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SUMMARY

THE FUTURE OF THE DUTCH INNER CITY 1960-1978

This thesis opens up a new perspective on the politics of urban redevelopment in Dutch cities during the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically it examines the tensions between politicians, private developers and citizens in determining the reconstruction of central districts in the cities of Utrecht, The Hague and Amsterdam. In order to understand why politicians decided to work together with developers and how these well-intentioned public-private partnerships eventually collapsed, this research focuses on company records, the records of action group meetings held at the International Institute of Social History, council archives in each of the three cities, archives of the planning ministry and relevant newspapers and booklets from the period.

In this way, the growing tensions between developers, city administrators and the public in a period of rapid urban change are investigated. Drawing on a limited historiography of the relationship between local authorities and commercial interests, and on urban protest movements in the period, this thesis brings together for the first time the interaction between these three actors into a single analytical frame. In order to understand the correlation between broader societal developments and the actors involved with or relating to the Dutch urban renewal order, this thesis engages with notions of modernity and modernisation. By focussing on the experiential aspects of societal change rather than our contemporary understanding of these umbrella concepts, it becomes clear how and why the urban renewal agenda was so fundamentally altered during the 1970s.

In order to bring structure and agency together, this thesis investigates both post-war urban change and the actors encouraging or protesting against this change. During the 1950s and 1960s progressive and future-oriented thinking dominated the field of planning in Western Europe. Economic and demographic growth led to ever-rising ambitions. As society was becoming more affluent, new possibilities opened up for the implementation of urban renewal agendas, which had been formulated long before the Second World War, but had been deemed unrealistic due to political turmoil and lack of funding. Western European welfare states allowed a majority of citizens to share in the benefits of economic prosperity.

The era of high modernism, which was closely aligned with the rise of this welfare state, had already reached its zenith in the early 1960s. By that time, signs of rapid and radical change were discernible all over Western Europe. The Netherlands was no exception in this zeal for modernisation. Whereas the 1950s should be seen as a decade of recovery and agenda setting, the 1960s were a period in which the country was actually transformed in fundamental ways. Construction of the so-called Delta Works, which were to keep the country safe from sea flooding, and Flevoland, a vast land reclamation project, were in full swing. The port of Rotterdam and Schiphol Airport were growing at tremendous rates. In the countryside, the government was pursuing a thorough redistribution of farming land.

As this dissertation demonstrates, nowhere was the increasingly rapid pace of modern life more tangible than in Dutch cities. Plans were launched for satellite towns with no fewer than 500,000 inhabitants, as well as for the wholesale demolition of nineteenth-century areas surrounding the larger

cities' historic cores to make way for multi-lane expressways, shopping centres and spacious office blocks. In order to accommodate a growing number of cars, increasing amounts of office space and more retail and shopping venues, several Dutch municipalities considered the comprehensive redevelopment of their inner cities, or at least those areas that planners deemed obsolete and outdated. The inner cities were thought to be in urgent need of redevelopment schemes that would correspond to the large-scale, uniform changes in society – setting in motion a process of creative destruction on a spatially fixed level.

In order to understand how the urban renewal order worked, this thesis acknowledges that planners were not merely designing a better future but also responding to contemporary needs and demands on behalf of locally elected officials. In the Netherlands, the future of inner cities was firmly in the hands of locally elected councils and is therefore investigated as such. Almost without exception, all through the 1960s and 1970s the aldermen of the larger cities were members of the powerful Dutch Labour Party, which means electoral change was very limited. These officials were not operating in a local vacuum. More often than not, local politicians were cooperating with a wide range of advisory boards, interest groups, independent researchers and, last but not least, private developers.

During the 1960s strong alliances were forged between these public officials and the representatives of private enterprise. These public-private partnerships determined and reinforced the reform impulses underpinning national and local urban renewal agendas. Despite this heterogeneous composition, historians have almost solely focused on the role of planners, dismissing the political interaction between the different stakeholders and the public at large. Historical studies on urban renewal have largely neglected political meetings discussing the run-up to renewal schemes, instead focusing on the plans as they were actually implemented or presented to the public. Consequently, current Dutch historiography has painted a picture in which an elite of technocratic planners determined the future of inner cities.

This thesis demonstrates that this image is largely misleading case for two reasons; firstly, historians have not fully taken into account the ways in which planners and politicians experienced the challenges of urban renewal. Secondly, and more importantly, historians have discussed the planning system as an independent entity operating in a political vacuum. The sources used here allow for a different reading of urban planning, one that is much more about governance and its actors than about the contents of finalised plans. This reorientation is presented in the first chapter through a discussion of nation-wide planning issues, together with different levels of plan and decision-making. It will become clear how during the 1960s the rise in car ownership, growing population numbers and socio-economic shifts resulted in mounting demographic and economic pressures on inner cities, leading politicians and developers to envision a future that was geared towards the comprehensive accommodation of the automobile age and a post-industrial economy aligned with mass consumerism. The introductory chapter is followed by three chapters presenting five case studies of exemplary redevelopment schemes for the inner cities of Utrecht, The Hague and Amsterdam.

