new group of students to carry out a research project based on the question: What is the use and meaning of the village hall, and how is the social participation of inhabitants influenced by the presence and openness of a village hall, personal factors and the local residential context? A random sample of 1,106 inhabitants (men and women) of the villages in Littenseradiel were invited to take part. The students visited 459 addresses to carry out face-to-face structured interviews, while 647 inhabitants were asked to fill out a questionnaire. A total of 604 either agreed to be interviewed (307 men and women = 66.9%) or completed the questionnaire (297

= 45.9%). In the context of social research in the Netherlands, these are high response rates. Of these 604 respondents, 319 were women (166 and 153, respectively). The survey included questions on participation in, and satisfaction with, the village hall, as well as engagement in paid work and civic activities, personal characteristics and satisfaction with the local residential environment. Twenty one of the respondents, in different stages of the life course and living in the same selection of villages as in 1993, were invited, during qualitative interviews, to tell their story on participation in the local community and to reflect on the social capital of the local community and the role of the village hall in it.

In the analysis of the data, we used mixed methods strategy with numerical descriptives of the relation between participation in paid work and civic engagement and an interpretative analysis of this relationship in the qualitative interviews. Following Monk and Katz (1993), we subdivided the group of women in both samples into three subgroups at different stages in the life course: a group in the learning stage, a group in the working stage and a group in the stage of late adulthood. In order to analyze the relationship between civic engagement and paid work participation, we focused the analysis of the survey data on women in the middle stage of the life course, i.e., women ≤ 50 years who were no longer living with their parents: 155 women in the 1993 sample and 159 women in the 2007 sample.

In accordance with Putnam (1993) and Wilson (2000), civic engagement was broadly defined and measured by active membership and leadership roles in all kinds of civic organizations, as well as being active in volunteer work, defined by Wilson as “any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause” (2000:215). In order to make the data of the 2007 survey comparable with the 1993 survey, we distinguished four types of civic engagement: (1) being active in leisure clubs such as sports clubs, choral societies and theater groups; (2) being active in interest organizations, such as political parties, trade unions, environmentalist groups and local action committees; (3) doing formal volunteer work—for example, driving disabled community members to hospital or church, teaching language courses to refugees, helping out at a home for the elderly—at least three hours a week; and (4) caring for relatives at least four hours a week. With respect to the activities in leisure clubs and interest organizations, we asked about active membership and the performance of leadership functions, such as being the president of a local history association or the treasurer of a music group.

Changes in paid work involvement

In one of the interviews conducted in 1993, a 56-year-old woman stated: “My husband told me: ‘We are married,’ and at the time the children were born, he said: ‘You don’t

work when you have children, I won't have it.' So, I was a real mom for the kids." This was the situation for several women in her generation in 1993, but was not true anymore for younger generations. Participation in paid work by women in the middle stage of the life course in the villages of Littenseradiel increased dramatically, from 55% in 1993 to 87% in 2007. Moreover, the percentage of women with a small part-time job decreased, while the percentage of women with a part-time job of 13-30 weekly hours and of women with an (almost) full-time job increased (Figure 2).

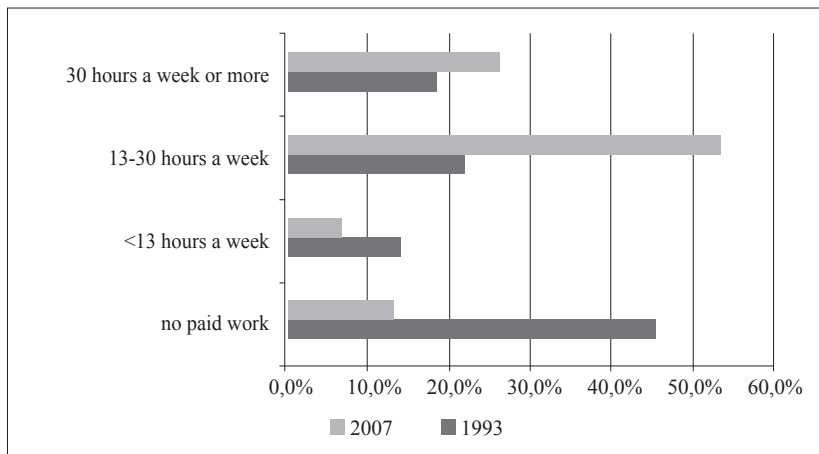


Figure 2. Hours of paid work per week of women in the working stage of the life course, Littenseradiel, 1993 and 2007 (percentages). Source: Droogleever Fortuijn et al. (1994); Thissen and Droogleever Fortuijn (2012).

