Afstand en betrokkenheid in de gemengde wijk: over afwijzende en loyale groepen bij stedelijke vernieuwing
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Citation for published version (APA):

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INTRODUCTION AND QUESTION

Over the last five years, more than 40,000 social housing units were demolished as part of the restructuring of the housing stock within disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. These were often inexpensive flats built in the post-war era, torn down to make way for new, more expensive rental or owner-occupied homes. This long-term process of urban renewal, launched nationally in 1997, is far from over. The average share of social housing units in these districts is to shrink from 65 percent to 42 percent, while the proportion of middle class residents is to rise through demolition as well as the selling and upgrading of existing homes. It is hoped that greater economic diversity will make these neighbourhoods more liveable, stable and sustainable. A further assumption among policy-makers is that income-mixing will create ties of commitment between the different social groups and that vulnerable groups will absorb the values and standards of the middle class, whose members are assigned the responsibility for this uplift. Policy, then, postulates a middle-class burden.

Domestic scholars have criticized the Dutch government’s premises on social mix and cross-class solidarity. They point to Anglo-Saxon countries in which similar diversification measures have been attempted, where researchers concluded that spatial proximity does not lead to solidarity but to withdrawal behaviour and even to social conflict. However, given the strong economic and racial inequalities in these countries, conclusions reached there do not necessarily apply to the more egalitarian Dutch case. For their part, Dutch researchers thus far have found that urban renewal projects (where middle-class groups enter lower-class areas) often realize their objectives for the neighbourhood, including improving the quality of life, reputation and security of the district. Another important finding is that interventions in deprived areas do not lead to large-scale displacement, the disruption of old
networks among residents, or to rampant ‘yuppification’. On the other hand, the Dutch approach to urban renewal rarely helps disadvantaged residents in mixed income neighbourhoods to climb socially (even if they meet fewer obstacles to social advancement and more readily absorb dominant values). Social problems do not immediately resolve themselves, but persist or migrate to other areas. It was also found that social classes lead parallel lives, which hardly helps relations between them. And while residents tend to be satisfied with their new housing, they often remain disappointed with the social composition of their mixed neighbourhoods.

All in all, we have a ‘mixed’ picture of pluses, minuses and question marks. In the Netherlands, it has yet to be established that different social classes residing together in renewed areas leads to strained relations. Given the absence of social contact, most researchers assume that this is the logical next step. If their assumption is correct, social mixing within disadvantaged neighbourhoods, even in a relatively egalitarian welfare state such as the Netherlands,\(^1\) will fuel negative class consciousness.

The critics recognize that in general egalitarianism is firmly rooted among members of the Dutch middle class, with especially highly educated groups taking an interest in the issues affecting the most disadvantaged in society. This group is active in civil society, supports progressive taxation, has a relatively positive picture of social diversity and supports social programs and charities that focus on vulnerable groups. Members of the middle class indeed often look beyond their personal interests.\(^2\) But many scholars argue that in cases of spatial proximity, this compassionate attitude melts like snow under the sun - then a fear of having their own social positions undermined ‘unavoidably’ kicks in. This assumption – which goes back to the classical social theories of Simmel and Park on mental detachment and social distinction in situations of social mixing – posits that under conditions of spatial proximity, lofty

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\(^1\) This egalitarianism is reflected in the relatively large size of the Dutch social housing sector (32 percent of the total stock), which shelters a relatively heterogeneous mix of residents. Dutch neighbourhoods that contain many of these rented units do not necessarily suffer from social problems.

\(^2\) Several partially complementary explanations offer themselves for this cross-class ‘vertical’ involvement, such as the supposed civilizing effects of higher education (Hello et al. 2004: 264). Another explanation is the rise of post-materialist attitudes in Western countries: with greater confidence in their own positions, more people endorse the idea of equality between social groups (Inglehart, 1977). A third explanation is enlightened self-interest: the uplift of the poor is supported in the hope that they will not descend into hooliganism or criminality (De Swaan, 1993).
principles lose out to narrow self-interest. The literature on income-mixing is dominated by this view of the middle class as a group that tries to avoid disagreeable encounters and is not ‘really’ open to lower class residents. Their solidarity with poor groups living in close proximity is regarded as empty, and is often illustrated by examples of inhabitants of middle-class areas rejecting the presence of lower class residents in their midst. The same mechanism is expected in the case of urban renewal.