The construction history of the privately initiated redevelopment project Hoog Catharijne, located in the inner city of Utrecht, is object of study in the second chapter. Hoog Catharijne is a classic example of how public and private actors attempted to work together in the field of urban planning during the post-war era. The plan encompassed the redevelopment of the city's central railway station and an adjacent nineteenth-century quarter, which were regarded as inefficient and obsolete at the time. Furthermore, the scheme included the sealing of a canal to give way to a multi-lane arterial road,

parking spaces for thousands of cars and an elevated indoor pedestrian area that would connect local businesses and shopping venues to the old inner city. Utrecht was the first Dutch city to co-operate with a private developer to bring about this modernist urban future: Hoog Catharijne was bound to be the largest urban renewal operation ever carried out in the Netherlands.

When the Dutch construction company Bredero launched Hoog Catharijne in 1962, virtually everyone in Utrecht praised this vast shopping and office complex. Only during its construction phase in the early 1970s the public consensus altered. Criticism came from young professionals in the field of urban planning as well as local protest groups, eventually followed by local politicians. At the heart of this conflict were two opposing visions about how to physically shape urban modernity. An optional scheme, encompassing a venue for cultural performances designed by architect Herman Hertzberger, would abolish an arterial road connecting Hoog Catharijne's shops and offices to the old inner city. It was the way in which Bredero opposed this alternative that sparked off serious protests. The discussion over the plan for a musical venue became the first public encounter between a consumerist and culturalist vision of Utrecht's urban future, demonstrating how contemporaries attached notions of local democracy to central urban spaces.

The third chapter focuses on the urban renewal agenda of The Hague. Just as any other Dutch city in the western part of the country, The Hague was experiencing rapid economic and demographic growth in the early 1960s. Simultaneously, the city's central districts were rapidly depopulating and decaying. As the city's planning department frequently emphasised, it wanted to co-operate with private developers to stop this spiral of dereliction. In 1961 a developer by the name of Reinder Zwolsman presented a vast redevelopment scheme for a centrally located inner city district, encompassing offices, a six-storey parking garage and a 400-bed hotel, as well as several catering, entertainment and shopping facilities. Soon after the presentation of the plan, the city's alderman and his planners joined forces with Zwolsman to evict local tenants and tear down the area's remaining properties.

Despite this flying start, the developments in The Hague demonstrate that politicians themselves were highly ambiguous about the ways in which they facilitated progress. Moreover, they frequently considered the modernisation tendencies that required urban renewal to be outside of their control. They were by no means brave men envisioning a bright future for the inner city. Still, when a private redevelopment project came into reach, an informal pro-growth coalition surfaced. After all, during its early years the redevelopment of central districts was a highly capitalist enterprise – even in Western European welfare states. Zwolsman was thought to be able to coordinate and steer The Hague's urban society towards the collectively defined objective of an economically sturdy and car-friendly inner city. In the end his plans were cancelled due to a combination of financial mismanagement within his own organisation and the continuing interference of state planning agencies.

The fourth and last chapter discusses three different case studies in the inner city of Amsterdam. Local politicians assumed that the new economy, dominated by business, finance and consumerism, had to find its place and thrive in the city's central spaces. They were eager to kick-start urban renewal programmes by granting planning permissions to several local entrepreneurs. With a political focus on participation, equal say and social activism, local residents however presented developers as undemocratic bodies with illegitimated power over their living environment. After the arrangements of the 1960s were made and the contracts were sealed, the power of developers could often not be brought within the range of democratic consensus, leading to conflict situations from the

early 1970s onwards. As the Amsterdam chapter demonstrates, we should be careful not to sketch a too simplistic and monolithic image of the Dutch urban renewal order. When researching the politics behind this order, close attention should be paid to shifting positions and the mutual conflicts between blocks that at first sight might seem to represent a singular interest, but actually have a more complex motive within the realm of urban planning.

By taking into account the experience of modernity from an urban governance perspective, this thesis suggests moving the focus away from plan making to decision taking. The alliances that planners, politicians and developers forged in the 1960s to secure and promote local renewal agendas were by no means static. Instead, they were subject to socio-economic change, financial restraint, changing resonances of expert discourses and the alleged public good, which contributed to the doubtful mindsets of elected representatives in particular. Their experience of these far-reaching societal changes was the decisive factor for the acceptance of new ideas regarding the renewal of dilapidated inner city areas, leading to a radical readjustment of Dutch urban renewal agendas in the early 1970s. By this time, a combination of structural economic and demographic changes, the rise of urban action groups and new insights into how cities worked was discrediting the agendas of the 1960s.

In conclusion, this thesis emphasises that professional and political elites designed and implemented redevelopment schemes not out of utopian aspirations but out of a compulsive need and sometimes even a fear of what was yet to come. Planners and politicians expected the Netherlands to be a fully motorised, overpopulated and densely built-up country by the year 2000. They thought that these dynamics could be facilitated, but not steered – all the more since they were extremely difficult to comprehend. The main reason most urban renewal schemes never materialised or were heavily amended at least lay in governance practices within the Dutch urban renewal order. These governance practices disclose interrogations of modernity between a range of actors who frequently displayed feelings of doubt, hesitation and ambivalence about the future, leading to particular political and spatial outcomes.