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Inequality in the gentrifying European city

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Publication date

2017

Document Version

Other version

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Citation for published version (APA):

Hochstenbach, C. (2017). *Inequality in the gentrifying European city*.

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CHAPTER 3 – Stakeholder representations of gentrification in Amsterdam and Berlin

Abstract

In recent years several studies have highlighted how gentrification strategies are imposed under the discursive umbrella of ‘social mixing’. However, most evidence is based on Anglo-Saxon experiences. This chapter sets out to expand the geography of gentrification by looking at the representation of processes and policies of gentrification as put forward by key stakeholders in the Nord-Neukölln (Berlin) and Indische Buurt (Amsterdam). It shows that, in both contexts, stakeholders and policy documents actively engage with the concept of gentrification, rather than avoid it. Due to public-policy influence and local criticisms this engagement differs between both cases. In Nord-Neukölln the term is heavily contested and policymakers attempt to refute accusations of gentrification, while in the Indische Buurt, the process is explicitly pursued as a positive policy instrument by policymakers. Different representations within each case are shown to be influenced by the characteristics of in-moving and out-moving residents; the employed timeframe; and the perceived influence of institutions on urban regeneration.

Introduction

Over the years the literature on gentrification has conceptually and geographically expanded. An important addition to this literature examines the shift towards generalised, blueprint strategies of state-led gentrification implemented in a range of contexts (Hackworth 2002; Smith 2002; Uitermark et al. 2007). A crucial element of state-led gentrification is the way it is represented by policymakers, other stakeholders and in general discourse (see Lees 1996). A growing body of critical literature highlights how gentrification is represented as a positive policy instrument to enhance, inter alia, the liveability, social order and residential composition of disadvantaged neighbourhoods to prevent negative neighbourhood effects (e.g. Bolt et al. 2010; Uitermark et al. 2007; Walks & Maaranen 2008). Furthermore, various scholars have highlighted gentrification strategies are frequently imposed under the discursive umbrella of social mixing to avoid the association with class struggles and displacement (Davidson 2012; Slater 2004; Smith 2002).

This chapter questions the notion that gentrification has become a generalised blueprint strategy, sugar-coated with the policy vocabulary of social mixing or similar terminology. These assertions are predominantly based on studies from the Anglo-Saxon context. We know little about how and to what extent discourses and specific representations of gentrification can legitimise or delegitimise policies of state-led gentrification in other contexts (with the notable recent exception of Rose et al. 2013), where the term gentrification is often less known and hence less value laden (Lees 2012). Thus, a knowledge gap exists regarding the way different contexts can influence the way representations of gentrification as part of public policies are construed.

In this chapter I contend that gentrification is not so much avoided by involved stakeholders in the context of two neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and Berlin. Instead, stakeholders and policy documents engage with the concept gentrification in various ways. This chapter proposes three context-specific elements that can influence stakeholders' representations and can, in turn, also be used by the same stakeholders to construe their desired representations. These elements are the characteristics of in-moving, sitting and out-moving residents; the employed timeframe to assess neighbourhood change (e.g. shorter-term or longer-term focus); and the perceived extent and form of influence of local institutions on urban regeneration. Stakeholders can potentially emphasise or suppress these contextual elements in their representations of localised gentrification processes to their own interests.

This chapter focuses on the Continental-European context by conducting a comparative analysis of two cases situated within the Dutch and German context. It investigates the (re)production of different representations of gentrification (Lees 1996) by different stakeholders and in official policy documents. This chapter also assesses how both contexts, specifically the three contextual elements highlighted above, influence these representations. The main research question of this chapter is:

How is gentrification represented by different stakeholders and expressed in local discourses in the context of Nord-Neukölln (Berlin) and Indische Buurt (Amsterdam)? How do both specific contexts inform these representations?

Nord-Neukölln (specifically Reuterquartier and Schillerpromenade) and Indische Buurt are selected for two main reasons. First, while Amsterdam and Berlin are characterised by different housing systems, traditionally dominated by social-rental and private-rental housing respectively, both housing contexts are subject to processes of neoliberalisation (Aalbers & Holm 2008; Van Gent 2013). Second, in both neighbourhood contexts gentrification started relatively recently, and the changes in these neighbourhoods can be defined as marginal gentrification (Rose 1996), because in-moving residents are relatively low income themselves and the 'old' character and population of the neighbourhood have not (yet) been displaced. This enables the cross-case comparison of local representations and discourses.

The remainder of this article begins with the theoretical framework to explain the rise of state-led gentrification, its link to social mixing, and address the contextual factors of the role of institutions, residential mobility, and issues related to time. Next, I elaborate on discourse and representations in the methodological framework. Third, empirical evidence from Berlin and Amsterdam is presented. In the synthesis the two cases will be compared.

Theory

The expansion of gentrification as a state-led process

Over time the literature on gentrification has expanded to include different contexts, types of cities and neighbourhoods. As a result of these conceptual

expansions, gentrification is now often broadly defined as the ‘production of space for progressively more affluent users’ (Hackworth 2002: 815). Perhaps the most significant shift in the form of gentrification relates to the neoliberalisation of public institutions, the welfare state and housing systems across the world (Brenner & Theodore: 2002). As the welfare state retrenches, cities have to compete for capital and talent through strategies of urban entrepreneurialism. Hence, Smith (2002: 440) has argued that gentrification has become a ‘crucial urban strategy for city governments in consort with private capital in cities around the world’ to make neighbourhoods more attractive for middle-class residents as well as private investors. In the US, and particularly in New York, these strategies of state-led gentrification have been termed ‘third-wave gentrification’ (Hackworth & Smith 2001; Smith 2002), although other studies identified processes similar to third-wave gentrification in other contexts, including Amsterdam (Van Gent 2013) and Berlin (Bernt 2012).

State-led gentrification has been associated with a new phase of urban policies (Smith 1996), including repressive tactics of surveillance and control to clear the city from undesirable elements and make it safe for the influx of global capital (Atkinson 2003). It is also characterised by a ‘symptomatic silence’ about rent increases, displacement and class struggles (Smith 2002: 440). The term gentrification itself is predominantly circumvented by involved stakeholders as they instead opt for less contested terms such as revitalisation, regeneration or renaissance (Slater 2004; Smith 2002). These elements are considered part of generalised blueprint gentrification strategies aimed at a remaking of urban space.

