



City profile Amsterdam

Amsterdam in the 21st century: Geography, housing, spatial development and politics



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ABSTRACT

This city profile provides a multi-dimensional overview on the most recent social, economic, political and spatial changes in the city of Amsterdam. We map the social-geography of the city, discussing recent housing and spatial development policies as well as city-regional political dynamics. Today, the city of Amsterdam is more diverse than ever, both ethnically and socially. The social geography of Amsterdam shows a growing core–periphery divide that underlines important economic and cultural asymmetries. The tradition of public subsidies and regulated housing currently allows for state-led gentrification within inner city neighborhoods. Public support for homeownership is changing the balance between social, middle and high-end housing segments. Changes in the tradition of large-scale interventions and strong public planning are likewise occurring. In times of austerity, current projects focus on small-scale and piecemeal interventions particularly oriented to stimulate entrepreneurialism in selected urban areas and often relate to creative economies and sustainable development. Finally, underlying these trends is a new political landscape composed of upcoming liberal and progressive parties, which together challenge the political equilibriums in the city region

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1. Introduction

In an earlier City Profile, Kahn and Van der Plas (1999) depicted Amsterdam as a patchwork of large-scale development projects and infrastructural improvements, a breeding ground of housing renewal interventions and a growing regional economy. At that time, the city's main policy concerns were centered around the strengthening of regional cooperation, the dealing with land development during demographic growth, the renewing of the inner city and post-World War II neighborhoods, and positioning Amsterdam in the international marketplace (see also Savitch, Kantor, & Vicari, 2002). Fifteen years later, Amsterdam's city development model shows continuity with its mid-90s policies, as well as certain peculiar and unexpected discontinuities as a result of experimental approaches to urban development, housing and regional politics.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, several cities across Europe are questioning the viability of earlier models of urban policies, which were often built on the optimistic expectation of raising real-estate demand and a growing urban economy (Rydin, 2013). The recent crisis seems to have provided space for new practices of state neoliberalism (Aalbers, 2013). Today, experimental methods are recursively used to boost real estate markets and respond to socio-economic change. Amsterdam, perhaps more evidently than its counterparts in Europe, is rethinking some of its most characteristic – and internationally

studied and acclaimed – attributes, including its social housing policies, its experimental approach towards regional metropolitan governance and its active land policy.

We propose a multi-perspective and inter-disciplinary look at Amsterdam's recent socio-economic and political trends and planning's responses to these tendencies in order to inform a critique of the city's contemporary urban development.¹ At the international level, a closer and more detailed look at Amsterdam's peculiar social, economic and political profile and development policies can help to sophisticate debates about contemporary urbanization. As we show in this article, at first glance, Amsterdam assumes some important features of what Peck, Theodore, and Brenner (2009) define as neoliberal urbanism. The city has become a battleground where old policies seem to fail in achieving their original objectives and where these same policies are redefined into new models, supported by changing political and social conditions. At the same time, local geographies, path dependencies and political cultures are steering the city into a peculiar – and probably fragile – state of neoliberalism with progressive features.

Three peculiar aspects of Amsterdam's social, economic and political condition need to be taken into consideration when examining present trends. First, the city combines a long tradition of social democracy and strong statehood, with entrepreneurial policy trends. Stable social democracy has, on the one hand, resulted in comparatively low levels of segregation and social dislocation despite emerging trends in the

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¹ For a broad historical overview of Amsterdam social and spatial change until the mid-90s see Kahn & van der Plas, 1999.

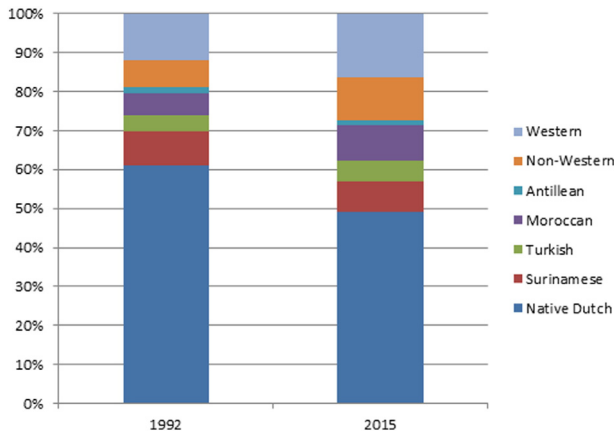


Fig. 1. Ethnic composition of Amsterdam's population. Source: authors based on municipal statistics.

