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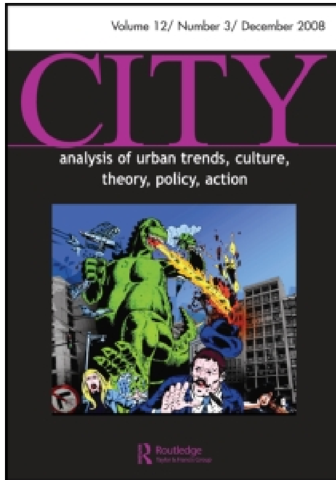

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Social housing in the Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood (above) and gentrification in process (below). Photos: Goezde Tekdal

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An *in memoriam* for the just city of Amsterdam

Justus Uitermark

This paper shows how the just city of Amsterdam came to live, celebrates its achievements and mourns its death. The paper suggests that an equitable distribution of scarce resources and democratic engagement are essential preconditions for the realization of a just city. Social movements of Amsterdam struggled hard to make their city just and they had considerable success. However, in the late 1980s, social movements lost their momentum and, in the late 1990s, neoliberal ideologies increasingly pervaded municipal policies. Whereas urban renewal was previously used to universalize housing access and optimize democratic engagement, it is now used to recommodify the housing stock, to differentiate residents into different consumer categories and to disperse lower income households. Part of the reason that these policies meet so little opposition is that the gains of past social struggles are used to compensate the most direct victims of privatization and demolition. Future generations of Amsterdammers, however, will not enjoy a just city.

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Introduction

The Nieuwmarkt subway station has a collage of monuments of resistance and reminders of oppression. One picture on the wall shows a sign '*Juden Viertel*' and a road block. The Nieuwmarkt neighborhood had been a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and the Nazi occupiers had closed it off and turned it into a repository for Jews that were to be deported to concentration camps. On another picture we see a person blindfolded on a stage. Perhaps it was one of the dock workers who went on strike to protest against the deportations and had to pay with their lives.

The walls also tell another story, namely, that of the resistance against draconic urban renewal that hit the neighborhood two decades after the war. The authorities wanted to raze the entire neighborhood. The old buildings as well as the messy street plan had to be replaced by straight roads, a metro and high-rises that would allow people, traffic and capital to circulate with unprecedented speed. On one of the pictures some of the houses are still standing amidst the rubble. On another picture the riot police are gearing up to sweep protesters out of the streets to make way for the next round of demolition. On one side of the platform, just before the tunnel, there is a small and fractured wooden wall with a slogan on it—'we will continue living *here*' (*wij blijven* hier *wonen*). On the upper platform, in a corner, the wall is made of red brick instead of the usual sterile light grey paint. There are beams and girders sticking out of the wall and, as if to remind us that this is not just a forgotten corner, a replica of a wrecking ball.[1]

It would be grotesque to draw a parallel between the atrocities of the Nazi occupiers

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and the modernization agenda of an elected government—but I do not think that this is what the monument intends. The monument, in fact, seems to lack coherence. The pictures just hang there and I never found any sign to explain what is on display and why it is there.[2] The only printed text is below a giant, kitschy picture frame and says 'Greetings from the Nieuwmarkt' (*groeten van de Nieuwmarkt*). There is a broken mirror in the frame but it is unclear whether this was the intention of the creator or the work of vandals. If this collage of pictures, props and murals has any meaning, it does not lie in the parallels but in the differences between the two eras; differences that, I think, capture the essence of democracy and the essence of the right to the city. During the occupation, the Jewish residents of the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood were exterminated and the resistance activists were executed. Any outcry against injustice or solidarity with the Jewish residents only reinforced the atrocities. During the urban renewal operation, by contrast, the authorities not only allowed residents to voice their discontent but also—ultimately—gave in.

Above ground, one can see where modernism was halted: at the border of the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood, at Waterlooplein, where the four-lane highway ends. Where hotels and banks were planned, there is now social housing (Figure 1). The fact that the government memorialized the resistance against itself signals a belief that defines the difference between the darkest pages of Amsterdam's history and the heydays of democratization: protest against inhumane authorities is not a crime but a duty. This official memorialization of resistance against state-mandated urban renewal projects rather graphically illustrates Amsterdam's importance as a source of inspiration for contemplating what the just city might actually look like. This paper indicates what I understand by the just city, examines how the just city came to life in Amsterdam, and shows how it also came to its end there. Against this background, the paper argues that the movement successes of the recent past (strong tenant rights, a large social housing stock, formalized resident consultation) do not necessarily pose an obstacle to gentrification. In fact, these institutions compensate the most immediate and resourceful victims and thereby help to co-opt or prevent resistance against policies that seek to promote gentrification.

Figure 1 Social housing in the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood. Source: Goezde Tekdal.