An emerging literature links gentrification as a (blueprint) policy instrument to pre-occurring territorial stigmatisation of neighbourhoods. Depicting a neighbourhood as declining, disproportionately disadvantaged and hosting a range of problems can be a way for stakeholders to justify policies of state-led gentrification, and removing social-rental dwellings (Kallin & Slater 2014; Sakizlioglu & Uitermark 2014). On the other hand, as noted by Sakizlioglu and Uitermark (2014: 1370), ‘a description of the same neighbourhood as a working-class area with affordable housing works in the opposite direction’.

Emphasising already existing neighbourhood problems can thus be a strategy to pursue policies of state-led gentrification. Similarly, as mentioned above, avoiding the term gentrification can also be a way to ‘ease’ implementation (see Bridge et al. 2012). In addition, this chapter signals out three specific contextual factors that can influence policymakers’ representations of gentrification and can influence (discursive) implementation strategies of gentrification as a public policy. These contextual factors concern the role of local institutions, residential-mobility patterns and the progression of gentrification during a certain timeframe.

Local institutions: Gentrification and social mixing

The links between state-led gentrification and ambitions and policies of social mixing has been extensively studied in recent years (see Bridge et al. 2012). Social mixing is considered an important policy instrument in a wide range of

(Western) contexts to improve the quality of disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods and the lives of the residents of these neighbourhoods (Friedrichs et al. 2003; Rose et al. 2013). Theories on social mixing argue that the settlement of middle-class residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods brings about positive neighbourhood effects – or minimises negative neighbourhood effects (see Wilson 1987). Sitting residents would, for example, benefit from better facilities and services, positive role models and, potentially, reduced territorial stigmatisation, or the improved quality of local schools. Nevertheless, the evidence base for positive neighbourhood effects on sitting residents resulting from social-mixing policies remains contested (Andersson & Musterd 2005).

The combination of gentrification and social mixing has been referred to as ‘impossible’ for a range of reasons (Davidson 2012), of which I will briefly highlight three here. First, the in-migration of higher-income middle-class residents would not enhance the social mobility of sitting residents. Most improvements in neighbourhood status can be attributed to spatial mobility, i.e. the in-migration of higher-status residents and the dispersal of disadvantaged and lower-income residents (Van Criekingen, 2012). Second, ‘gentrification theorists have tended to dismiss social class mix within gentrifying neighbourhoods as a transitory phenomenon’ (Rose 2004: 282; original emphasis). In other words, over time, gentrification and housing-market liberalisation may rather lead to a deepening of social inequalities and spatial divisions (Uitermark & Bosker 2014; Walks & Maaranen 2008). Third, even when a social mix can be established in a neighbourhood, residents with different backgrounds do not necessarily have to have contact with each other. Instead, despite spatial proximity actual contact may remain superficial or absent and can even create mutual distrust (Slater 2004; Walks & Maaranen 2008).

The extent to which local institutions are able to alter a neighbourhood’s residential composition or stimulate gentrification differs between contexts. This depends, for example, on the historical layering of institutions and policy interventions. Contradictory policies, originating from different time periods, can simultaneously stimulate and mitigate gentrification tendencies (Van Gent 2013). For example, already-existing social-rental housing provides a counterweight to more recent policies of housing-market liberalisation. However, these already-existing policies and institutions that protect residents from the negative consequences of gentrification (e.g. rent increases and displacement pressures) may serve as a justification for policymakers to question the extent of displacement and call for further housing-market liberalisation and state-led gentrification (Wyly et al. 2010).

Marginal gentrification as an exception?

Discussions about the influence of gentrification policies on social-mix levels are related to gentrification’s stage model. This model assumes early in-movers initially possess incomes similar to the neighbourhood’s sitting residents. Subsequently, as the attractiveness of the neighbourhood continues to increase, predominantly higher-income residents will move to the neighbourhood (Clay 1979). Following the stage model, first signs of neighbourhood

gentrification indicate the beginning of a process towards a fully matured final stage with few long-term residents remaining.

The concept of marginal gentrification potentially sheds a different light on discussions about the relationship between gentrification and social mixing. Marginal gentrification is driven by fractions of the new middle class who were highly educated but only tenuously employed or modestly earning professionals, and who sought out niches in inner-city neighbourhoods—as renters in the private or non-profit sector, or [...] as co-owners of modestly priced apartment units. (Rose 1996: 134).

Marginal gentrifiers were found to reject dominant (middle-class) suburban living and instead appreciated the diversity, tolerance and affordability of inner-city neighbourhoods. They also created some simultaneous understanding and extensive cross-class relations with sitting non-gentrifier residents (Caulfield 1994). Growing labour-market flexibility and insecurity, higher levels of student enrolment, an extension of the transitory period to adulthood, and the postponement of marriage and parenthood all contribute to growing numbers of young, potential marginal gentrifiers (Van Crieking & Decroly 2003).

Van Crieking and Decroly (2003: 2456) argue marginal gentrification should be ‘thought of as lying outside the framework of the stage model [...] rather than as a temporary prelude to the inevitable transformation of the neighbourhoods into new wealthy inner-city enclaves’. Consequently, marginal gentrification could be associated with structural forms of social mixing – particularly in housing contexts with strong renters’ protection and a large social-rental stock. Nevertheless, marginal gentrification is simultaneously associated with steep rent increases, displacement (pressures), and decreasing housing accessibility.

These characteristics of marginal gentrification can exert influence on representations of the process. For neighbourhoods that have recently begun to experience gentrification it might be unclear whether processes of marginal gentrification will develop into more mature forms as suggested by the stage model of gentrification or will be structural. Presumably, this allows for more negative and more positive representations respectively.