The rise in labor market participation is linked to an increase in the educational level of women in the middle stage of the life course (Table 1). In 1993, a 27-year-old woman discussed the change in attitudes with respect to education as follows:

I was a school dropout. I was anti-learning. I didn't like it at all. My parents were old-fashioned people. They told me, "Later you will get married and you will only have to know how to cook and sew and that sort of thing." That made me leave school.... Everything is different now. I think that the current generation of parents thinks that school is very important for their children because job requirements have become more demanding. These days you can't even get a job in a supermarket if you have only a secondary education. You really need education and diplomas to get any job at all.

Table 1. Social characteristics of women in the working stage of the life course, Littenseradiel, 1993 and 2007

Social Characteristics	Categories	1993	2007
Educational level	primary	32.9%	13.1%
	secondary	49.0%	39.4%
	post-secondary	18.1%	47.5%
Car availability	always available	54.0%	86.7%
	not always available	42.1%	12.0%
	no car in the household	3.9%	1.3%
Sector of employment	agriculture	6.0%	5.0%
	non-agriculture	94.0%	95.0%
Place of employment	in the village	35.0%	25.0%
	outside the village	65.0%	75.0%

Source: Droogleever Fortuijn et al. (1994); Thissen and Droogleever Fortuijn (2012).

Although dairy farming is the dominant feature of the landscape in Littenseradiel, very few women worked in agriculture in 1993 or in 2007 (Table 1). The majority were employed in the tertiary and quaternary sectors. An increasing share of the women worked outside the village.

Women in the working stage of the life course became more mobile over this period. While almost half had no car available to them in 1993, almost all had a car available in 2007 (Table 1). In a region in which public transportation is scarce, car availability is a highly important precondition for social participation (Harms, 2006), as a woman with two children explained in 1993:

For example, if I were to take a job in a shop and would have to work until 6 PM, I would have a problem getting home because there is no bus back to my village at that time of day. That means somebody would have to drive me or I would have to go by bicycle. If I were to take a job, I would be dependent on public transportation. We cannot afford a second car. If both of us had a job and we had no children and good salaries, then we would be able to afford a second car. Then there would be no problem at all. However, as soon as you have to be home in time for the children and you don't have a second car, you are dependent on the bus, and that would be a problem as far as I'm concerned.

Changes in civic engagement

In general, the civic engagement of women in the working stage of the life course in Littenseradiel decreased between 1993 and 2007. Although active membership in leisure clubs and leadership functions in leisure clubs increased slightly, active membership in interest organizations, leadership functions in interest organizations, volunteer work and caring for relatives decreased substantially (Table 2). This seems to be in line with the time availability hypothesis: as participation in paid work increased, civic engagement declined.

Table 2. Civic engagement of women in the working stage of the life course, Littenseradiel, 1993 and 2007

	1993	2007
Active member of leisure club	53.3%	56.3%
Leadership function in leisure club	16.8%	20.8%
Active member of interest organization	46.1%	34.2%
Leadership function in interest org.	20.0%	10.7%
Volunteer work ≥ 3 hours per week	16.7%	11.5%
Caring for relatives ≥ 4 hours per week	10.1%	5.7%

Source: Droogleever Fortuijn et al. (1994); Thissen and Droogleever Fortuijn (2012).

The women interviewed confirmed the time availability hypothesis. One example is a 38-year-old employed woman with young children in 2007:

I was a chairwoman, but I stopped on the first of April. I had done the job for two or three years, but I thought that was long enough. Another factor was that I'm going to start a course and will probably have less time. That means that someone has to take over.

A 51-year-old employed woman with older children reflected in 2007 on the changes in civic engagement over the life course. She used to be an active volunteer in the village hall, but was not active in leisure clubs or interest organizations. After her husband became very ill, she stopped her volunteer work in the village hall. She explained:

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Because I have no time and I can't be away from home that often because I have to care for my husband.... People do volunteer work when they have free time. And that is in another stage of the life course. If you are a student or have a young family, work and are busy with your career, you will not have any interest in the village hall. Those people who I see are active in this way are usually people who have a lot of free time and people who are a little bit older. Some of the board members, for example, have a job, but most of them have retired early or have more free time for some other reason.