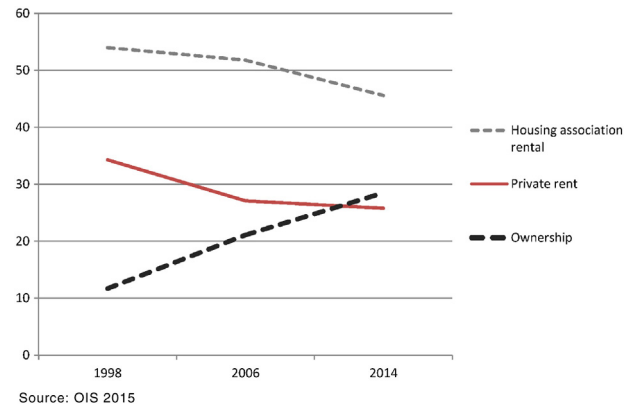


Fig. 3. Tenure as share of housing stock, Amsterdam municipality, 1998–2014. Source: authors. Source: OIS, 2015.

opposite direction (Tammaru, Marcińczak, Van Ham, & Musterd, 2016). On the other hand, a political praxis oriented to entrepreneurialism has often set Amsterdam at the forefront in academic debates on the creative city, smart city, entrepreneurial governance and large-scale urban developments (Peck, 2012; Fainstein, 2008). Secondly, Amsterdam combines a relatively strong economic growth, both nationally and at global scale, with a relatively compact and planned urban and regional structure. Nowadays, policy continues to strive for economic growth via a compact city approach. Lastly, Amsterdam's municipal tax system and land market are very peculiar in comparison to other European and North American cities. Within a nationally centralized fiscal system, Amsterdam largely relies on national tax revenues, and at the same time fosters proactive land use policy to leverage income from targeted urban interventions (Allers, 2013). Almost the totality of municipal land is owned by the city and leased to users. This provides not only a stable source of income but further allows the local government to directly control land change in order to pursue and implement municipal policies of housing regeneration and economic development. Nonetheless, the current economic crisis has put pressure on this system, compromising its capacity to mitigate social polarization (Engelen & Musterd, 2010).

Below we will sketch how these peculiar traits of the Dutch capital have changed over the last fifteen years, while emphasizing some fundamental continuities. We selectively look at the fields of urban politics,

planning, housing studies and social geography, which are the fundamental dimensions of Amsterdam's urban condition and further allow us to tangentially address other variables (e.g. infrastructures or environmental policies). First, we provide an up-to-date socio-economic portrait of the city. Second, we look at the historically consolidated tradition of housing policy as one of the main targets of institutional reform. Third, we address the key trends related to the approach and fruition of spatial interventions for urban development. Lastly, we show how these trends impact the political landscape of the city.

2. A changing social geography: greater ethnic diversity and an upgrading urban core

The social geography of Amsterdam has undergone remarkable changes in the past decades. Three key trends characterize this period: demographic growth, gentrification; and increasing ethnic diversity. While the last two trends have been under way for a longer period of time, the substantial demographic growth is a more recent phenomenon. As was the case in many Western cities, Amsterdam's net migration with the region and the rest of the country were negative for decades. By the mid-eighties, the City had lost about 20% of its inhabitants since the beginning of large-scale suburbanization in the early 1960s. For decades, suburbanization drained the city of large numbers of relatively affluent households, creating an ever-increasing income