Methods

This chapter focuses on representations of gentrification by different stakeholders as expressed in local discourses. Discourses can be defined as composed of a range of spoken and written texts ‘involved in producing or constructing reality, specifically our perception or knowledge of the world and the meanings we make about it’ (Hastings 2000: 131). Discourse analysis has been applied to critically examine policy interventions and their implementation (Fairclough 1992; Hajer 2006). Discourses can play an important role in the implementation of housing policies through the construction of specific ‘social problems’ that need to be addressed (Jacobs et al. 2003). In addition, they can ease policy implementation by rendering particular consequences of these interventions ‘harmless’ (Hajer 2006: 67). Emphasising neighbourhood problems can make policies of state-led gentrification appear harmless or indeed

even necessary to address problems. Discourses are often closely related to the interests of the producers of these texts (Fairclough 1992). Individuals can reproduce discourses through representations, which Lees (1996: 455) defines as ‘an act of description by a person or by a group of people’. Lees found that actors with different backgrounds construed representations of gentrification that constitute binary opposites of dominant processes at work. That is, they defined gentrification by what it is not, e.g. suburbanisation or decline.

In this chapter I analyse how stakeholders with different backgrounds represent (policies of) gentrification. Discourse analysis is applied to illuminate how and to what extent these stakeholders refer to specific concepts and topics in their representations (cf. Hajer 2006). Specifically, this discourse analysis highlights how residential-mobility patterns, employed timeframes and the perceived extent and form of state influence play a role. I analyse how these topics inform debates on gentrification and how stakeholders draw upon them to either legitimise or contest policies of state-led gentrification. The analyses are based on twenty-seven interviews with key stakeholders in Nord-Neukölln, Berlin (fourteen interviews) and Indische Buurt, Amsterdam (thirteen) undertaken throughout 2012 and an analysis of relevant policy documents and additional written texts (e.g. opinion articles and press releases).

Stakeholders were selected and approached for an interview after an analysis of relevant policy documents and – where necessary – news items. From these sources it was possible to derive a comprehensive and balanced list of involved stakeholders¹⁷. Stakeholders from all major officially involved organisations (planning bureaus, housing associations, governmental departments at the urban and neighbourhood level) were interviewed¹⁸. In addition, major parties representing local residents’ interests (renters’ associations, artist networks, active resident networks) were interviewed¹⁹. The interviews were semi-structured and addressed a range of topics presented in Table 3.1. The discourse analysis assesses to what extent these topics play a role in legitimising or criticising policy interventions (of state-led gentrification). The analysis of the interviews was complemented by the analysis of relevant policy and planning documents focusing on both the neighbourhood and urban scale.

All interviews were transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti. I linked expressed attitudes towards gentrification, neighbourhood change and public policies to quotes related to a range of topics – most notably residential-mobility patterns, the role of the state and time perspective (Table 3.1). This gives insight into how specific (discussions of) topics are situated within particular discourses and representations and illuminates related complexities and contradictions.

17. This was discussed with local academics knowledgeable about the neighbourhoods.

18. When a stakeholder refused to participate, it was always possible to arrange an interview with a close colleague, often after referral by the initially-approached stakeholder.

19. Included are one of the larger, overarching communities closely involved in formulating a community neighbourhood vision (Indische Buurt Community 2013) and a community that received ample media attention.

General topics	Exemplary themes	
Neighbourhood description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing stock • Public space/facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population • Image
Perceived role of the state (aims and influence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local residents (e.g. opportunities, schooling) • Neighbourhood (e.g. reduce stigmatization/ ghettoization liveability) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social mix (tenure mix, new residents) • Level of control or influence
Residential mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving in (reasons) • Moving out (reasons) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting
Timeframe, future focus (concerns, issues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long/short term • Displacement, exclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upward (social) mobility

TABLE 3.1. Analytical framework for the analysis of interviews and policy documents

Quotes have been translated from German or Dutch into English. It is important to take into account the influence each language may exert on representations and discourses. In general, the term gentrification is more common and contested in Germany (particularly Berlin) than in The Netherlands. Although all stakeholders were familiar with the concept, different stakeholders may use different definitions of what gentrification precisely entails. To avoid confusion and signal out potential differences, I asked them how they would define concepts like gentrification when they came up during the interview.

Contested gentrification in Nord-Neukölln

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, many inner-city neighbourhoods have experienced gentrification during different time periods (Holm, 2011). Formerly run-down neighbourhoods like Prenzlauer Berg became more popular and witnessed gentrification. Since Berlin is dominated by rental housing, gentrification primarily takes place in the private-rental sector. The sale of social-rental housing to private investors and, subsequently, privately financed renovations of the housing stock have spurred gentrification in specific. This can lead to steep rent increases in short periods and works as an incentive for investors to push for eviction. Large-scale renovation projects, creative-city policies and city-marketing strategies further support gentrification (Colomb 2012). In recent years, gentrification has progressed from one neighbourhood to the next moving through Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg before landing in Nord-Neukölln (Holm 2011).

Until recently, Nord-Neukölln was considered one of the worst districts in Berlin and often portrayed as a ghetto (see Eksner 2013). Consequently, the Socially Integrative City (Soziale Stadt) programme in 1999, an area-based

initiative to target Berlin’s districts with ‘special development needs’, focused on many parts of this district: Ten of Berlin’s 34 ‘Neighbourhood Management’ areas (Quartiersmanagement, QM areas) are located in the district. These area-based initiatives pursue the broad goal of ‘stabilising’ the population and conserving the social mix by ensuring the attractiveness and the competitiveness of the neighbourhoods (Quartiere) (SenStadt 2010). Primarily, stabilisation is linked to goals of retaining upwardly-mobile households, particularly families with children, for neighbourhoods like Reuterquartier and Schillerpromenade. These two neighbourhoods of Nord-Neukölln – with 38,000 and 30,000 residents respectively – have recently started to experience upgrading. Both neighbourhoods are favourably located in Berlin’s western inner city with Reuterquartier bordering the popular district Kreuzberg and Schillerpromenade benefiting in particular from the conversion of the adjacent, former airport Tempelhof into a public park. These autonomous forces and public policies push gentrification in these neighbourhoods, leading to rent levels spiralling upward. Table 3.2 uses GSW housing market data to give a rough impression of how rents developed in Reuterquartier and Schillerpromenade between 2007 and 2011, and how this compares to Berlin.