Table 3 provides more in-depth insight into the changing relationship between paid work and civic engagement and demonstrates that this relationship is more complex than the time availability hypothesis suggests. As seen in Table 2, the time availability hypothesis cannot explain changes in active membership in leisure clubs or leadership functions in leisure clubs. Participation in these activity types increased slightly between 1993 and 2007 for employed and non-employed women alike, and the participation levels of both groups of women are more or less the same in both years. In contrast, the changes in volunteer work are in line with the time availability hypothesis. In both years, non-employed women spent more time doing volunteer work than employed women. The decrease in volunteer work between 1993 and 2007 can be attributed to the larger share of employed women over that period.

Table 3. Civic engagement and paid work of women in the working stage of the life course, Littenseradiel, 1993 and 2007

	Employed women		Non-employed women	
	1993	2007	1993	2007
Active member of leisure club	52.4%	56.2%	55.7%	57.1%
Leadership function in leisure club	16.7%	20.3%	17.1%	23.8%
Active member of interest organization	41.0%	35.0%	52.9%	28.6%
Leadership function in interest organization	14.3%	12.3%	27.1%	0.0%
Volunteer work ≥ 3 hours per week	12.3%	10.4%	22.1%	19.0%
Caring for relatives ≥ 4 hours per week	4.9%	6.5%	16.7%	0.0%

Source: Droogleevers Fortuijn et al. (1994); Thissen and Droogleevers Fortuijn (2012).

Furthermore, the decrease in active membership in interest organizations, leadership functions in interest organizations and caring for relatives cannot be explained by the increasing labor market participation. Non-employed women were predominantly

involved in these types of civic engagement in 1993, while in 2007 the same applied mainly to employed women. Therefore, civic engagement was in line with the time availability hypothesis in 1993. The group of non-employed women at that time (constituting almost half of all active women) had the civic skills and the local social relations that are indispensable for civic engagement *and* they had enough time available to make them the cornerstones of local community life, as exemplified by the story of one of the interviewed women in 1993, a non-employed mother with three children:

We came to live here and I immediately became involved. I've sat on several boards, and still do. I have been a member of the board of the kindergarten, of the Equal Opportunity Commission and of the primary school, and still am, and in between times we've been involved in a public footpath group. We have a very active local community association and I am a member of the ecology group. I also give language courses for immigrant women. I've already done this for six months and now I also do some counselling work. This morning I phoned the general practitioner and I contacted the housing association. I'm always on the go and, in addition, we have a big garden and three children and, all in all, a very busy life.

It is clear that this woman was professionally engaged in volunteer work and that this occupied a similar position in her daily life as a paid job. In other words, in 1993, paid work and civic engagement were parallel activities.

By contrast, in 2007, certain forms of civic engagement could be explained by the integration hypothesis. Many activities in civic organizations became part of the social participation repertoire of employed women. For these activities, participation in paid work went hand in hand with civic engagement, as demonstrated by this 50-year-old woman with teenage children:

Volunteer work? I do a lot. I have at least six collection boxes. That's very important. I'm a volunteer in a house for mentally disabled people. What else? I take elderly people in the home for the elderly on walks. Whenever anyone wants to go for a short walk, they can phone me and I help them into a wheelchair and take them out for a walk. What more? I help with the festivities in my village. I deliver the local newspaper. That's it, more or less. It all takes up quite a lot of time in addition to my job. I do a lot, although I'm trying to cut down a bit now. Because I have my work—two years ago I became self-employed—it's a bit less than what I used to do. Nowadays I have less time.

In 2007, a 27-year-old employed woman with young children described a pattern of civic engagement that reflects the relevance of both hypotheses. Part of her story focused on time availability:

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In the past, I worked as a volunteer at a home for the elderly. I did this for three years. I did volunteer work with a group of older people with dementia for eight hours a week.

Interviewer: Why did you stop?

Because I was pregnant with my oldest daughter. And I had a demanding job. I had to stop because I worked three days a week and then if I had done another day of volunteer work that would have meant I would have had to arrange an extra day of day care for my daughter and that would have been too much.