Demographic change City of Amsterdam 1990-2014

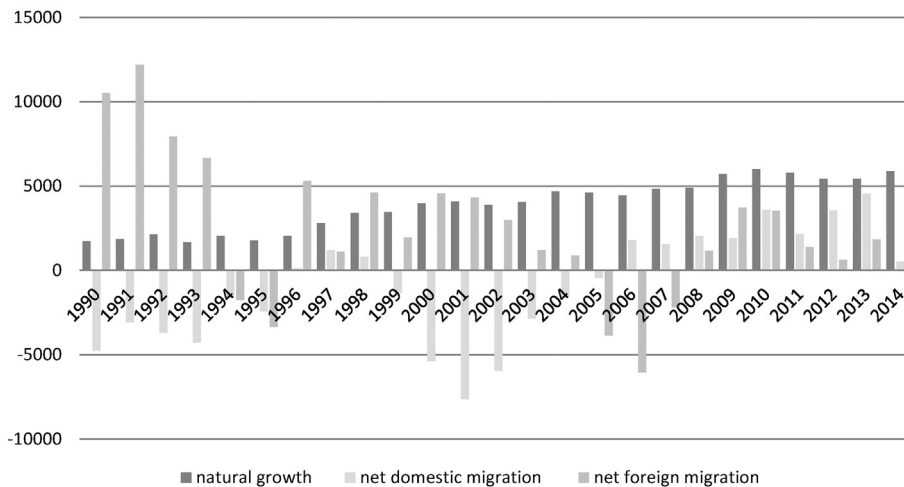


Fig. 2. Demographic Change of the City of Amsterdam 1990–2014. Source: authors, based on municipal statistics.

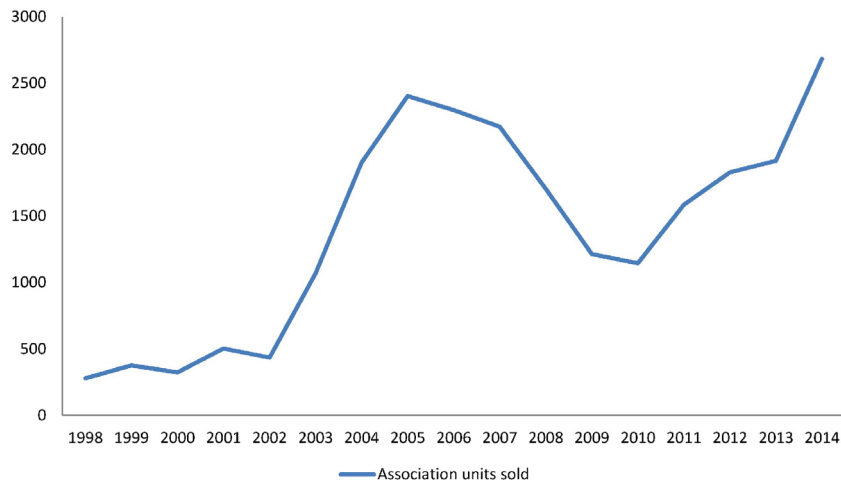


Fig. 4. Rental dwellings sold by housing associations in Amsterdam per year. Source: Amsterdamse Federatie van Woningcorporaties (AFWC), 2015.

gap between the central city and its suburban fringes (Musterd, Bontje, & Ostendorf, 2006). This trend was reinforced by the city's extensive social housing program, and the large-scale construction of owner-occupied housing in suburban New Towns like Almere and Haarlemmermeer. At its peak in 1995, Amsterdam's housing stock consisted of 55% public housing and an additional sector of regulated affordable private rent (about 15%). Although public housing was generally accessible, also for middle classes, the newly constructed suburban areas appeared much more attractive, particularly for family households. Enabled by car-ownership, rising household incomes, and fiscal stimulation of mortgage lending, middle class families abandoned the central city in great numbers.