	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	in €	Rel.	in €	Rel.	in €	Rel.	in €	Rel.	in €	Rel.
Schillerpromenade	327	75	343	72	334	77	372	86	414	88
Reuterquartier	334	76	360	76	392	90	469	108	528	113
<i>Berlin</i>	437	100	476	100	434	100	434	100	468	100

TABLE 3.2. Average ‘cold’ rents (in €) for new rental contracts and relative to Berlin (= 100). Source: GSW (2012); own adaptation.

Decline or gentrification?

The case of Nord-Neukölln is distinct from Anglo-Saxon experiences because policy documents and policymakers do not avoid the term gentrification, but actively engage with it. This engagement is related to strong criticisms voiced by active left-wing groups aiming to contest (neoliberal) urban developments including gentrification (see Scharenberg & Bader 2009). In reaction to these criticisms, policymakers tend to downplay processes of gentrification and represent it as merely a perception of residents and visitors. For example, the QM Reuterquartier in their Development Concept 2012 speaks in terms of ‘gentrification on the waiting list’ (QM Reuterplatz 2010: 7 [author translation]) and ‘[...] as a result of the quarter’s improved image, a part of the residents of the Reuterquartier fear gentrification of the area and displacement of the poor’ (QM Reuterplatz 2012: 11). A distinction is made between perceptions and images of gentrification inspired by the increasing presence of visitors, students, shops and gastronomy (ibid.: 2) on the one hand, and a reality of

structural poverty (and decline) on the other. The discrepancy between a hyped image and reality was a frequently recurring theme during interviews with local public-policy stakeholders as well:

Since one or two years we have 60 or 70 interested visitors for a single house in Schillerpromenade. Five years ago this would have been unthinkable. It surprises me. These houses are not modernised. They are really slum houses sometimes, but the people want to live here. That's the current hype; the wish to live here is so great that they accept bad living conditions. (QM coordinator Neukölln)

Simultaneously, these public-policy stakeholders express frustration with 'outside' visitors and critics who frame attempts to reduce poverty as an attempt to displace unwanted residents:

When we act against bad landlords and bad living conditions it is called gentrification and when we don't do anything we are blamed for these bad conditions. The situation exists that one or two houses are not renovated and the people still live there, also when the staircases are broken and the rooftop is leaking. When you act against this, it is framed as a theme of upgrading or gentrification. (QM agent Schillerpromenade)

Stakeholders mainly represent interventions as a (short-term) necessity to prevent decline and help the large local poor population (QM Reuterplatz 2012: 2) and that gentrification is not taking place. If gentrification does take place, the local QM agencies do not see themselves to blame, as a news item (in reaction to their local office being vandalised with stones and paint bombs) on the website of QM Schillerpromenade stresses: 'to repeat it once again: we do not renovate, we do not sell or buy houses; we do not cast out, displace or repress anybody' (QM Schillerpromenade 2012 [author translation]). This implicitly refers to the large role of private real-estate investors and a perceived impossibility of state-led gentrification due to limited state influence.

Despite these officially communicated representations of gentrification not taking place, several interviews reveal underlying motives and desires to fuel gentrification. For example, a key stakeholder of the Senate for Urban Development notes that 'a few more Kollwitzplätze [in Neukölln] would be good' for the neighbourhood. His point of reference, Kollwitzplatz, is one of the most gentrified parts of Prenzlauer Berg and Berlin as a whole. Another QM agent sees gentrification as a logical outcome of interventions:

I have invested millions in Reuterplatz, in Maybachufer, everywhere the streets and squares have been improved. I have worked together with the neighbourhood's residents. What do they want? We have made it more attractive, [...] the landlords will notice this and demand higher rents.

This (often-reproduced) notion arguably creates a false dilemma between gentrification and disinvestment or slummification, which allows policymakers to remain vague about the actual benefits for sitting residents.

Generally, policymakers mainly point to general notions of social contact, positive role models, a new clientele (for local shops and services) and reduced stigmatisation.

Reimagining the neighbourhood

Despite a general emphasis on preventing decline, several public-policy stakeholders make implicit references to a desired remaking of the neighbourhood and its image for a different type of residents. These focus, for example, on the retail composition of the neighbourhood. One public-policy stakeholder argues it is necessary to prevent the opening of ‘the 500th mobile-phone shop’. This vocabulary refers to the many ethnic shops in the area and qualifies them as undesirable. It also reflects an intention to counteract market tendencies and instead produce a retail landscape that is more ‘gentrification friendly’ (see Rose et al. 2013), for example by considering other types of shops as desirable and preferable:

We held a Fashion Week here, because we have a lot of designers that unfortunately are not situated on the Karl-Marx Strasse [the main shopping street of Nord-Neukölln], but rather on the side streets. We want to have them front row. (Urban planner ‘City management’)

More critical stakeholders refute these policies as they see no benefits for sitting residents. Rather, these schemes are considered to contribute to the commodification of the neighbourhood. They doubt sitting residents will benefit from these developments:

Public space is increasingly commercialised. [...] There have been protests, but the [Maybachufer] market is there the whole week. It brings money into the neighbourhood, but I doubt it will reduce unemployment and those who live here longer cannot afford the products anymore. I have never spoken to anyone here who likes the market. (active neighbourhood resident)

Issues of commodification relate to broader representations by critical stakeholders of current public policies, which they see as attempts to subtly reclaim public space using predominantly soft strategies. Interestingly, various critical stakeholders argue that investments to make the neighbourhoods bicycle friendly are indicative of class shifts, because these would not appeal to the large local immigrant population, who are seen as not riding bicycles. Other critical stakeholders also reflect on harder, repressive strategies including ‘law and order’ policing strategies to remove alcoholics and the homeless from the streets. Interestingly, these stakeholders link such intentions and interventions directly to the Neighbourhood Management programme. This contrasts policymakers’ representations of having no influence on gentrification and investing to prevent, what they term, ghettoization. Critical stakeholders uncover underlying motives to attract a new class of residents and spur gentrification, referring to subtle and less subtle attempts to remake public space.