The just city and Amsterdam

The achievements of urban social movements in Amsterdam have been extensively documented and praised in the international literature. In the late 1960s, Amsterdam attracted the attention of Lefebvre, who ventured to Amsterdam to explore the city with artists and activists who were experimenting intellectually and practically with new strategies for resisting modernization. Around 10 years later, in 1977, Susan Fainstein arrived in Amsterdam for the first time and discovered in it an equitable alternative to the cities of the USA. In the 1990s, Ed Soja wrote of Amsterdam as a city that fosters a culture of tolerance and civic engagement (Soja, 1992). After several return visits in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Fainstein praised Amsterdam as a city that approached her ideal of a just city, that is, a city that has found the right trade-offs between equity, diversity, growth and sustainability (Fainstein, 2005). In 2008 John Gilderbloom organized a

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conference in Amsterdam on the 'ideal city', praising the conference site as a place where people are 'more tolerant, secure, happier, and healthier compared to citizens in the United States' because of a unique blend of progressive policies (with respect to drugs and prostitution) and a comprehensive welfare state. 'Amsterdam, at this moment in history, might be the world's greatest city because of its ability to ensure basic necessities, freedom and creativity.' Most impressively, everybody can partake in this success as 'quality housing is supplied to everyone that gives pride of place' (Gilderbloom, 2008, n.p.; see also Gilderbloom *et al*., 2007).

My understanding of the just city is slightly different from that of Fainstein and Gilderbloom. Gilderbloom emphasizes that Amsterdam outperforms American cities on criteria as diverse as prosperity, quality, tolerance, health and welfare. While all these features make a city *nice* or *good*, they do not necessarily make it *just* (see also Fainstein, 2006, p. 3). A just city, in my view, is a city where exploitation and alienation are absent. In this sense my understanding is closer to Fainstein for whom equity is central to the concept of a just city (Fainstein, 2000). Much more than Gilderbloom, she argues that democratic participation and an engaged populace are crucial for realizing the just city. However, like Gilderbloom, she also praises Amsterdam for its capacity to combine growth with diversity and sustainability (Fainstein, 2005). In my view, 'growth' can help to promote justice but it might just as well exacerbate injustices. Likewise, it is very well possible to imagine a city that is sustainable and diverse, yet replete with inequalities. According to my understanding of the just city, then, growth, sustainability, health, and so on, can be valued but not traded off for less equity or lower civic engagement. In order to clearly differentiate the just city from a nice, prosperous, sustainable or safe city (all of which have their specific contribution to make to the well-being of urbanites), I want to focus on two preconditions that, in my view, are essential (but perhaps not sufficient) for realizing the just city: mechanisms that guarantee an equitable allocation of scarce resources; and mechanisms that engage residents with the ongoing project of making the city.

A fair distribution of scarcity is one of two crucial preconditions for a just city. The commitment to make the city accessible to each and every person irrespective of their purchasing power is a cornerstone of any project that aims to fairly distribute scarcity. Note that this is not the same as quality—it may be the case that houses are small or ugly, but I still think a city could be legitimately called just (though not necessarily pleasant) if it provides its limited or imperfect housing evenly across the population. This means that the just city would either create an egalitarian income distribution or that it would create institutions that prevent households and investors from translating their economically privileged position into a privileged position in land and housing markets (which therefore would cease to be markets).

A second precondition for the just city is that residents have control over their living environment, that is, they engage with the polity of which they form part. Since it is usually the state that enforces the first precondition of a just city, there is a very real danger that economic egalitarianism leads to the concentration of power in the hands of a bureaucratic apparatus that defines what is just, without too much consideration for the individuals and groups that are supposed to benefit from the system. Rather than simply receiving whatever provisions are allocated to them, residents should have the right and capacity to inform and shape the distribution of universal provisions in particular ways. This implies that they should have what recent literature on civil society refers to as collective efficacy and social capital; they should have the right and ability to organize in such a way that they can effectively inform and shape the distribution of universal provisions according to their particular needs.

These two criteria are formulated in such a way as to demand the impossible. There is, to

my knowledge, no city in the world that can live up to the standards of a just city. But some come closer than others and it is exactly for this reason that we should be interested in concrete approximations of abstract ideals. And, even though my criteria are different from those of Fainstein, Gilderbloom and others, I agree with these authors that Amsterdam provides fascinating insights and inspiring examples for other cities. However, I think Amsterdam should not only be held up as an example of a just city but also as an example of how quickly and dramatically movements striving for the just city (Nicholls and Beaumont, 2004) can lose their momentum. Amsterdam, I argue, has degenerated from a city that aspires to be just for all into a city that is nice for many.

The ascendancy of the just city

In the 1960s and 1970s, the state as well as capital discontinued investments into inner cities. Investors as well as governments felt that the city had to be drastically renewed and restructured according to the demands of the time. The demands of the time, in turn, were defined in modernist terms. Through modernist lenses the city looked like a hopelessly dysfunctional, chaotic and ugly mess. But a growing number of people identified strongly with exactly those parts of the city that disgusted the modernist planners. And, equally important, those urban residents no longer perceived the government's wishes as divine law. Criticism and imagination democratized rapidly. The authorities that had previously appeared as skillful executioners of the collective were now reinterpreted as modernist fanatics.