The alleged middle class rejection of lower income neighbours might be prevented if (urban renewal) policies focused on working with groups with less social distance from the most disadvantaged residents. “When differences between people are small, residents of an area can develop tolerance towards each other [...] More extreme population heterogeneity is not likely to have the same result” (Gans, 1961: 178). Echoes of this argument continue to inform thinking about urban restructuring and renewal, where examples from upwardly mobile ethnic neighbourhoods are often held up as role models for the ethnic lower class. This view is consistent with theories of ethnic mixing where significant socio-cultural distance between groups is considered a hindrance in many ways. Neighbourhoods where the highest and lowest status ethnic groups live together do not easily foster mutual understanding or cultural adaptation. ‘Extremely’ ethnically mixed populations have indeed fuelled the dominant group’s aversion of others – and are an underlying cause of withdrawal behaviour, often on both sides. While the impact of economic diversity on Dutch neighbourhoods is not yet fully understood, most researchers believe that the mixing of groups with significant income differences within urban renewal sites will lead to polarization, in a similar manner as ethnic diversity does in culturally heterogeneous surroundings.

We thus see two dominant hypotheses. First, that any spatial proximity causes a sharp change in the attitudes of middle-class groups, with solidarity giving way to the rejection of poorer neighbours. And second, that only insignificant social distance between classes in the neighbourhood is likely to maintain some middle-class involvement, thereby overcoming the ‘iron rule’ of separation and avoidance. Do these two dominant hypotheses about social distance, spatial distance and involvement also apply to Dutch efforts at income-mixing in disadvantaged areas, or are there caveats to be heeded? Can we conclude that urban renewal is fuelling negative middle-class attitudes towards lower income groups, or does disappointment over the social composition of mixed-income neighbourhoods have other causes? Are members of the middle class
with (ethnic) similarities to the most disadvantaged residents indeed the most supportive of the mixed living that results from urban renewal, or are there other candidates? The current research focuses on the following questions:

1. Does the spatial proximity of social classes in Dutch urban renewal districts lead to inter-class tensions or withdrawal behaviour? Which groups show little involvement with other groups in these mixed neighbourhoods? In other words, who are the NIMBY (not in my backyard) refuseniks of urban renewal?  
2. Which middle class groups in these mixed neighbourhoods involve themselves with disadvantaged residents? In other words, who are the loyal WIMBY (welcome in my backyard) proponents of mixed living after urban renewal? What role does social distance play in this loyalty?

OPERATIONALIZATION

Involvement refers to positive solidarity between individuals or groups. This solidarity has two empirical components. First, an attitude of engagement with individuals or groups, inspired by certain values and beliefs. Second, the actual behaviour and (in)formal rules towards these others that result from this attitude. This thesis focuses primarily on inclusive attitudes rather than behaviour. Other studies of mixed-income neighbourhoods often use concepts such as social capital (networking) or social cohesion (among residents). Academic claims on involvement are thus largely based on analysis of social contact: little contact is seen as an indication of low involvement. But whether contact is a reliable indicator of involvement remains uncertain. In any case, attitudes towards involvement fall from view: how groups think about each other, whether they view each other with sympathy or antipathy, is rarely considered in such studies. In this thesis, it receives extensive attention (see next section).

In this study, small geographical distance refers to people living in the same neighbourhood. While urban renewal obviously involves multiple spatial scales – from the residential neighbourhood to the city to the urban region – the focus is essentially on the neighbourhood. The social distance between different groups is a much more relative concept than spatial distance and largely a matter of perception. Social distance refers to how people accept or reject others, how close or far away their social positions are.
The research questions are posed to three case studies. Case studies can be described as in-depth studies of the particular, and may well serve to falsify general hypotheses (Campbell, 2003: 422). The studies make use of both quantitative and qualitative sources. Quantitative data are based on door-to-door surveys distributed in the study neighbourhoods. The first case study (Hoogvliet) combined several surveys, the largest of which N=1,684. In case study 2 (F-buurt), N=120. In the third survey (De Geuzenbaan), N=143. The responses were always checked for representativeness. Results are presented via descriptive statistics. Qualitative data serve to illustrate the trends found in the surveys.