Residential mobility: legitimisation and criticisms

Questions about who moves into the neighbourhood as well as who moves out – and under what conditions – play a key role in legitimising or, alternatively, criticising current policies. Despite rents rising quickly, survey research by TOPOS (2011) suggests that relatively recent in-movers in Reuterquartier and Schillerpromenade are in a relatively marginal position themselves, possessing incomes similar to the neighbourhood average (Table 3.3).

	Period of moving in				
	pre-1990	1990-1999	2000-2008	2009-2010	Average
Reuterquartier	1771	2145	1939	2160	1989
Schillerpromenade	1582	1754	1719	1690	1691

TABLE 3.3. Average net household income in 2011 in Euros; based on move-in date.
Source: TOPOS, 2011; own adaptation.

The characteristics of in-moving residents provide public-policy stakeholders with a justification to continue investments and represent current developments as something else than gentrification. Public-policy stakeholders routinely refer to the notion that current in-movers do not ‘bring a lot of money with them’. They do so by reproducing a main conclusion of the recently published report ‘Social Structure Development in Nord-Neukölln’ (Sozialstrukturentwicklung in Nord-Neukölln), which states that ‘the poor displace the very poor’ (TOPOS 2011). This creates a distinction between the type of residents currently moving in and the type of residents ‘necessary for a real population turnover’. Seemingly, it also contrasts official policy goals to ‘attract socially more stable residents’ (Planergemeinschaft 2010: 7 [author translation]), although it does not become clear who these residents exactly are. This distinction leads most key public-policy stakeholders to conclude that gentrification is not occurring in Nord-Neukölln:

What happens here is something different. For us, it has nothing to do with gentrification. Completely nothing, but that’s how it is discussed: ‘displacement is occurring here and the long-term residents are cast out’ [...] The residential structure is changing, but young residents are moving in. (urban planner ‘City management’)

Interestingly, these stakeholders pay little attention to how similar household incomes may represent substantially different levels of purchasing power for households of different types and sizes. Furthermore, these stakeholders represent Schillerpromenade and Reuterquartier as unsuitable for further gentrification, for example due to the small size of most dwellings. This reinforces their claim that ‘it is much too early to speak of gentrification’.

On the other end of the spectrum, critical stakeholders clearly frame in-moving residents as different from sitting residents, despite their low incomes. They make repeated claims that structural differences in class or future perspectives underlie current similarities between in-moving marginal gentrifiers and sitting residents. They do so by describing in-movers in terms such as ‘temporarily poor’, ‘middle class’, ‘able to afford more rent’, ‘rich compared to those on benefits’ and argue they experience a ‘different kind of poverty’ as they are often students with little financial obligations or with parental support. Furthermore, they argue in-moving residents fuel rent increases regardless of their socioeconomic position.

Differences also exist regarding the representations of out-moving residents. Public policies argue ‘families tend to move out of the area as soon as their children have to go to school’ (SenStadt 2010: 55). Policymakers problematize this as it leaves behind, as one respondent calls it, a ‘ghetto where all better-paid, education-oriented households move out of’. Processes of direct displacement are generally dismissed by policymakers as impossible by law. Furthermore, even when indirect displacement is acknowledged by policymakers, they refer to it as an insignificant and necessary side effect to improve the quality of life for most sitting residents. Again, critical stakeholders dismiss this view by highlighting how incremental rent increases and official regulations can produce, perhaps unintended, displacement:

This is also direct displacement: When people on benefits live in too expensive housing they receive a demand [...] to move to reduce their expenses on housing. This can be the case when homeowners have only carried through incremental rent increases. (stakeholder renters’ association)

Several (critical and public-policy) stakeholders reflect on their own position in the neighbourhood. These stakeholders perceive a discrepancy between their own lived experiences of gentrification on the one hand, and policy vocabulary – referring to reports and statistics – of structural decline and poverty on the other:

I find the presentation [of data] playing it down a bit. One result was that there’s no gentrification in Neukölln and that’s a subjective conclusion. What I notice is really totally different, I don’t know if data supports this, [...] I know so many examples of people who lived here in a house that got sold. They just got informed that rents would be raised. You also notice it in the residential structure, which has changed enormously. (public-policy stakeholder; cultural department)

To summarise, the low-income characteristics of in-moving residents make processes of gentrification appear softer and further investments more justifiable. The employed timeframe plays a role, because critical stakeholders see current developments as the precursor of policy aims to facilitate more mature, long-term gentrification forms. Public-policy stakeholders and policy

documents represent current investment schemes as a short-term necessary reaction to problems of decline and ghettoization or slummification.

Celebrated state-led gentrification in Indische Buurt

Gentrification in Amsterdam started in the 1970s as a spontaneous process in inner-city neighbourhoods like the Jordaan, but already in the 1980s acquired a state-led character as it became part of local policy goals (Musterd & Van De Ven 1991). Traditionally, Amsterdam is dominated by affordable social-rental dwellings owned by housing associations, which are allocated on the basis of waiting lists and for which income limits exist²⁰. This stock, as well as extensive tenant protection, hampers the progression of gentrification (Van Gent 2013). Since the late 1990s the local government and housing associations pursue policies that promote homeownership and the sale of social-rental dwellings (Aalbers 2004). Still, in 2013 social-rental dwellings composed 46% of the city's total housing stock. The conversion of social-rental dwellings in owner-occupied or more expensive private-rental dwellings fit within policy ambitions to create attractive and affordable neighbourhoods for upwardly-mobile 'middle-income' groups households (Dienst Wonen 2007; also see Hochstenbach & Boterman 2015).

Indische Buurt was for a long time represented as one of Amsterdam's least liveable neighbourhoods, and is consequently targeted by national policies aiming to improve the neighbourhood through social and tenure mixing. Changes in the housing stock provide evidence for state-led gentrification: Particularly in the Western part of Indische Buurt the share of social-rental housing declined and average real-estate values rose faster than in Amsterdam, proving relatively resilient to the financial crisis (Table 3.4). Still, real-estate values remain considerably below the citywide average and the social-rental sector continues to dominate.