In the course of the 1970s, resident resistance intensified in cities throughout Western Europe (Castells, 1983). In the case of Amsterdam, the emergence of the squatting movement contributed to an intensification and radicalization of resident protests. Squatting is usually a marginal urban practice of people left without other options, but in the 1970s squatters gained significance as a movement against the demolition of affordable housing and the imposition of modernist fantasies on urban space. In the Nieuwmarkt and many other Amsterdam neighborhoods, vacancy rates accelerated in anticipation of demolition or due to speculative reasons; subsequently, large numbers of squatters moved in. It is in the very nature of squatting to achieve revolutionary change through conservation—that is, by preventing space from being redesigned to maximize profit. Squatters have always been disliked by large parts of the Dutch population, but during this time they were actually a natural ally of residents who demanded proper housing for a reasonable price. Everywhere in the city residents—tenants and squatters—successfully opposed modernist renewal plans. In the space that had been left by capital and had not been colonized by the state, a residents' movement grew that propagated an alternative view of the city. This movement advocated the construction of new houses, the maintenance of the existing stock and the democratization of planning (Pruijt, 1985; Mamadouh, 1992).

The strength of this movement ultimately led to the overthrow of the modernistic technocrats within the ruling Labor Party. More than anyone else, Jan Schaeffer personified the new urban vision. He had actively resisted modernistic renewal in the Amsterdam neighborhood of De Pijp during the 1960s and early 1970s, and he had subsequently made his way into the higher ranks of the Labor Party on the wings of the resident movement. In 1973, he became Junior Minister of Public Housing in the national government, and in that position he would help to create the institutional preconditions for a further deepening and broadening of the residents' movement. In the most left-wing cabinet that the Netherlands had ever seen, he could break with the conception that urban renewal should serve to restructure the city to better meet the 'demands of the time'. Instead he helped to popularize and institutionalize the slogan 'building for the neighborhood' and to work out the concept of the

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'compact city'. Rather than razing entire neighborhoods, projects would be realized as much as possible within the existing urban structure and, wherever possible, renovation would be chosen over demolition. The central government made considerable budgets available to stimulate housing production.

When he moved back to Amsterdam in 1978 as a local party leader and alderman for urban renewal, he could demonstrate that his approach was not only more humane, but also more effective: housing construction exploded from 1100 units in 1978 to 9000 units in 1984 (Dienst Wonen, 2008, p. 7). The recession of that period did not at all hinder Schaeffer's plans. At the national level, the expenditures for housing were considered essential and beneficial for the economy. Because private owners were confronted with high interest rates and low demand, they often preferred to sell their properties to the government. Around 35,000 houses (*c.*15% of the stock) were taken out of the market and put under the control of housing associations and the state (Dienst Wonen, 2008, p. 12). The belated acceleration of urban renewal also triggered major conflicts. As the state took over urban space, squatters were pushed out of their houses and violent clashes ensued. But this only helped Schaeffer in pushing through his agenda. As his successor noted:

> '[Squatting] gave him an incredibly strong argument to break through everything. We are in a war and as a government we have to show that we do not only evict those people from their squats but that we also build appropriate housing. That gave him wings.' (Stadig cited in: Dienst Wonen, 2008, p. 15)

Decommodification and equity

Even though the mechanisms for allocating housing and determining rent levels are dynamic and intricate, we can nevertheless observe three general trends in the direction of a decommodified housing stock. These trends occurred nation-wide but they were especially pronounced in Amsterdam as a result of the strength of the residents' movement. First, the rights of owners to determine rent levels were gradually curtailed. Over time a comprehensive system was created to determine a fair rent, the so-called point system (*puntensysteem*). In the point system rents are based on the use value of a house. Use value is calculated according to objective criteria, like the size of a house and the quality of its amenities (Huisman and Kelk, 2008). These regulations apply to all houses regardless of ownership. The points system does not apply if the total number of points surpasses a certain threshold. Currently that threshold corresponds to a rent of 620 euros but before 1991 it was substantially higher. This basically meant that the entire rental sector was subject to strong regulation. And since owner-occupied houses constitute a very low share of the stock (13% in 1997), it meant that, by the late 1980s, the Amsterdam housing market had in effect become decommodified (Huisman, 2009, p. 9).

Second, the rights of owners to determine the use of their properties were gradually curtailed. Property owners in the 1960s still had major discretion to choose their tenants, but in the course of the 1970s their discretion was circumscribed through the centralization and standardization of allocation. Standardization was achieved through the formulation of universal criteria of eligibility. Waiting time is by far the most important criterion, but under some conditions (urgent) need also plays a role. Centralization was achieved through the creation of a city-wide distribution system. Private landlords had to register their property and the municipality and the landlord alternately allocated the accommodation that would become available. Housing associations initially each had their own waiting lists but these were gradually fused together.