Who rejects?
I examined friction between groups in Hoogvliet, a satellite town of Rotterdam and a site of large-scale urban renewal. Who was against whom? Did higher status groups reject lower status groups? Or did urban renewal itself feed negative attitudes among 'better' tenants vis-à-vis the 'worse' ones? Data from five (including my own) studies of urban renewal in Hoogvliet were re-used to test the hypotheses. These studies focused on the integration of networks, transfers of social capital, residents’ social mobility, the relocation of the elderly, and the relation between the different goals (local management or social mobility) of urban renewal. Sufficient data were gathered to venture answers to our questions.

Hoogvliet, located 15 km southwest of Rotterdam, was built after World War Two for workers in the petrochemical industry. The district entered a downward spiral with the economic crisis of the 1970s. Problems with finding tenants, nuisance, crime, drugs, debt and poor school performance came to overshadow parts of Hoogvliet. Since the early 1990s, Hoogvliet (37,000 inhabitants) has been the site of one of the longest-running urban renovation projects in the Netherlands. The project, which posits that ‘everyone gains from renewal’, includes a reduction in the social housing stock from 66 to 40 percent. While urban renewal has reduced the neighbourhood’s degradation and led to moderate changes in the area’s ethnic composition, there remains dissatisfaction with the district’s demography. Among whom is this discontent palpable?

The study confirmed that there is indeed much discontent over Hoogvliet’s post-renewal social composition. It also showed that this discontent is found
not so much among those in the middle or higher status groups, but among the ‘better’ tenants: native Dutch living in social housing. Their bitterness is largely directed at the lack of change following urban renewal: the persistence of social problems as well as the rate at which ‘problem households’ relocate. Their main concern is that now more ‘new people with different cultures’ share their neighbourhood. Most of the original native Dutch (both the upwardly mobile and immobile) tenants welcome the arrival of the middle class (‘or else it would really become a problem neighbourhood’) but are unhappy that urban renewal has brought the ethnically mixed outside world closer to home. Income-mixing – at first seen as a promise of social restoration – has delivered disappointing results, with the unexpected spatial proximity of ethnic others fuelling antagonism among the ‘better’ tenants. For their part, newly arrived members of the native Dutch middle class seem much less immersed in this us-and-them thinking; they chose to live in a mixed area and favour peaceful coexistence. They can hardly be considered ‘vindictive’ – or as the ‘anxious middle class’.

In Hoogvliet, the NIMBY (‘not in my backyard’) attitude appears in a different form than the literature suggests. In the aforementioned studies on Hoogvliet as well as in other studies of urban renewal, most authors observe ethnic tension between tenants, although the relationship between this tension and urban renewal is rarely discussed. Some expect inter-ethnic friction to be overshadowed by inter-class friction. Even though the process unfolds under our own eyes, we often miss the fact that urban renewal sharpens tensions between the ‘better’ and ‘worse’ tenants.

The insights from Hoogvliet have broader applicability. Disappointment over the limited impact of urban renewal and greater sensitivity to sharing space with people of different backgrounds are also found elsewhere. Such revanchism is not necessarily racial or ethnic. In Amsterdam’s Bijlmer district, ‘good’ black residents complain about the presence of black drug dealers.

Who is loyal?