	Social-rental stock				Real-estate values (total stock)			
	2005		2012		2005		2013	
	in %	Rel.	In %	Rel.	*€1000	Rel.	*€1000	Rel.
Indische Buurt West	75	139	61	131	136	69	193	79
Indische Buurt East	79	146	72	154	159	81	200	82
Amsterdam	54	100	47	100	197	100	244	100

TABLE 3.4. Share of social-rental stock (left) and real-estate values of total stock (right) and relative to Amsterdam (=100). *Source:* Research and Statistics, 2012; own adaptation

20. The maximum annual household income was €34,229 in 2013.

Gentrification as necessary normalisation

Interestingly, in Indische Buurt local stakeholder criticism remain largely absent. Gentrification is even explicitly put forward in policy documents and by policy makers as a positive policy instrument. Policies of state-led gentrification are predominantly represented as a ‘normalisation’ of the housing tenure structure and a ‘necessity’ to adapt the city’s housing market to the changing residential composition. For example, the Housing Vision 2020 mentions gentrification as one of the city’s key qualities and as a necessary process to retain ‘new urbanites’ for the city (Dienst Wonen 2007: 33). These representation relate to the fact that gentrification is a less value-laden term in the Dutch context. The representation of gentrification as a necessity to accommodate these households is also reproduced by stakeholders for Indische Buurt specifically:

Students should not become depressed in Geuzenveld [a neighbourhood on the city’s outskirts], everyone wants to be as close to the expanding city centre as possible. You have to accommodate this or else they will leave. Graduates and starters have little access here. (Senior urban planner)

These representations tap into citywide discourses of Amsterdam as a creative knowledge city and as an escalator for upwardly-mobile households. Social-rental housing is referred to as a ‘problem’ in Amsterdam as it limits accessibility for certain households – predominantly young, upwardly-mobile and highly-educated starter households – and is thereby seen to endanger the (economic) wellbeing of the city²¹. Local policymakers argue the situation in Indische Buurt is even more problematic due to the above-average share of social housing. Therefore, policymakers and policy documents put gentrification forward as an instrument to ‘synchronise’ the housing stock with the population composition. Gentrification is also represented as bringing structural benefits specifically due to its state-led character, as this presumably ensures control over the process:

Through gentrification, with an influx of twenty per cent new households – both students and arrived households – the effects on neighbourhood quality are enormous. Sitting residents also benefit, they benefit from the Coffee Company [an upscale coffeehouse chain] even though they won’t go there every day. At least they have the opportunity to do so. (Senior urban planner)

This quote is exemplary for the often-reproduced notion that state involvement can ensure neighbourhood continuity by controlling the gentrification

21. Eric Wiebes and Eric van der Burg, at the time both aldermen representing the local liberal party, argued the large social-rental housing stock is responsible for ‘keeping talent outside the city walls’ (Wiebes & Van der Burg 2014 [author translation]).

and retaining a large social-rental stock. Notions of controlled, limited, soft or mild gentrification all implicitly hint at ideas of structural marginal gentrification. Furthermore, the quote above highlights how gentrification is represented as improving the opportunity structure for both sitting residents and local businesses. Most stakeholders perceive sitting residents as being disadvantaged on several accounts, among which a lack of (positive) social contacts (also see Stadsdeel Oost 2007). A developer of a major housing association in the neighbourhood describes current problems as follows:

Everybody lived very anonymous lives here, with a lot of hidden poverty and nuisances between residents. There was no sense of community [...]. Economically [it was] the same: High unemployment rates, low incomes, struggling shops.

Subsequently, (state-led) gentrification and social-mixing initiatives are frequently presented as the 'cure' to these perceived ills. Perceptions of 'hidden poverty' and, similarly, 'problems behind the front door' are frequently mentioned by policymakers as well as locally embedded stakeholders. These stakeholders argue middle-class residents can employ their social capital to improve the position of the worst-off sitting residents. Locally embedded civic-society communities play an important role in this narrative. The Indische Buurt is characterised by a range of such communities, which aim to foster contact between different resident groups:

Problems remain with the 'lowest' 20 to 25% of the population [...], the others do not need the communities [...], but we do need their resources to help these 25%. We facilitate this connection [between residents], that is the principle idea behind [this] community. (civic-society community leader)

Various stakeholders mention a range of success stories of civic-society communities contributing to more contacts between (middle-class) newcomers and disadvantaged sitting residents. Examples include festivals, language courses, homework assistance for children, and a local currency (Makkie, named after the Makassar-square) that pays out residents who do chores for other – predominantly disadvantaged – residents. The success of such community initiatives provides stakeholders with an important, 'tangible', justification to represent gentrification as an apt policy to create positive neighbourhood effects through social mixing.

Moreover, the neighbourhood communities have formulated a vision and a set of goals for the Indische Buurt in their Neighbourhood Bid (Indische Buurt Community 2013). This bid implicitly supports policies of gentrification and represents the current situation as problematic: 'the neighbourhood is still far from an ideal society. Poverty, violence, and threats still exist [...] also in public space, exclusion and nuisances exist. This forms an obstacle for developing potentials and realising ambitions' (ibid.: 1 [author translation]). Throughout the bid, it is stressed how 'bundling' the social capital of

disadvantaged residents with new in-movers is essential to deal with these local problems. Policymakers use this 'bottom-up' support for gentrification, arguing they have the voice of approval of the local residents (represented by the communities).

Limited criticisms

Despite this perceived bottom-up support for state-led gentrification, a (limited) number of critical locally embedded stakeholders exist. These stakeholders (active residents and squatters, rental associations, local housing support offices) reject the representation of state-led gentrification as a positive process on two main accounts. First, these stakeholders contradict the representation that state involvement can ensure 'positive', 'soft', and 'controlled' gentrification. Instead, they argue the state guidance allows for, or even ensures, widespread upgrading because even areas that do not possess the qualities to experience autonomous gentrification, are now 'injected' by gentrification-inducing policy measures. Furthermore, critical stakeholders argue the guided character allows the process to progress without having to deal with much:

It is a classical Dutch way to have policy implemented in an easy manner: you compensate everyone and this way you remove the sharp edges. It is softer, but still mean. [...] The train moves on and the tracks are there; they know where it will end. It never goes very fast, but also never stops or gets off its tracks, these inconsistencies are removed. (critical stakeholder; renters' association)

Second, these stakeholders attribute the limited amount of local criticisms to the dominance of civic-society communities in Indische Buurt, which they see to represent the interests of only a limited group of residents:

It is a group of people ruling over other people. [...] I cannot see any long-term benefits; the Indische Buurt has a lot of communities, it is driving me nuts. It only leads to segregation of public space and politics. I have heard them participate in council meetings and they are always preaching their own interests. (renters' association)

Hence, critical stakeholders argue that the perceived bottom-up support for gentrification policies predominantly comes from middle-class residents already living in the area. Critical stakeholders fear that the effective state involvement and bottom-up middle-class support will lead to gentrification processes progressing quickly and swiftly to a distinct endpoint: 'they [authorities] have no idea that through privatising the housing stock, they are letting go of something that will lead to Amsterdam becoming London; and London is hell when it comes to housing'. This vision juxtaposes policymakers' representation of soft and controlled state-led gentrification.