Third, access to the centrally allocated housing supply was gradually universalized. Initially only married couples qualified for housing that was distributed through the

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municipality but in the 1960s the growing group of single-person households and unmarried couples also qualified. The age limit was gradually reduced from 26 in the early 1960s to 18 in the early 1980s. The housing associations initially only catered to specific groups like members of unions or other professional associations but they gradually opened up access to the general public. Corporations thus never catered only to the needs of the poorest segments of the population but there was a conscious effort in the 1980s to develop a housing stock that provided appropriate and affordable housing to all income groups. Although definitions of what is appropriate varied over time, it meant roughly that a two-person household would have a two-room apartment, a three-person household would have a three-room apartment, and so on. In other words: housing composition rather than income would determine what is appropriate and what is not.

Democratization and engagement

The growing power *of* the state was absolutely central to this project but so was the power of residents *over* the state. Many specific institutions were created in the 1970s and the 1980s to ensure that residents would be able to claim their housing rights. Official organizations to provide support to organized resident groups as well as the legal assistance to individual tenants were created, offering activists the chance to transform their movement careers into careers in the state bureaucracy. The profession of social work was thus completely reconfigured in less than two decades. Many young activists went to schools for social work (*sociale academie*) which—under pressure of the students—adopted an increasingly suspicious attitude towards authority in general and the state in particular. There was a paradoxical development: the state increasingly took social work out of the hands of private initiative and civil society, but social workers increasingly saw themselves as an ally to residents in their struggles against the state (Duyvendak and Uitermark, 2005). They could afford this position—another irony—because they were fully funded by the central state. Since they were not dependent on local governments or housing associations, they could choose the side of (the most radical) residents.

Community workers were just one actor in a larger network that provided logistical and professional support to residents who wanted to change plans to better meet their demands. With state subsidies and voluntary support of sympathizing professionals, residents could win the advice of architects, academics and planners. With all these institutions and professions working increasingly as an extension of the residents' movement, abstract ideals could be translated into concrete policy suggestions. It is this power to translate intuitions and desires into formal representations that is crucial for shaping urban space in such a way that it meets the needs of residents both as individuals and as (diverse and overlapping) collectives.

The birth of a just city

The history of Amsterdam's housing politics after 1960 was a double development: grassroots mobilization brought the state under democratic control and the housing market was gradually brought under state control. The resident movement and emerging institutions helped to create a decommodified housing stock that universalized accessibility and maximized affordability, while in the process promoting resident engagement and facilitating direct action and direct democracy.[3] If we want to decide on a birth year for the just city of Amsterdam, it would have to be 1975—the moment that residents and squatters united around the preservation of the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood. It reached maturity in 1982 when the city constructed no less than 9000 housing units and had reduced the waiting time for a two-room apartment to an all-time low of two years (Figure 2). These really were

Figure 2 Social housing of the 1980s in the Oosterparkbuurt in Amsterdam East. In the 1960s and 1970s the quality of social housing was often poor according to contemporary standards. However, quality gradually improved and houses in these kinds of complexes can sell for anywhere between 150,000 and 300,000 euros. This block is still 100% social housing. Source: Goezde Tekdal.

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revolutionary developments: they gave the city to its people and they helped generate a vibrant creativity in spaces that had been freed from both the state and the market.

This is an idealization of course—there were many things to criticize (perhaps including the inclination incessantly to criticize)—but I think this is the type of idealization we need in order to imagine what a just city would look like. What should be idealized then, and elaborated through dialectical analysis, are the processes that empowered residents to make the city. What should be dissected and struggled against are the processes that give urban development over to the state and the market.

Recommodification and disengagement

The emergence of a just city was the outcome of the interaction between a radical resident movement and a national housing policy that was designed to solve the housing shortage through massive investments in social housing (Fainstein, 2000). But in the late 1980s national policies were starting to change. As neoliberal ideologies pervaded the government subsidies for social housing and housing construction were increasingly questioned. Budget-cutters of the Christian and Right-wing parties reasoned that there was plenty of scope drastically to reduce public expenditures on social housing. For the first time, administrators said that the housing shortage was 'qualitative' rather than 'quantitative'—they claimed that everyone could find accommodation; the problem consisted in the fact that not all groups could realize their preferences. The government therefore decided that no subsidies should be made available to promote housing construction and that the upgrading of the housing market should be promoted through privatization: the large-scale selling of social housing generates funds to maintain the stock while it creates a stimulus for private investments into the more expensive segments of the market.