Are there exceptions to the ‘iron rule’ of separation and avoidance among the middle classes in Amsterdam’s urban renewal districts? Which middle class groups are loyal to disadvantaged residents and feel positively connected to them? We distinguish between two ideal-type WIMBY (‘welcome in my backyard’) constituents, primarily by their social distance to the disadvantaged residents.
Less social distance can create an *internal route* to involvement. The differences between members of the middle class and the disadvantaged residents in both socio-economic and socio-cultural terms is only a matter of degree. Through internalized norms (‘noblesse oblige’), better-off residents with multiple neighbourhood relations present themselves as an elite group for those community members with fewer opportunities. They continue to live in mixed-income neighbourhoods because of the better housing opportunities offered by urban renewal. As mentioned above, the internal route to involvement is the dominant assumption among social scientists and urban planners.

Greater social distance can create an *external route* to involvement. Self-confident, highly-educated members of the middle class are not occupied by their own survival, which allows for more inclusive attitudes. They have little in common with the neighbourhood’s poor inhabitants. They have high cultural capital, think positively about disadvantaged groups and find social mixing to be an essential part of urban reality. Due to self-interest (affordable housing) and ideological reasons, they choose to live in mixed neighbourhoods.

The two models of vertical cross-class involvement were identified in interviews conducted among members of the active middle class in the Amsterdam district of New West. Representatives of the internal route to involvement, including upwardly mobile ethnic minorities with similar economic and cultural traits to the disadvantaged residents, considered themselves as role models and emphasized their obvious connection to the neighbourhood and its residents. Among representatives of the external route (including white, educated, social and creative professionals), social mixing was seen as enriching and instructive – as a social ideal. Their loyalty was however limited by concerns about crime, education and much else. Two Amsterdam case studies thus serve to test the hypotheses about middle class loyalty to their mixed neighbourhoods. Surveys in the F-buurt (F area) in Amsterdam Zuid Oost (Bijlmer) and in De Geuzenbaan in Geuzenveld were conducted among representative groups of the middle class.

The Bijlmer, located in Amsterdam Southeast, fell into decline shortly after its completion in the early seventies. The ‘city of tomorrow’, with its large honeycomb flats, did not appeal to the urban middle class or to those native Dutch groups fleeing to the suburbs. The Bijlmer instead became an impoverished neighbourhood of Surinamese and Antilleans. Given its high unemployment, (self-) marginalization and crime, economically successful
people were quick to flee. Particularly the D, E and F areas of Bijlmer Centre suffered ill repute. Through the reduction of social housing (from 93 to 55 percent across the Bijlmer, and from 100 to 52 percent in the F neighbourhood) and through interventions in the urban infrastructure, the Bijlmer (45,000 inhabitants) must become a more ‘normal’ and stable district. After initial resistance in the early nineties (due to fear of being pushed out), the population voted to support demolition and new development, even when it concerned their own homes. Almost two-thirds of the residents moved to new homes; the most important group to climb the housing ladder were the Surinamese. Even after renewal, the Bijlmer and especially the F area (3,200 inhabitants) remained a predominantly black neighbourhood. While sensitivity towards deviant behaviour has risen with urban renewal, most residents are satisfied with the improvements in the district’s status as well as its ethnic diversity.

The Westelijke Tuinsteden (Western garden cities) were built after World War Two as safe, green, healthy alternatives to Amsterdam’s overcrowded urban areas. They did not achieve the ideal of community that informed their original creation, but the space for individual freedom made the Tuinsteden a long-time favourite on the housing market. But decline began in the late 1980s as the middle class moved on and an ethnic underclass moved in; the media portrayed the area as a model of failed integration as ethnic groups withdrew into their own parallel worlds. Through urban renewal, the Westelijke Tuinsteden (132,000 inhabitants) should rise again in the urban hierarchy, with its pockets of isolation brought into the mainstream. Across the Tuinsteden, the social housing stock is to decrease from 76 to 45 percent; in Geuzenveld (15,000 inhabitants), from 80 to 50 percent. The new homes attract the upwardly mobile ethnic middle class of Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese as well as starters on the Amsterdam housing market. The renewal began in the Geuzenbaan, an area of almost 1,000 residents lying largely in neighbourhood 9 and partly in neighbourhood 8 of Geuzenveld. Urban renewal has yet to translate into higher appreciation for the district, or for its mixing of income and ethnic groups.