Residential mobility patterns

Discussions about the current and desired socio-economic composition of in-moving and out-moving residents reflect the absence of critical representations. Policymakers openly acknowledge the goal to attract residents with higher incomes or better prospects. They describe current in-movers in terms like ‘starters’, ‘pioneers’, ‘initially low income’, and ‘hip young residents’, but also in terms like ‘increasingly better-off residents’, ‘yuppies’ and ‘arrived households’. Even though some of these representations hint at low levels of economic capital, all indicate new residents are different from the structurally low-income residents already living in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, and regardless of income levels, several policymakers argue that in-moving residents possess specific values that contribute to positive social mixing:

People who come to live here are often defined as being post materialistic on the basis of lifestyle research. They are involved in society. [...] People moving here are not so much concerned about their career. They value other things more than a paid job. (Planner district East, involved in civic-society communities)

Again, this quote shows how policymakers legitimise state-led gentrification by (implicitly) referring to positive social mixing through the new residents’ willingness to participate in, for example, local civic-society communities, which form a successful vehicle for new residents to be involved in society.

In addition, policymakers and employees of housing associations represent the voluntary or involuntary displacement of residents in the social-rental sector as a logical and necessary given to achieve the desired mix. They downplay the potential effects and impacts of displacement, by using vocabulary like ‘ensuring the right balance’ and ‘a few people having to leave [emphasis added]’. The view of people having to leave is contrasted by ambitions to ‘retain middle incomes’ and to ‘facilitate the housing careers’ of upwardly-mobile households. The Housing Vision underlines the necessity to sell social-rental dwellings to facilitate these two ambitions (Dienst Wonen 2007: 41).

Furthermore, displacement itself is discussed as a soft process with potential positive outcomes for the displaced. Two institutional arrangements underlie these positive representations. First, housing-association employees argue participatory schemes empower and support residents to be involved in renovations (and tenure conversions). It is often claimed sitting residents voluntarily decided not to return:

Do we retain enough social housing? Based on several studies we conducted, it is enough. Everybody had to indicate if they wanted to return. [...] For some projects, only five people [wanted to return], for a current project no one. (area developer housing association)

Involved stakeholders stress they have experienced little resistance from residents. They argue that sitting residents are predominantly in favour of renovations and willing to pay higher rents for better or larger accommodation,

claiming that ‘it is ultimately their own choice to be rehoused’ (but see Sakizlioglu & Uitermark 2014 for a critical study). Second, evicted residents receive an urgency status giving them priority for social-rental housing in their current district. Hence, displacement is represented as a small-scale side effect, claiming that most residents are able to move to another dwelling in the same district. Other stakeholders add to this that many evicted residents strategically use the acquired urgency status to skip the regular waiting list and acquire more desirable – often more spacious – apartments in other parts of the district or city. Hence, evictions are framed as potentially beneficial to displaced residents even when they are not able to return within the same neighbourhood or district. This narrative of positive displacement focuses on large families that were considered to be living in too small apartments.

Critical community stakeholders criticise this narrative of positive displacement. By giving displaced residents priority over the regular waiting list, other residents who follow the regular waiting-list trajectory are subsequently increasingly excluded from the social-housing market. Practices of gentrification-related exclusion are then extended geographically, i.e. to the entire metropolitan area’s social-rental sector, and conceptually, i.e. not only on the basis of financial resources, but also on the basis of waiting times:

The urban renewal urgency status...it’s full, there is no housing available. You can give them an urgency status, but there is no housing. (renters’ association)

They relate this to the promotion of owner-occupied housing in Indische Buurt (from 9% and 11% in the Western and Eastern part respectively in 2005 to 25% and 18% respectively in 2013). These dwellings are, they argue, only accessible for those who have ‘big bags of money’ or earn ‘double the average income’. This links to wider debates that the subtraction of social housing essentially leads to the future exclusion of other low-income residents due to the smaller supply of affordable dwellings.

This section has given insight in the representation of current processes and policies at work in Indische Buurt. It has shown that public-policy makers explicitly represent gentrification as a beneficial process for the neighbourhood (e.g. a normalisation of the housing stock and social mixing), for the city (improved accessibility for upwardly-mobile households), and for sitting residents (through mixing and positive displacement). The specific characteristics of in-moving residents and the increasing prominence of civic-society communities provide policymakers with legitimisation and bottom-up support for state-led gentrification.

Synthesis

This chapter has highlighted three contextual elements that influence, in both cases, how stakeholders with different interests and visions construe opposing positive or critical representations of gentrification and policies. First, the characteristics of in-moving residents are used to justify interventions or, alternatively, to criticise them. In Nord-Neukölln policymakers justify

interventions by representing current in-moving residents as poor themselves and having few alternatives. This element of marginal gentrification is employed as an important justification for further investments despite apparent neighbourhood changes, including steep rent increases. Due to the different class orientation of in-moving residents regardless of their low income, critical stakeholders problematize this view. Representations of marginal gentrifiers form a key ‘battleground’ between stakeholders with different interests. In Indische Buurt this distinction is subtler, because policymakers recognise that in-moving residents have better prospects than (most) sitting residents. Instead, policymakers define them as ‘post materialistic’ and willing to engage with local residents. This relates to conceptions of the tolerant marginal gentrifier (cf. Caulfield 1994) and explicitly aims to counter the notion of different social groups living separately, even within the same neighbourhood.

