Disentangling processes of neighbourhood change: Towards a better understanding of upgrading and downgrading of neighbourhoods in the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands
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6 Conclusion and discussion

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation focused on processes of neighbourhood change in the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands. The aim of this research was twofold: the first objective was to obtain a better understanding of how processes of upgrading and downgrading manifest themselves, while the second aim was to obtain insight into the way in which governing actors contribute to these processes. These aims are related to two gaps which were identified in the literature on neighbourhood change.

Firstly, many studies about neighbourhood change assume a close relationship between social and physical changes: socio-economic changes are assumed to go hand-in-hand with physical changes and vice versa (e.g. Clay, 1979; Grigsby et al., 1987; Lees et al., 2008; Walks and Maaranen, 2008a), but empirical evidence underpinning these relationships is scarce. In addition, studies about neighbourhood change attribute a key role to residential mobility, while incumbent processes – changes in the socio-economic status of sitting households – are overlooked. Downgrading is related to immigration of low-income and out-migration of high-income households (e.g. Andersson and Bråmå, 2004; Van Ham and Clark, 2009) and migration is even one of the defining characteristics of gentrification: the cause of which is assumed to be the immigration of high-income households, leading to replacement of lower-income groups (e.g. Lees et al., 2008). Processes of incumbent neighbourhood change are often overlooked: few studies actually explore the relationship between social and physical neighbourhood change and between residential mobility and neighbourhood change. So, these relationships were addressed in the first part of this research.

Secondly, many studies addressing the relationship between governing actors and neighbourhood change focus on only one type of governing actor (e.g. Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Andersson and Turner, 2014) or treat governing actors as one group, which are assumed to follow shared objectives in neighbourhood regeneration (e.g.
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Uitermark et al., 2007). Although these studies have led to important insights into the way in which governing actors contribute to neighbourhood change, multiple actors are often involved in neighbourhood regeneration. Moreover, residents are increasingly included to participate in decision-making processes in neighbourhood governance (Bailey, 2010; Parés et al., 2011). It is likely that the actors involved have different goals and priorities, leading to varying outcomes in regeneration strategies and diverse processes of neighbourhood change. The second purpose of this research therefore was to understand how goals of governing actors aimed at generating neighbourhood upgrading resulted in different regeneration strategies, to what extent residents contributed to these strategies through participating in decision-making processes and how this resulted in different processes of neighbourhood change.

This concluding chapter is organized as follows. Section 6.2 discusses the main findings and provides conclusions of the first part of this research, while section 6.3 discusses the findings and presents a conclusion of the second part. An agenda for future research is provided in the last part of this chapter.

6.2 Part I: disentangling patterns of neighbourhood change

The first part of this research (chapters 2 and 3) involved a citywide analysis of patterns of neighbourhood upgrading and downgrading in Amsterdam, The Hague and Tilburg. Chapter 2 provided insight into the relationship between social and physical neighbourhood change, by addressing the following research question: what is the relationship between social and physical upgrading and downgrading of urban neighbourhoods? The aim of chapter 3 was to further unravel processes of social upgrading and downgrading, by exploring the relationship between residential mobility and neighbourhood change. Chapter 3 addressed the research question: what is the relationship between neighbourhood upgrading and downgrading and residential and social mobility of residents? This section discusses the main findings of these chapters, provides answers to the research questions and concludes with a discussion of the role of the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands in understanding social and physical changes in neighbourhoods.
6.2.1 The relationship between social and physical neighbourhood change
Chapter 2 began with the assertion that many studies assume a close relationship between social and physical upgrading and downgrading. The chapter investigated this relationship by examining income and real estate patterns of neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, The Hague and Tilburg between 1999 and 2006. The findings showed that only a relatively small number of neighbourhoods (thirty percent) in these cities demonstrate a simultaneous trend in social and physical neighbourhood change. These are generally neighbourhoods at the top and bottom of the housing market hierarchy: on the one hand, these are prosperous neighbourhoods, characterized by owner-occupied housing and a central location, while on the other hand, these are relatively poor neighbourhoods with large proportions of social housing and a peripheral location.

Other neighbourhoods, however, displayed a more complex relationship between social and physical developments. About twenty percent showed parallel trends of social and physical change in the end, but with a time lag between the processes. In some cases, physical changes preceded social changes, while in other cases this was the other way around. Another thirty percent demonstrated a partial diverging relationship between the processes. For instance, these neighbourhoods experienced social upgrading, but the physical development followed city-wide change, or vice versa. Only a small number of neighbourhoods (eight percent) showed completely diverging trends with social upgrading and physical downgrading or vice versa.