Segregating the housing stock

The ideological core of the new policy discourse on housing is that all income groups should have their own segment of the housing market. The working class, according to this discourse, should live in social housing. If their rents are high in proportion to their income, they can claim rent subsidies. The middle and higher classes should own their houses; the government supports them with subsidies for purchasing a house, especially the so-called *hypotheekrenteaftrek*, which allows homeowners to deduct mortgage interest from their taxable incomes. Whereas in the old policy constellation, subsidies were used to make social housing available to all income groups, in the new policy constellation subsidies are used to segregate the housing stock; residualization of the social sector is not merely a side effect of policies but one of the key objectives (compare Malpass, 1990 for the British case).

The national policies of the 1990s were a direct assault on the universal provisions that had been created in the 1980s. The problem of the housing shortage was declared solved,

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which meant—in the case of Amsterdam—that the 50,000 people on the waiting list for social housing simply disappeared as a target group. The general trend of bringing the housing stock under state control, and of bringing the state under control of the resident movement, was thus reversed. Housing associations were formally privatized and transformed into housing corporations in which tenants are mere consumers (*woonconsumenten*) and not even the most important types of consumers. That privileged role has now been assumed by the middle classes. They are expected to purchase the newly privatized social housing and to invest the capital necessary to upgrade the properties. Apart from relegating each class to its own segment of the housing market, the government fragmented residents through the creation of new tenure types, such as so-called anti-squatters and temporary tenants.[4] Anti-squatters are residents without tenant contracts and (hence) without tenant rights. They can be requested to leave their residences within a day or within a month, depending on the agreements between property owners and anti-squatters. Temporary tenants also do not enjoy the legal protection of regular tenants but they do have contracts which stipulate that the property owner needs to inform them at least one month before they have to move out. Anti-squatters and temporary tenants have a position on the housing market that is analogous to flex workers in the labor market: because their position is so precarious they are extremely unlikely to protest against property owners. Property owners, including housing corporations, often place anti-squatters and temporary tenants in houses that are to be redeveloped in order to prevent opposition from residents with full housing rights and in order to avoid providing compensation to residents that are to be displaced.

These general trends in Dutch housing policy—privatization and consolidating tenant rights—did not circumvent Amsterdam. In the late 1980s, the Amsterdam government had protested against the national policies to privatize the housing market, but during the course of the 1990s it began to adopt such policies. The government no longer considered the large stock of social housing as an achievement of social struggles, but instead came to view that stock as an impediment to a well-functioning housing market. The local alderman for housing, Tjeerd Herema, recently summarized this new, market-based vision for local housing policy: 'the housing policy aims at a much more diverse group than before. The focus is no longer exclusively on the lowest incomes. Amsterdam is a city for everyone' (press release, 7 December 2007). This quote is interesting not least due to its flagrant misrepresentation of Amsterdam's recent history. Policies in the 1980s were based on the premise that no differentiation should be made between different income groups, because all households could apply for social housing. This misrepresentation of history allows the government to present its focus on the higher income groups as an inclusive measure: they, not the working class, suffer. The number 1 target group for current policies are the so-called *scheefwoners*: tenants with high incomes who are, according to the policy discourse, trapped in a segment where they do not really belong. A visualization of this discourse is depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3 suggests quite forcefully what would previously have been considered absurd, namely, that there is a large surplus of affordable housing in Amsterdam. It suggests, further, that the main challenge is to reduce the number of affordable dwellings so that the housing market becomes more balanced (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2008, p. 27). The municipality uses several tools to achieve this. One simple strategy is to allow owners—both housing corporations and private real estate firms—to sell apartments that were previously in the regulated sector.

Integrating neighborhoods

Another strategy has been to use urban renewal policies to change tenure compositions. Instead of constructing housing for a

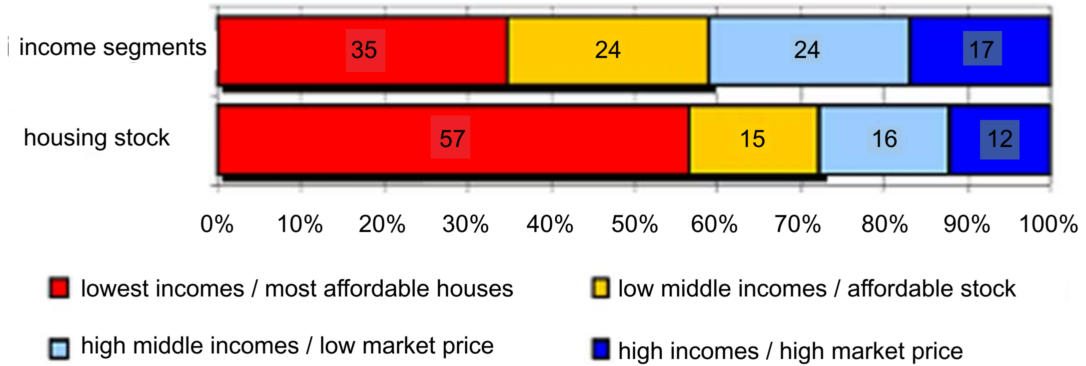

Figure 3 Income segments and housing market segments compared. Source: Gemeente Amsterdam (2008, p. 27).