In her opinion, time availability is not her individual problem, but part of a general pattern:

It's becoming more and more difficult to find volunteers. Quite often there are ads in the village news asking for more volunteers because otherwise it's impossible to organize certain activities.... It's more and more difficult for people to fit volunteer work into their daily lives. People are just very busy, and society expects you and your partner to have paid jobs, even when you don't want them. I know a lot of couples who both have to work for financial reasons. In those cases it's asking a lot for them to give up their evenings as well.

In another part of the interview, the woman indicated the importance of civic skills and social relations that are at the center of the integration hypothesis. Her current paid job is below her educational level: "I work at a child care center out of necessity. Although I enjoy the work, I have higher education qualifications, and I would prefer to have a more high-powered job than I have now." Although she stopped the demanding eight hours of volunteer work a week in a home for the mentally handicapped, she is still a volunteer at a youth club in the church where she organizes meetings: "Each time we meet we discuss a theme relating to all kinds of social issues. Examples are homosexuality, spirituality, other issues, euthanasia, and that kind of thing."

This volunteer work can be seen as an extension of her (higher) education in social pedagogical work, in which she learned the civic skills that she can use in her volunteer work. She reflects on the importance of local social relations as well:

[I know] quite a lot of people. It's especially easy to meet people when you have children. And I work here in the village and that makes a difference too. I do a lot in the village. Another factor that makes a difference is that people see and meet you in the street and it also helps if you are open-minded. I also know a lot of people in the church.

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Members of local clubs and organizations tend to ask people they know for help, rather than unknown outsiders:

People knock on the door for all kinds of things. Some people are from local clubs and ask you to join in with volunteer work. Before they even knock on the door they know whether you have ever done that work before and whether you are interested in the work.

This woman's story reflects elements of the time availability hypothesis, as well as aspects of the integration hypothesis.

Conclusion

In accordance with the findings of Putnam (1995, 2000), Mutchler et al. (2003) and Rotolo and Wilson (2003), time availability appears to be an important explanatory factor regarding the civic engagement of women in the working stage of the life course in the rural municipality of Littenseradiel in 1993. At that time, non-employed women formed an important source of social capital in the local community, while the minority of employed women with paid work lacked the time to participate in civic activities. In the conclusions of our report on the 1993 case (Droogleever Fortuijn et al., 1994), we expected civic engagement to decline in the future, an expectation that followed the time availability hypothesis. Civic engagement indeed declined between 1993 and 2007. However, only part of the decline could be explained by a decreasing time availability of women in the working stage of the life course. The integration hypothesis of Wilson (2000) seems to be more appropriate for an understanding of civic engagement in 2007. In that year, a new divide can be distinguished between a substantial majority of active women who combine paid work with civic engagement and a small minority of non-participating women who are not active in paid work or in civic activities. In 2007, a minority of non-employed women seem to lack the civic skills and social relations that are a precondition for civic engagement. They became marginalized in the local community. This minority demonstrates the "dark side" of social capital and the exclusionary processes of marginalized groups (Shortall, 2004, 2008).

In terms of gender, civic engagement in 1993 was in line with Little's (1986, 1987, 2002) concept of the "domestic idyll" as a central part of the dominant rural ideology. At that time, being active in the local community was seen as an extension of the domestic sphere of the traditional mother and housewife role. Back then, employed women were an exception to the dominant ideology. In 2007, civic engagement of women in the middle stage of the life course demonstrates the "blurring boundaries" (Fincher and Panelli, 2001) between the private and public spheres. Women not only

fulfilled traditional, invisible “female” roles in civic organizations, but also leadership roles in all kinds of interest organizations and performed professionalized volunteer tasks. In accordance with the integration hypothesis, employed women have developed the civic skills and social relations that have turned them into the cornerstones of civic life in the local community.

Note

- 1 We wish to acknowledge the contribution of 76 undergraduate students in human geography in 1993 and 42 in 2007 to the conceptual development and data collection of the two research projects, as well as the contribution of our colleagues, Wim Ostendorf, Henk Schmal and Lucy Bloemberg, to the supervision of the field work. We also thank the province of Fryslân, Doarpswurk (an independent organization for community development in the Frisian countryside) and the municipality of Littenseradiel for supporting the field work and the sampling.

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