Chapter 2 provided tentative explanations for these complex relationships and stressed the importance of a number of interrelated issues. Firstly, the findings highlighted that the complex relationship between social and physical changes in neighbourhoods may be attributed to the multiple social dynamics of households which can become manifest in neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood change can result from residential mobility as well as developments of sitting households. In addition, it may be that neighbourhoods fulfil different functions for different types of households: some neighbourhoods can mainly accomplish a function for households at the start of their housing career, while other neighbourhoods can be places where many households are found in the later stages of their housing career (also see Musterd et al., forthcoming). To complicate the issue, a neighbourhood can simultaneously fulfil different functions for different types of households at the same time. A poor neighbourhood may trap certain disadvantaged households, but may provide a social support network to other households and can thereby offer young households the
opportunity to start their housing career. In other words, a relatively homogeneous housing stock can serve a heterogeneous population. This can result in multiple social dynamics within a neighbourhood, which is also likely to contribute to the diffuse relationship between social and physical dynamics of a neighbourhood. In order to fully understand the relationship between household and neighbourhood dynamics, more research in this direction is needed.

Secondly, the findings revealed the importance of the institutional and housing market contexts in understanding the disparities between social and physical changes. For instance, the findings illustrated that area-based regeneration policies do not only lead to physical neighbourhood change through interventions in the housing stock, but can also cause social change as the aim of regeneration is often to attract higher-income households. In addition, the presence of social housing can affect the complex relationships: the in-migration of low-income households might lead to social downgrading, but physical grading may continue to follow the citywide trend when the condition of social housing remains sufficiently high. Furthermore, the findings highlighted the impact of privatization and deregulation of the housing system on the patterns observed. The conversion of social housing into owner-occupied housing affects both physical neighbourhood change, as social housing is often sold off at a price below the market value, and social change, as higher-income households are attracted to these dwellings (also see Boterman and Van Gent, 2014).

6.2.2 The relationship between residential mobility and neighbourhood change

Chapter 3 further disentangled processes of social upgrading and downgrading. The chapter investigated the relationship between residential mobility and social neighbourhood change, because many studies assume that mobility plays a key role in neighbourhood change, while incumbent processes are often overlooked. The focus was placed on neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, The Hague and Tilburg between 1999 and 2008. The chapter started with the expectation that that processes of upgrading and downgrading go hand-in-hand with high mobility rates. However, the findings demonstrated that there are both upgrading and downgrading neighbourhoods with low, average and high mobility rates.

In order to get a better understanding of the relationship between mobility and neighbourhood change, income developments of in-migrating, out-migrating and non-migrating households were examined and related to neighbourhood income
developments. The findings demonstrated that in- and out-migration are not the only processes at work, but that changes in the socio-economic status of sitting residents were also important. In downgrading neighbourhoods, in-migrants reinforce downgrading, as their incomes are – generally – a downward force on the income level of their neighbourhood. However, the findings showed that sitting households impede processes of decline, as their income levels and income developments are generally above the neighbourhood level. The contribution of out-migrants to downgrading is mixed: in some cases, they reinforce downgrading, while in other cases they hinder the process. In upgrading neighbourhoods, incumbent processes seem to be the main driver of upgrading: incomes of non-migrants are systematically above the neighbourhood level and although in-migrants initially impede upgrading – as their incomes are below the neighbourhood level when moving in – they experience strong income gains in the years after in-migration. In general, out-migrants reinforce upgrading because their incomes are below the neighbourhood level when moving out. However, in other years, their incomes are around the neighbourhood level. The income developments of in-migrants, out-migrants and non-migrants together determine whether the neighbourhood as a whole is upgrading, downgrading or keeping in pace with city-wide development.

The findings demonstrated that neighbourhood change results from both migration patterns and social mobility of sitting households of a neighbourhood: households with income levels below the neighbourhood average move into a neighbourhood, cause incumbent upgrading as they experience strong income gains soon after in-migration, and leave the neighbourhood after a certain period of time – expectedly in order to advance their housing career. These patterns were observed in both upgrading and downgrading neighbourhoods and it seems that households anticipate having higher incomes in the near future when moving to a new neighbourhood.