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broad cross section of the population, the government and the housing corporations now pursue a strategy of 'social mixing' which refers—as usual—to attempts to replace a proportion of the low-income households with high-income households (see Uitermark *et al.*, 2007). The goal of 'constructing for the neighborhood' has been replaced by the goal of making neighborhoods 'livable' and 'integrated'. Livability has been a central concept in Dutch urban policies since the late 1970s. Initially, it was used by resident groups who protested large-scale demolitions and who argued for more subtle interventions that do not force tenants to relocate. Now, 20 years later, housing corporations and governments argue that their own policies are supposed to promote livability. But if we look at the operationalization that is used for calculating livability scores,[5] it is evident that the concept has been completely redefined (Uitermark, 2005). Residents' perceptions are still included in the operationalization, but the score is also said to be based on 'objective' criteria. For example, if a neighborhood has a high share of ethnic minorities, the score goes down. If it has a high share of lower income households, the score goes down. If it has a high share of affordable housing, the score goes down. In short, what is really being measured here is not the extent to which *residents* can live a pleasant and affordable life in neighborhoods, but the extent to which *housing corporations* and *governments* can govern these neighborhoods and extract profits out of them. Similar arguments could be advanced about the policy construct of 'integration'. This term no longer refers to the composition of a society or a neighborhood, but rather to a process that minorities are said to have to go through in order to become part of Dutch society (Schinkel, 2007). Hence, in practice, the ideal of 'undivided cities' means that policies try to disperse concentrations of migrants and lower income groups (Figure 4).

There are many possible criticisms against these policy discourses and practices. The first and most obvious is that the policies do not work. Renewal operations are used to drastically transform the tenure composition

Figure 4 Gentrification in process. In the process of renewal or renovation, the share of social housing is typically reduced from 100 to around 20. Source: Goezde Tekdal.

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of neighborhoods, but they typically do not affect high-income tenants.[6] This is because such groups are underrepresented in renewal areas and because displacees will have to be offered another social housing unit. This also leads to the second criticism: the transformations do not seem to lead to a reduction of *scheefwoners*. There is no reason to assume that the transformations would have this effect in the first place, but there is also some research—conducted by tenant organizations—that suggests the share of *scheefwoners* does not in fact decline through such policies (Initiatief Betaalbaar Wonen Amsterdam Noord, 2008). These two criticisms thus lead to the conclusion that the government should either abandon its goals to transform the housing market, or have the guts directly to target the higher income residents.

But a more fundamental criticism of the government's policy—and one that would lead to a different conclusion—is that the idea of *scheefwonen*, the notion that there are 'too many' affordable houses and the fear that social housing will lead to the concentration of poor ethnics—is predicated on the assumption that lower income groups should spend time on a waiting list for unpopular social housing, whereas higher income groups should have the right to instantly buy their way into the more popular segments of the city's housing market. The conclusion that follows from this criticism is that the state has the duty, first and foremost, to address the housing shortage in the city. Even though the waiting time for a two-bedroom apartment is up from two years in 1982 to 10 years in 2008,[7] the very word 'housing shortage' does not appear in the current policy vision of Amsterdam. Not only do these policies lead to less equity, they also lead to citizen disengagement at the neighborhood and city levels. Whereas, in the 1970s, urban renewal was oriented towards neighborhood itself, it is now oriented primarily towards people from outside of the neighborhood. Housing corporations now encourage tenants in renewal projects to try their chances on the city's housing market rather then facilitating their participation in planning the neighborhood itself. In short, whereas urban renewal was previously instrumental for *improving* the condition of a neighborhood and *strengthening* ties among different groups of neighborhood residents, it is now used to *disperse* tenants and to *transform* the neighborhood from above. If participation and integration are understood as active engagement with issues of common concern and with fellow residents, then it is clear that the renewal process is today designed to achieve precisely the opposite goal: it differentiates the population, individualizes residents and hands over its democratic responsibilities to actors—housing corporations—that are accountable to no one.

Discussion

One might ask: how did this happen? Why was the ideal of the just city abandoned so swiftly and so smoothly? The largest part of the answer to this question cannot be found at the local level. The ascendancy of neoliberalism at the national level in the Netherlands—itself something that should be understood as part of a global trend—was extremely consequential for those who prioritized the use value of the city. But part of the answer can indeed be found at the local level. For what has become of the movements that had previously forced the government to design the city for people rather than for profit? Why did they not protest as they once did? The main reason, I think, is that the movements were so successful in realizing their demands and in penetrating the state that they created structures that benefit—first and foremost—those who have the good fortune to live in an affordable house and whose rights are—as a consequence of the activism in the past—rock solid. The movements have turned into interest groups (see Mayer,