Second, the employed timeframe plays an important role in the construction of more positive or negative representations. Policymakers and policy documents construe positive representations by employing a short-term focus and stressing the necessity of investments to prevent decline and ‘slummification’ and improve the state of the neighbourhood. This injection, the influx of better-off residents, will improve the state of the neighbourhood on short notice. However, this is achieved through spatial mobility (of upwardly-mobile residents), rather than through social mobility of disadvantaged sitting residents (Van Criekingen 2012). The employed timeframe also plays a role because current gentrification tendencies are still marginal and negative effects remain limited. Critical representations focus on the longer term, highlighting how current investment schemes are essentially a prelude to more mature forms of gentrification and increasing exclusion and displacement. These representations counter the idea of structural marginal gentrification, instead linking current developments to the first stage of the gentrification stage model, in which social mixing is considered merely a transitory phenomenon.

Third, different stakeholders interpret the role of local institutions and public policies in different ways. In Indische Buurt in particular, positive representations are informed by the belief that state involvement can ensure controlled, limited gentrification in which only a limited number of new (types of) residents is attracted. In other words, these representations are based on the assumption that public policies can prevent gentrification from progressing from its (current) marginal and socially mixed state towards more mature and exclusive forms. Critical stakeholders in Indische Buurt, in contrast, perceive state involvement as able to effectively guide gentrification through the sale of social housing without having to deal with many interruptions or criticisms. State involvement, they argue, obscures forms of neighbourhood development other than gentrification. In Nord-Neukölln policymakers stress that the large private-rental stock prevents them from leading gentrification processes. This produces a (discursive) distinction between policymakers and policy interventions, and what policymakers consider the actual drivers of gentrification processes. In contrast to these representations, critical representations argue policy interventions (indirectly) drive gentrification, for example, by remaking

public spaces, by enhancing the local image, and by removing undesirable elements to facilitate the influx of private investors and middle-class residents.

Through a direct comparison of Nord-Neukölln and Indische Buurt, the different ways stakeholders engage with gentrification becomes apparent. On the one hand, in Nord-Neukölln policymakers actively try to counter criticisms of state-led gentrification, representing current investments as necessary to prevent ghettoisation and decline. A strong, critical discourse by locally embedded stakeholders fuels concerns about gentrification, subsequently reinforcing policymakers' desire to contradict these criticisms. This can be considered a negative engagement with the term gentrification. On the other hand, in Indische Buurt, and in Amsterdam as a whole, most stakeholders and policy documents explicitly represent gentrification as a positive process arguing that the process creates attractive living environments, 'normalises' the housing stock (i.e. sale of social-rental dwellings), and produces positive neighbourhood effects through social mixing. Contrasting the Nord-Neukölln case, critical voices remain relatively weak in Indische Buurt.

These differences between the two cases can be linked to the institutional context: the large social-rental stock in Amsterdam allows local authorities and housing associations to actually pursue state-led gentrification by determining the number of social dwellings to be sold. Furthermore, state guidance ensures the compensation – at least to some extent – of residents displaced by renovations or demolitions (cf. Kleinhans 2003). In Indische Buurt civic participation in civic-society communities is framed as bottom-up resident support for gentrification policies. However, concerns exist that these communities only represent local middle-class residents rather than the entire residential base. These factors allow stakeholders to explicitly represent gentrification as a positive policy instrument and dismiss negative effects like displacement and exclusion as non-existent, or a necessary by-product of creating a 'normal' housing market that suits the city's population structure.

In Nord-Neukölln gentrification is better described as state-supported rather than state-led; i.e. due to the large private-rental stock the direct influence of local authorities is limited. Consequently, policymakers reject criticisms by arguing they are not responsible for renovations, displacement or gentrification. However, other policy measures (e.g. investments in public space) indirectly facilitate gentrification. Simultaneously, local authorities can do little about the steep rental increases (for new contracts) and the resulting displacement pressures. Nord-Neukölln is also characterised by strong, local discourses that are highly critical of current developments. In Berlin in general, a broad range of left-wing social activists have proven able to organise themselves effectively against large-scale projects (Scharenberg & Bader 2009). This factor arguably enhances the necessity for local authorities to engage with accusations of gentrification. Hence, the absence or presence – in Indische Buurt and Nord-Neukölln respectively – of strong, local criticisms can significantly influence the representation of gentrification by policymakers and in policy documents. Rather than avoiding the term gentrification, the absence of critical voices allows for distinctly positive and uncritical representations of gentrification (also in policy documents) in Indische Buurt, while

the presence of criticisms forces local policymakers to deal with (and reject) these discourses in Nord-Neukölln.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the local representations of gentrification (Lees, 1996) and public policies by involved stakeholders and in discourses in Nord-Neukölln (Berlin) and Indische Buurt (Amsterdam). It has compared the localised representations with general scholarly debates, in which it is often argued policymakers avoid the term gentrification due to its negative connotation and instead use terms such as social mixing (e.g. Slater 2006; Smith 2002). However, in the context of Nord-Neukölln and Indische Buurt, stakeholders with varying interests as well as official policy documents do not avoid the term gentrification, but engage with it either negatively or positively. This nuances the idea of state-led gentrification as a mass-produced blueprint strategy including supporting discourses avoiding the term 'gentrification' (Smith 2002), since implementation strategies and accompanying representations and discourses show considerable contextual variation.

The representations of gentrification in public policy are intertwined with various context-dependent factors, specifically residential-mobility patterns, the employed timeframe, and the perceived role and influence of local authorities. Stakeholders in both contexts use these contextual factors to construe representations of gentrification that are more or less positive – dependent on their own interests. Public-policy stakeholders strategically employ these factors, such as the relatively marginal characteristics of in-movers and limited extent of gentrification to legitimise further interventions. Critical stakeholders point to class differences and long-term repercussions of gentrification strategies for the sitting population. The limited criticisms of gentrification in Indische Buurt allow stakeholders to explicitly pursue gentrification strategies. Of course, gentrification is a dynamic process that changes over time. Accompanying discourses and representations are thus also liable to change.