These observations are striking for at least two reasons. Firstly, one of the key assumptions in an important part of the gentrification literature is that the in-migration of progressively more affluent households into low-income neighbourhoods leads to displacement or replacement of the low-income sitting population (see Marcuse, 1986; Lees et al., 2008; Slater; 2009). The findings of this research indicate a more nuanced picture. In upgrading neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, income levels of in-migrants are not systematically higher than the neighbourhood average, but in-migrants experience strong income gains in the years after in-migration. In addition, income
levels of sitting households are above the average neighbourhood income level. Although income levels of out-migrants are generally below or around the neighbourhood level, their incomes are higher than those of in-migrants. In other words, the findings do not provide clear evidence for displacement of low-income households. Of course, the findings presented in chapter 3 are average income levels and do not provide developments of individual households. Moreover, in-migrants may possess higher education levels and can have higher levels of cultural capital than sitting and out-migrating households, which can be translated into higher levels of economic capital in later stages. Also, sitting households might experience displacement pressures as a result of changes in the social, physical and/or economic neighbourhood environment (see Slater, 2009), which can cause sitting residents with lower incomes to move out. Nevertheless, the findings of this research add a new perspective on the progression of gentrification to the academic literature, which is schematized in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1** Two perspectives on gentrification. *Left:* the progression of gentrification as assumed in an important part of the gentrification literature. *Right:* the progression of the process based on the research findings.

Secondly, although the findings demonstrate that in-migration, and in some cases, out-migration reinforce downgrading, the findings reveal that in-migrating households experience strong income gains after moving in. In addition, income levels of sitting households are above the neighbourhood level. These observations stress the importance of taking income developments of sitting households into account, and raise the question of whether in-migration of low-income households is problematic when their incomes increase significantly in later years.
Chapter 3 presented a number of tentative explanations for the patterns observed. Firstly, processes of incumbent upgrading can be related to the fact that households may be less willing to move after an increase in income, as they may be happy with their current neighbourhood. Secondly, the chapter stressed the importance of social housing in understanding the relationship between residential and social mobility and neighbourhood change. The social housing stock is characterized by long waiting lists and households relying on social housing may consequently wish to move out, but might not be able to. In addition, in the Netherlands, households cannot be forced to move out after income gains. For households which do no longer comply with the allocation rules of social housing, moving is associated with strong increases in housing costs. So, households may choose to stay in their dwelling, even when they are no longer appropriate for them – which can lead to incumbent upgrading.

6.2.3 The meaning of the local and institutional context
The findings of chapters 2 and 3 revealed the variety of social and physical transformations that may manifest in urban neighbourhoods. In short, there does not appear to be one type of upgrading or downgrading process, but in fact there are multiple processes operating simultaneously. Both chapters indicated the importance of the institutional and housing market contexts in which the cities and neighbourhoods are embedded: the complex relationship between social and physical upgrading and downgrading and between residential mobility and neighbourhood change could be attributed, at least partly, to the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands.

Firstly, the complex relationships could be related to the presence of social housing. The housing markets of Amsterdam, The Hague and Tilburg are characterized by a significant proportion of social housing: although these proportions vary between the neighbourhoods – ranging from 0 to 96.6 percent (CBS, 2012) – most neighbourhoods in these cities have at least a certain proportion of social housing. The presence of social housing firstly may affect the relationship between social and physical neighbourhood change: as mentioned earlier, the in-migration of low-income households may cause social downgrading, but does not necessarily lead to physical neighbourhood change. In addition, the presence of social housing implies that low-income households are able to move into both upgrading and downgrading neighbourhoods and can prevent the exclusion of low-income households from gentrifying neighbourhoods – which is often feared in the gentrification literature (Van
Gent, 2013). As chapter 3 demonstrated, this can partially explain the comparatively low income levels of in-migrants in both upgrading and downgrading neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, chapter 3 suggests that the presence of social housing can explain the observed processes of incumbent upgrading. As social housing is scarce and characterized by comparatively low rents, households might decide to stay in their socially rented dwellings, even when they are no longer suitable or when they can afford to live in dwellings higher up in the hierarchy. In the tight housing market of Amsterdam in particular, where demand exceeds the supply of housing and privately rented housing is expensive compared to social housing, many higher-income households remain in socially rented dwellings for which they once qualified (Musterd, 2014). This has been termed ‘scheefwonen’ (skewed living). This leads to processes of incumbent upgrading and, moreover, it may affect the relationship between social and physical neighbourhood change: the neighbourhood may demonstrate social upgrading with physical changes following the citywide trend.