2007) and they now represent only the interests of tenants, which means they have no interest—or formal role—for the masses of people who are not lucky enough to be inside the social sector, and are thus forced to pay very high rents in the private sector, to resort to illegal subletting or to become a temporary tenant. The strategy of the interest organizations was to demand regulations and promises of the government to protect the position of tenants in a rapidly privatizing housing market.[8] One of the outcomes of the negotiations is that tenants—formally—have a very strong position in urban renewal processes: they have a right to be consulted and a majority of tenants need to agree with the plans. Tenants who are forced to relocate receive urgency status on the waiting list and a moving subsidy of at least 5050 euros. What we see in Amsterdam is that the gains of earlier struggles are now—literally—sold out or given away to compensate those groups with the most rights or key positions. There are still many residents who fiercely resist forced relocations and the attendant rent increases, but the Tenant Associations (*Huurdersvereniging Amsterdam*, HA) as well as the Amsterdam Resident Support (*Amsterdams Steunpunt Wonen*, ASW) generally encourage these protesters to accept better deals rather than to challenge the premises of the policies. This is not surprising because the HA has been created by the government to participate in tripartite negotiations while the ASW increasingly relies on the housing corporations for funding. Community work organizations at the local level are increasingly funded by the local government and housing corporations, which induces community workers to streamline the process of urban renewal rather than to equalize the balance of power between residents and housing corporations.

What can be learned from the case of Amsterdam? In my view, the main lesson is this: the state may be a necessary vehicle for achieving justice, but there is a danger in investing too much power into it. Many of the institutions that are now cooperating with the government to privatize the housing stock used to be either grassroots organizations (tenant and community associations) or were part of civil society (housing associations, social work). Their absorption into the state gave these actors the chance to translate their ideals into regulations and stipulations but it was also the beginning of a process of gradual disconnection from the grassroots. The resident movement at the time, however, assumed that the state would be more subject to democratic control than civil society associations, but it seems now that they were wrong.[9] It is ironic that the municipality's housing association has since its privatization made a name for itself as a ruthless demolisher of social housing. As a true Brutus, it now turns against the movement that gave it its power. In retrospect, it appears that Amsterdam would have been far more resilient to gentrification pressures if squatters and militant tenants had established cooperatives to purchase and manage their houses.

Conclusion: just a nice city

Few passengers will nowadays notice the monument on Nieuwmarkt station. Its incoherent parts are likely to merely reinforce the image of yet another poorly maintained metro station with graffiti, broken glass and unmanicured edges. There is only one part of the whole ensemble that is not messy, ambivalent and chaotic. This is the slogan on the platform that is stretched across nearly 20 meters. There it is, grafted in stone, the most fundamental element of any right to the city: 'housing is a right, not a favor' (*wonen is geen gunst maar een recht*). The slogan represents a promise of the government; the promise to provide housing to all its residents regardless of their income, background or merit. The letters are big and bright, but very few people notice them. When the monument was created, it

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symbolized the power of a residents' movement that had their ideas inscribed into the urban fabric and institutionalized into local organizations. The meaning that it conveys today is that a massive momentum can be reduced to an incoherent collage. The monument has been transformed from a sign of strength of the residents' movements to an *in memoriam* for the just city of Amsterdam. For many, if not most, residents of Amsterdam today, the idea of promoting egalitarianism and engagement may or may not be appealing, but it is certainly not something they strive for. The fragmentation of people into different market segments makes it very difficult to foster solidarity among tenants. A waiting list of 10 years has become a fact of life, where in an earlier era a waiting list of two years was considered a breach of the basic right to housing. The case of Amsterdam thus shows that it is very difficult to work towards a just city but nearly impossible to sustain it.

Just to be clear: Amsterdam has not become a playground for hard-edged neoliberalism. The stock of social housing is still comparatively large and tenants enjoy a strong legal position. For international scholars, it makes sense to hold up Amsterdam as an example that proves to conservatives and neoliberals that a city can have success when it combines a relatively comprehensive welfare system with progressive policies.[10] But when we analyze the city historically rather than comparatively, the reality looks rather different. All the institutions that had previously decommodified the housing market and engaged residents now use their power to promote gentrification and the polarization of the housing market. Ironically, it was the residents' movement of the 1980s that invested these institutions with the power and resources necessary to impose their view upon the city. Neoliberalization proceeds so smoothly because the gains of past social struggles are used to compensate the most direct victims of privatization and demolition.