As we can see, both areas have witnessed a radical conversion of their housing stock. Successful people who move up the housing market ladder constitute(d) an important target for intervention in both neighbourhoods; both have focused on the internal route to involvement. Yet one is a success and the other is not (yet). The F-buurt showcases a self-conscious Surinamese middle class apparently exhibiting solidarity with tenants from their own ethnic
group, while in the Geuzenbaan the middle class seems to opt for withdrawal. These assumptions are tested in the study.

In the surveys, solidarity with underprivileged neighbours is not measured by contacts between classes, but by feelings of loyalty. The analysis makes use of four indicators, which together serve as a scale of loyalty: (1) the valuation of the ratio of rental to owner-occupied homes; (2) the appraisal of the composition of the population; (3) the perceived commitment to the neighbourhood’s residents; and (4) the intention to maintain social distance vis-à-vis the occupants of low-cost rental housing. Tested against this scale of loyalty, the F area poorly fits the hypothesis of spatial proximity leading to an 'exodus' or ‘crowding out’ of vertical cross-class involvement. The middle class in the F area is broadly loyal to the mixed district. But even more remarkable is that the loyalty of the Surinamese middle class towards the neighbourhood and its poorer residents is surpassed by that of the native Dutch middle class, whose members are more positive about the area’s social composition, feel more connected to the residents of the district, are more positive about the mix of housing types and have fewer objections to contact with lower-status groups. The loyalty of the Surinamese and other ethnic middle class groups is slightly more conditional: they seem more afraid that they themselves or the district may fall back. The findings in this case study speak against Gans' hypothesis that loyalty in mixed-income neighbourhoods is only created through similarity.

The situation in the Geuzenbaan is a kind of mirror image of what prevails in the F area. The middle class here lives indeed withdrawn from the mixed neighbourhood, and its scores on the loyalty scale are much lower than in the F area. Most of its members worry about the neighbourhood’s educational climate and ethnic composition. If there is any pattern to unravel in the low loyalty scores in the Geuzenbaan, it tends to support the internal route to involvement: as socio-cultural distance increases, loyalty scores decrease.

RECAPITULATION

Members of the middle class in the Netherlands are generally well disposed to groups that are socially and spatially distant from themselves. This generates significant cross-class solidarity. But when middle-class groups move into restored neighbourhoods, they rarely exhibit ‘open’ social behaviour to the ‘other’ residents. Nevertheless, members of the middle class who move into
these neighbourhoods are not the ones who most vocally complain about the residential composition following urban renewal. Most of the complaints come from the ‘better’ tenants of the lower classes who are disappointed that urban renewal has not resulted in a larger exodus of ‘undesirable’ tenants. The answer to the first research question, then, is that the assumption that urban renewal will lead to inter-class conflict is mistaken. Tension exists primarily within the lower class and not between classes. Long-term native Dutch tenants are, at least in Hoogvliet, the main proponents of ‘not in my backyard’.

On the other end of the spectrum are those small middle-class groups which – as an exception to the ‘iron rule’ of separation and avoidance – feel involved with the ‘other’ residents. This pertains not only to groups that are broadly similar to the disadvantaged residents (the internal route to involvement). Greater social distance (the external route to involvement) also leaves possibilities for mild forms of solidarity, which mostly appear in the form of quiet loyalty. This was most evident in the Bijlmer’s F area, where alongside the ‘black solidarity’ of the Surinamese middle class, highly educated native Dutch groups involved themselves with the ‘less promising’ residents of the new mixed neighbourhood. The insights from the F area fit in other recent findings suggesting that among higher educated groups the tolerance for ‘other’ neighbours doesn’t evaporate in case of spatial proximity. The answer to the second research question is thus that (in an advanced stage of urban renewal), both upwardly mobile ethnic minorities and the ‘new’ middle class of highly educated, post-materialist native Dutch are loyal to the mixed-income neighbourhood and support the presence of its less affluent residents. They are the main proponents of ‘welcome in my backyard’. Their solidarity with less privileged groups in the mixed neighbourhood, while light (more in attitude than in behaviour), is not empty.