Secondly, the research findings indicate that the complex relationship between social and physical neighbourhood change and between residential mobility and neighbourhood change could be attributed to policies and interventions of governing actors, such as the national government, municipalities and housing associations. As mentioned, a number of neighbourhoods have been subjected to area-based regeneration policies and interventions. In these neighbourhoods, (large) proportions of social housing have been demolished and replaced by a mixture of social housing, privately rented housing and owner-occupied housing. These regeneration processes may trigger residential mobility, as demolition of social housing forces low-income households to move out of the neighbourhood. As regeneration generally results in lower proportions of social housing, not all households are able to return. Simultaneously, higher-income households are attracted to renovated or newly-constructed housing, which may lead to social upgrading, and physical interventions in the housing stock and public space are likely to cause increases in real estate values. Moreover, area-based policies may cause changes both in targeted neighbourhoods and the surrounding neighbourhoods, for example, in neighbourhoods receiving the (low-income) households which are relocated from the neighbourhoods being regenerated.

In addition, processes of privatization and deregulation of the housing system may contribute to the complex patterns and trends. In particular, part of the social housing stock is converted into owner-occupied and privately rented housing. In chapter 2, it was argued that social housing is often sold off at a price below the market value, which
might lead to physical downgrading. At the same time, higher-income households are attracted to the converted dwellings, thereby affecting residential mobility patterns and, consequently, social neighbourhood change.

In sum, the findings of the first part of this dissertation highlight the importance of the institutional and housing market contexts in which the cities and neighbourhoods are located, in understanding the social and physical transformations that may manifest in urban neighbourhoods. In order to obtain a better understanding of the impact of the highly-regulated context on neighbourhood change in the Netherlands, the second part of this research explored the importance of the institutional context in processes of neighbourhood change.

6.3 Part II: the role of the institutional context in neighbourhood change

The second part of this dissertation (chapters 4 and 5) addressed the importance of the institutional context in neighbourhood change in the Netherlands. Chapter 4 explored goals of different governing actors – the national government, local governments and housing associations – in generating neighbourhood upgrading by addressing the following research question: what are goals of governing actors for policies and interventions in generating neighbourhood upgrading and how do different goals result in place-specific regeneration strategies and diverse processes of neighbourhood change?

Then chapter 5 examined how the inclusion of residents in decision-making processes in neighbourhood governance provided opportunities for residents to influence neighbourhood regeneration strategies. This chapter addressed the research question: how and to what degree have residents been included in decision-making processes in policies and interventions for neighbourhood upgrading and to what extent have residents thereby contributed to neighbourhood change? The main findings of these chapters are discussed in this section. In addition, this section provides answers to the research questions and concludes with a reflection on institutional approaches to neighbourhood change.

6.3.1 Goals of governing actors in generating neighbourhood upgrading

Chapter 4 focused on the way in which governing actors in the regeneration of the neighbourhoods of Transvaal and Oosterpark in Amsterdam and Rustenburg in The Hague aimed to achieve neighbourhood change. The chapter concerned a
neighbourhood analysis and made use of a combination of qualitative data and methods. Transvaal, Oosterpark and Rustenburg were targeted for regeneration with the objective to upgrade them, because they had a weak socio-economic and housing market position in the 1990s. This was assumed to be caused by a one-sided housing stock, resulting in selective out-migration of high-income households. The findings of chapter 4 showed that a central element in the regeneration of the neighbourhoods was state-led gentrification: the aim was to attract and retain higher-income households through differentiation of the housing stock (such as conversion of social housing into privately rented and owner-occupied housing) as well as upgrading of the physical, economic and social environment. The findings demonstrated that the national government played an important role in the formulation of these regeneration goals, as national regeneration policies shifted in favour of gentrification in the 1990s, which was related to processes of neo-liberalization. These goals were adopted by the municipalities of Amsterdam and The Hague.