While it is impossible and unnecessary to allocate responsibility for the demise of the just city of Amsterdam to any specific actor, I do think that there is a special responsibility for scholars in general and, by way of conclusion, I would like to flesh out how critical urban analysts could take on this responsibility. Scholarship has played a crucial role in both the tendential emergence of the just city and in its demise. In the 1970s and 1980s, academics and experts actively cooperated with resident groups and tried to help them to translate their demands and desires in concepts, figures and drawings. For instance, students in architecture thought of new ways to renovate houses and sociologists attempted to unearth policy processes and to map the needs of residents and house seekers. But in the 1990s residents lost most of their academic support. Today, housing corporations and municipalities fund the bulk of research into cities and especially lower class groups. Thus discourses and data on cities reflect the interests of entrepreneurial governments and corporations rather than those of residents. The idea that there are 'too many' social houses and that selling social houses is the best way forward to improve 'liveability' goes virtually unchallenged. I think critical urban analysts—including those who do not subscribe to the ideal of the just city as I have sketched it here—do have a responsibility to improve reflexivity and to open up debate. The way to do this is to critically scrutinize dominant conceptualizations of the city and to show that alternative conceptualizations are possible. When notions such as 'integration', 'liveability' and 'differentiation' are measured and mapped as if they reflected an objective reality, then there is a need to challenge the discursive hegemony of the authorities and their mercenary experts. To show that the changing definition of these concepts reflects changing power relations then is one crucial enterprise for critical urban analysts. Next deconstructing naturalized renderings of reality, critical scholars face the daunting but fascinating challenge to provide rigorous operationaliza-

tions and conceptualizations of alternative conceptions of the city, for instance, in terms of justice or use value.

The value of such work is that it may open up alternative urban futures. Under present conditions in Amsterdam, however, it is highly unlikely that residents will regain the momentum of the 1980s. The heritage of the just city can be seen everywhere in Amsterdam, but the just city itself died sometime around 1990. The heritage that permeates the urban fabric is now considered an obstacle to the functioning of the housing market. Once again, 'market' and 'housing' go together as an inseparable couplet. It is now the market rather than residents that needs to be freed from constraints and put into motion. To think of the just city under such conditions is frustrating but also stimulating. It is a lost cause, but perhaps that is precisely why the just city is worth fighting for.

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Notes

1 It is difficult to say whether it is an original. It might be the case that some government officials have pulled it from the rubble to preserve a reminder of the houses that other government officials destroyed. It could also be the case that they commissioned someone to reproduce the wall and to write—in big brushes of white paint—the words that had motivated so many to stand up for their neighborhood.

2 The careful observer will find another quirky little monument above ground. It is made of stone and features a turtle that carries an ionic pillar on its shell. The symbolism is lost on me but fortunately we do find some text here. On one side of the pillar there is a poem of Jacob Israël de Haan on the nostalgia for Amsterdam of Jews who had migrated to Israel. On the other side there is, finally, a text that describes what happened: 'Up to this point the old city pattern disappeared. Beyond this point the urban renewal of the neighborhood started. By way of commemoration, this memorial stone was erected in 1986' (Figure 1).

3 The residential areas that planners could construct without the interference of residents became planning disasters. The most famous example is the gigantic futuristic suburb in South East Amsterdam colloquially referred to as Bijlmer (Aalbers, 2006). But where residents were present and engaged, they managed to temper the modernist ambitions to write designer history and to focus instead on the needs of residents in the renewal neighborhoods.

4 Tenants with regular contracts enjoy very strong legal protection: the property owners can only force them to relocate if they urgently need to have control over the house (for instance, to proceed with urban renewal) and only after they have offered alternative housing and a relocation fee.

5 There are many varieties of the leefbaarheidsmonitor. The most recent and comprehensive is online: http://www.lemoninternet.nl/lemondnn/default.aspx (accessed 14 March 2009).

6 The most obvious solution would be to let wealthy tenants with low rents pay more for their units but such a plan would run into the strong protection of tenant rights. As a consequence of the decades of resident mobilization it is nearly impossible to one-sidedly discontinue a lease or to raise rents. Plans in this direction immediately trigger a response from powerful tenant lobby groups which represent a core constituency of the ruling labor party.

7 Among the most important reasons for the increase in waiting time is that the social sector is shrinking, the growing number of displacees with urgency status (and hence priority) and the virtual standstill of housing production.

8 Sometimes the drive to dispense of public goods takes on frenzied forms. While housing corporations are formally not allowed to make a profit, some managers and directors—free from state interference, accountability to residents and market discipline—have found other ways to consume dispossed surpluses. At the time of writing—March 2009—the news is full of the fraudulent transactions of one of the former directors of housing association Rochdale and especially his car park. During work-time he moved around in a Masserati with a driver (until his employees told him that he might give the wrong—that is, of course, the correct—impression on tenant representatives and others) and in his holiday

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house in Spain he had a choice between a number of expensive sport cars, all paid for by the housing corporation. Other directors—who used to earn modal wages as civil servants—have been so generous on behalf of the public interest to give themselves up to 600,000 euros of salary per year.

9 Schools provide an interesting counter example to housing associations: they are non-profit associations that are governed by a board of parents rather than enterprises.

10 Still, it would be nice if they would not just idealize Amsterdam's achievements but also defend them. The impression that Gilderbloom, Fainstein and other scholars leave behind is that Amsterdam is ruled superbly.

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