However, although the formulated regeneration goals were similar in Transvaal, Oosterpark and Rustenburg, the findings of chapter 4 showed that in each neighbourhood, the actors involved all had their own objectives and priorities. These objectives and priorities did not only vary between contexts, but also within contexts. This resulted in processes of negotiation between actors and led to different outcomes in neighbourhood interventions. In each neighbourhood, the municipalities initiated the regeneration process and aimed to establish a coalition with the housing associations active in the neighbourhoods. As owners of the social housing stock, housing associations are important partners for the local governments – especially in Transvaal and Oosterpark, where the housing associations own the majority of the housing stock. However, through their deregulation in 1995, housing associations have become hybrid organizations (Blessing, 2013): although their primary task was to provide affordable housing, they have now also become market-oriented actors which have to strengthen their economic position and generate income from market activities by, for example, selling off social housing and converting social housing into owner-occupied housing. For the regeneration of the research neighbourhoods, this implied that the housing associations strategically determined in which neighbourhoods they wanted to intervene and where they wanted to invest in the housing stock and other

35 As mentioned in the introduction (p. 16), policies and interventions aiming at attracting higher-income households to the neighbourhoods have also been referred to as ‘social-mixing’, ‘urban revitalization’ or ‘urban renaissance’.
neighbourhood aspects. The findings of chapter 4 demonstrated that the goals of housing associations did not always match those of the government. The actors involved all had their own objectives and priorities, which resulted in negotiation between actors and consequently different outcomes in terms of regeneration strategies and varying processes of neighbourhood change.

Moreover, although pushing forward gentrification was a central element in the regeneration of Transvaal, Oosterpark and Rustenburg, the findings demonstrated that the government and housing associations still form a strong buffer between market interventions and neighbourhood development. In other words, social motives remain important drivers. Housing associations are still obliged by law to realize social objectives and the government imposes comprehensive regulations to impede gentrification and reduce its negative effects.

6.3.2 Resident participation in neighbourhood upgrading

Finally, chapter 5 explored how the inclusion of residents in decision-making processes in policies for neighbourhood upgrading provided opportunities for residents to influence neighbourhood regeneration strategies and, consequently, processes of neighbourhood change. This chapter specifically focused on the neighbourhood of Transvaal (Amsterdam) and made use of a combination of qualitative data and methods. During its regeneration from 1999 onwards, varying forms of resident participation were introduced. Consequently, Transvaal provides an interesting case in which to study how the organization of participation in neighbourhood governance has changed over time and what this has meant for residents’ opportunities to influence neighbourhood interventions.

The research findings demonstrated that governing actors had high ambitions in creating opportunities for resident participation in neighbourhood governance. However, it turned out to be a process of trial and error in terms of the actual contribution of residents to decision-making processes and subsequent processes of neighbourhood change. In the first period of regeneration (1999-2006), resident participation was officially incorporated in formal planning processes, but the implementation was not sufficiently developed. Residents were only involved at the end of the policy-cycle, when major decisions had already been made. Moreover, the rules of the game were determined by the urban district. In line with previous studies (e.g. Jones, 2003; Taylor, 2007; Chaskin et al., 2012), resident participation seemed to have mostly served to legitimize top-down interventions, while it did not lead to more
democratic decision-making processes. Consequently, residents had to turn to traditional forms of activism, outside formal governance forums, to get attention for their concerns. Although the urban district responded to these forms of activism, residents’ influence remained limited to a particular domain of everyday nuisances.

During the second stage of regeneration (2007-2013), the regeneration coalition put a lot of money, time and effort into the organization of participation. New participation mechanisms were introduced, which ranged from formalized and long-term mechanisms to small-scale, temporary and project-based initiatives. These mechanisms ranged from low to high levels of impact and largely determined the actual contribution of residents to neighbourhood change. Participation mechanisms that contribute to reducing everyday concerns of residents in particular domains, such as safety and public nuisance and strengthening the local community, were quite successful. These mechanisms were also fruitful from the perspective whereby participation is seen as an objective in itself. The coalition also aimed to create opportunities for co-production. However, the findings demonstrated that co-production largely remained out of reach for residents and the participation mechanisms did not result in more open planning processes at the scale of the neighbourhood as a whole. In particular, residents were excluded from decision-making processes regarding strategic and long-term interventions about tenure conversion. So, from the perspective of participation as a means to create locally-embedded policies for long-term neighbourhood change, resident participation was not very successful. So, despite the high ambitions of urban professionals about resident participation and the establishment of varying mechanisms, residents’ achievements in shaping policy plans for neighbourhood upgrading remained limited.

6.3.3 Reflections on institutional approaches to neighbourhood change

Chapter 4 started with an important assertion of this research that although gentrification has become ‘a global urban strategy’ (Smith, 2002), the way in which governing actors contribute to gentrification is context-specific, as institutional and housing market contexts affect patterns of neighbourhood development differently. The objective of chapter 4 was to explore goals of governing actors in generating neighbourhood change, in order to provide insight into the way in which state-led gentrification unfolds in the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands. Thereby, the aim was to contribute to the ‘geography of gentrification’ (Lees, 2000; 2012). The findings demonstrate that Dutch state-led gentrification stands out in a number of ways
when to compared to gentrification in – for instance – Anglo-Saxon contexts. Firstly, in the Netherlands the presence of social housing and rules and regulations (e.g. rent control and property protection) mitigates the negative effects relating to gentrification to some degree. Low-income residents are not systematically excluded from gentrifying neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, governing actors increasingly adopted gentrification as a regeneration policy.

Secondly, while state-led gentrification is often seen in the academic literature as a municipally-led goal (for instance to generate local tax revenues), the findings revealed that in the Netherlands, the national government still plays a central role in the promotion of gentrification. National regeneration policies shifted in favour of gentrification during the 1990s: as mentioned, the government assumed that the presence of a one-sided housing stock resulted in processes of selective migration in many urban neighbourhoods (Musterd and Ostendorf, 2008). The government assumed that processes of in-migration of low-income households and out-migration of high-income households resulted in neighbourhood decline. The government therefore attributes a key role to residential mobility. These observations are striking in comparison with findings of chapter 3, which demonstrated the importance of incumbent upgrading: in-migrants experience strong income gains after in-migration and income levels of non-migrating households lay above the average neighbourhood income level, which impeded processes of decline.

Nevertheless, the shift in national regeneration policies towards gentrification resulted in rather uniform policy objectives: in Transvaal, Oosterpark as well as Rustenburg, governing actors aimed to counteract decline through attracting and retaining higher-income households. This is in line with observations of Lees (2000, p. 405), who argued that state-led gentrification policies have become ‘one size fits all’. However, the findings demonstrated that although the formulated regeneration goals were similar, the were differences in the practice of the regeneration strategies between the research neighbourhoods. These differences could firstly be attributed to the local contexts in which the neighbourhoods are embedded. For instance, because of its central location, Oosterpark (and Transvaal to a lesser degree) benefitted from the ongoing gentrification of the inner-city and Amsterdam’s tight housing market. In contrast, upgrading was hindered in Rustenburg, due to the presence of higher-quality housing in the vicinity and The Hague’s rather loose housing market. In addition, the findings demonstrate the importance of tenure structures of the housing market. As the majority of the housing stock in Transvaal and Oosterpark is owned by housing
associations, differentiation of the housing stock was much easier than in Rustenburg. Differentiation was difficult in Rustenburg because the majority of the dwellings is owned by owner-occupants and governing actors therefore did not have control over the housing stock. So, although the goals of the regeneration strategies were quite similar in the research neighbourhoods, the outcomes in terms of neighbourhood change varied, which could – partly – be attributed to the local contexts and characteristics of the neighbourhoods. In other words, the findings demonstrate that the ‘geography of gentrification’ is not only of importance at the national scale, but also at the scale of the city and neighbourhood.

Secondly, the differences in the practice of the regeneration between the neighbourhoods could be related to different goals and priorities of the actors involved, as was discussed earlier. The municipalities had to deal with housing associations in the regeneration of the neighbourhoods, all having their own objectives and priorities, which resulted in negotiation between actors. In these already highly-complex arrangements, chapter 5 demonstrated that the national government prescribed the inclusion of another stakeholder in neighbourhood governance: regeneration plans had to be discussed with residents. For residents, this meant that they were able to address their concerns in the neighbourhood through participating in formal decision-making processes – instead of by resisting these policies or by leaving the neighbourhood. However, the implementation of resident participation was not that easy – both for governing actors and residents. For governing actors, residents were only one of the negotiation partners in the formulation of regeneration plans. In the first stage of regeneration, this implied that residents were included at the end of the policy-cycle, when major decisions had already been made. Although in the second stage of regeneration, governing actors implemented various participation mechanism, the achievements of residents in shaping policy plans still remained limited.

6.4 Agenda for future research

The aim of this research was to contribute to the ‘geography of neighbourhood change’ by exploring the manifestation of processes of upgrading and downgrading in the highly-regulated institutional context of the Netherlands. What this dissertation demonstrated is that there is a great variety in the social and physical changes that may occur in urban neighbourhoods. There is not just one type of upgrading or downgrading process, but there are multiple processes at work simultaneously. This
dissertation demonstrated the interplay between social and physical neighbourhood change, the importance of residential and social mobility of households and the impact of policies and interventions of governing actors. Although the findings provided much insight into processes of upgrading and downgrading in the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands, the findings also raised a number of questions which provide directions for future research.

Firstly, this dissertation encourages scholars to conduct more refined studies that show and explain the place-specificity of neighbourhood upgrading and downgrading. In the academic literature, there is a tendency to generalize processes of neighbourhood change. The knowledge on gentrification in particular has evolved significantly since the concept was coined in the 1960s: while it is increasingly considered a globalized phenomenon (e.g. Smith, 2002), in fact it does not operate uniformly everywhere. This dissertation demonstrated that the ‘geography of neighbourhood change’ is not only of importance at the national scale, but also at the scale of the city and neighbourhood, and stressed the importance of the institutional and housing market contexts in which the neighbourhoods are embedded in understanding the complex processes. More refined studies, which demonstrate and unravel these place-specific characteristics, may contribute to our understanding of neighbourhood change.

Secondly, the results of this dissertation suggest the importance of further examining and unravelling the relationship between changes in the lives of individual residents – in terms of residential and social mobility – and neighbourhood change. This study demonstrated the importance of both processes in understanding upgrading and downgrading. With respect to social upgrading and downgrading, most studies tend to use income data, but educational and occupational data are other important indicators of social neighbourhood change. For instance, gentrification is often associated with the in-migration of highly-educated households, working in the tertiary or quaternary sector, which is assumed to lead to the displacement or replacement of lower-educated working-class households (Hamnett, 1991; Lees et al., 2008). Especially when these in-migrating households are young and have only recently started their working career, their income levels may be modest when moving in, but may increase significantly in the (near) future (e.g. Van Criekingen and Decroley, 2003). Despite their modest income levels, these households can change the neighbourhood ambience reflecting their tastes and values, which might lead to indirect displacement of sitting households. Moreover, it can be argued that students in particular may enter neighbourhoods with modest incomes, but within a few years may experience a marked
increase in earnings. This may explain the finding that sitting residents seem to be a driver of neighbourhood change. In order to obtain a better understanding of the contribution of in-migrating, out-migrating and sitting households to neighbourhood change, it would therefore be valuable to examine educational and professional data. In addition, it would be worthwhile to examine and unravel the relationship between residential and social mobility and neighbourhood change in other – less regulated – contexts than the Netherlands. This research stressed that the observed processes of incumbent upgrading and relatively low income level of in-migrating households could (at least partly) be attributed to the highly-regulated Dutch context, which is, among other things, characterized by the presence of a large social housing stock. This raises the question what the relationship is between residential and social mobility of households in countries with a comparatively smaller role for governing actors, such as Anglo-Saxon contexts.

Thirdly, the Social Statistical Database of Statistics Netherlands, which was used for this research, would be very useful to go even further in understanding residential mobility and the dynamics of neighbourhoods by, for instance, following individuals in their housing and social careers over a certain period of time, in order to obtain a better understanding of the social dynamics that manifest in urban neighbourhoods.

Fourthly, although this research examined the role of governing actors in generating neighbourhood change, the focus was on creating upgrading and the question can be raised whether processes of downgrading can also be related to policies and interventions of governing actors or to the absence of policies and interventions. For instance, the research findings demonstrated that governing actors have to make strategic choices in which neighbourhoods and neighbourhood aspects they invest (most). This implies that some neighbourhoods are selected for regeneration, while others are characterized by significantly lower levels of investment or even by disinvestment, which might lead to downgrading. In addition, Boterman and Van Gent (2014) observed that in Amsterdam, the selling off of social housing may contribute to processes of ethnic polarisation between centrally-located, pre-war constructed neighbourhoods and peripherally-located, post-war constructed neighbourhoods. It would therefore be worthwhile to investigate the relationship between the role of governing actors and downgrading.

Finally, this dissertation focused on the highly-regulated context of the Netherlands and examined – among other factors – the way in which governing actors generate upgrading. Although the role of market actors in generating neighbourhood
change was beyond the scope of this research, the question can be raised what the highly-regulated Dutch context means for the possibilities of market actors to generate neighbourhood change, as they have to operate within the set of rules and regulations established by the government.