While international migration in the eighties and nineties compensated for some of the population losses due to suburbanization, Amsterdam's demographic and economic position remained weak due to the low educational level and poor status of most of the immigrants (Musterd, 2006). Immigration from countries like (former) colonies Surinam and the Antilles, and 'guest workers' from Turkey and Morocco greatly changed the ethnic profile of the city (Foner, Duyvendak, van Reekum, & Rath, 2014). While the population was still predominantly native Dutch until the early 1990s, by 2011 Amsterdam became what has been referred to as a minority-majority city (Aalbers & Deurloo, 2003), that is, more than half of Amsterdam's population is of non-Dutch descent, of which about two-thirds are from non-

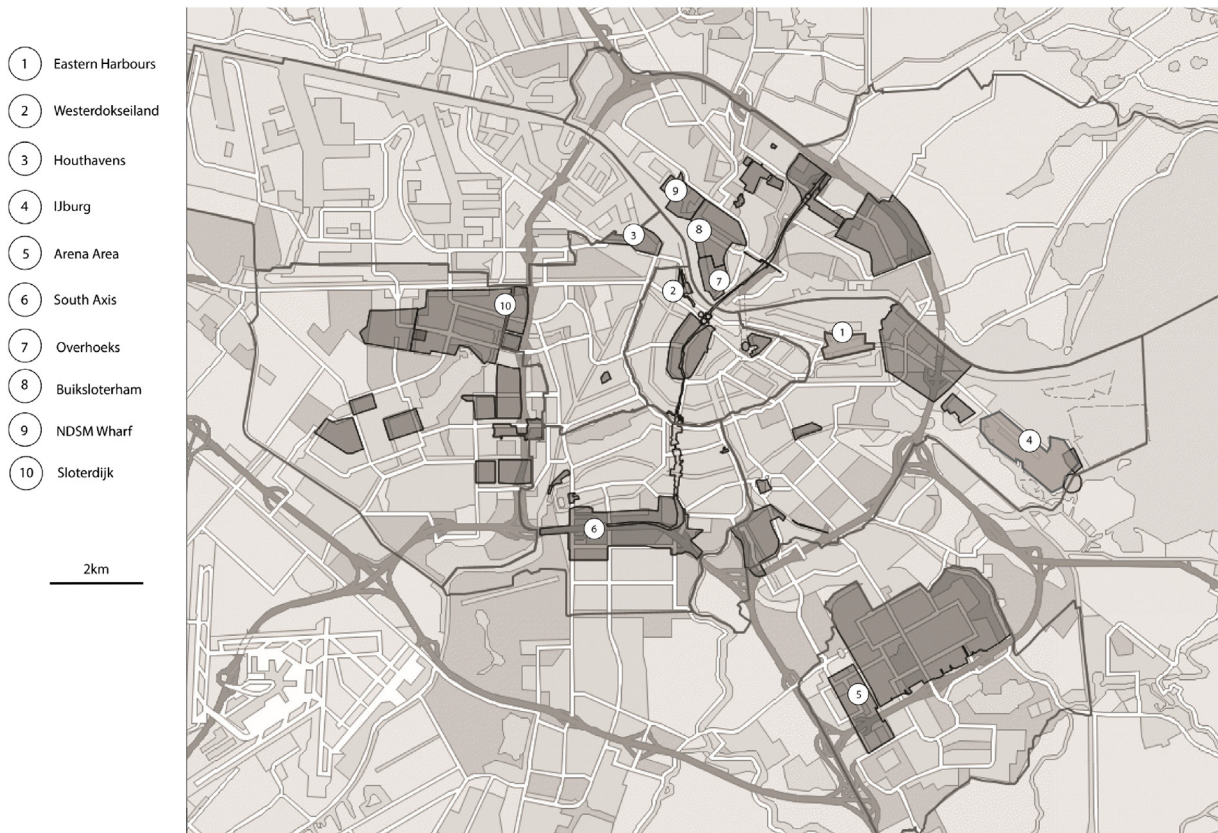


Fig. 5. Main projects of urban development in Amsterdam.



Fig. 6. Temporary urban gardens filling unused plots within the developing area of South Axis.
Picture: Marcel Heemskerck.

Western countries. Although Moroccan and Surinamese still comprise the largest ethnic groups, migration from these and other traditional countries of origin is now ebbing. New migration flows from an ever

more diverse group of countries have emerged, making Amsterdam increasingly diverse. So much in fact that it is now the city with the greatest number of different nationalities in the world (OIS, 2015) and has

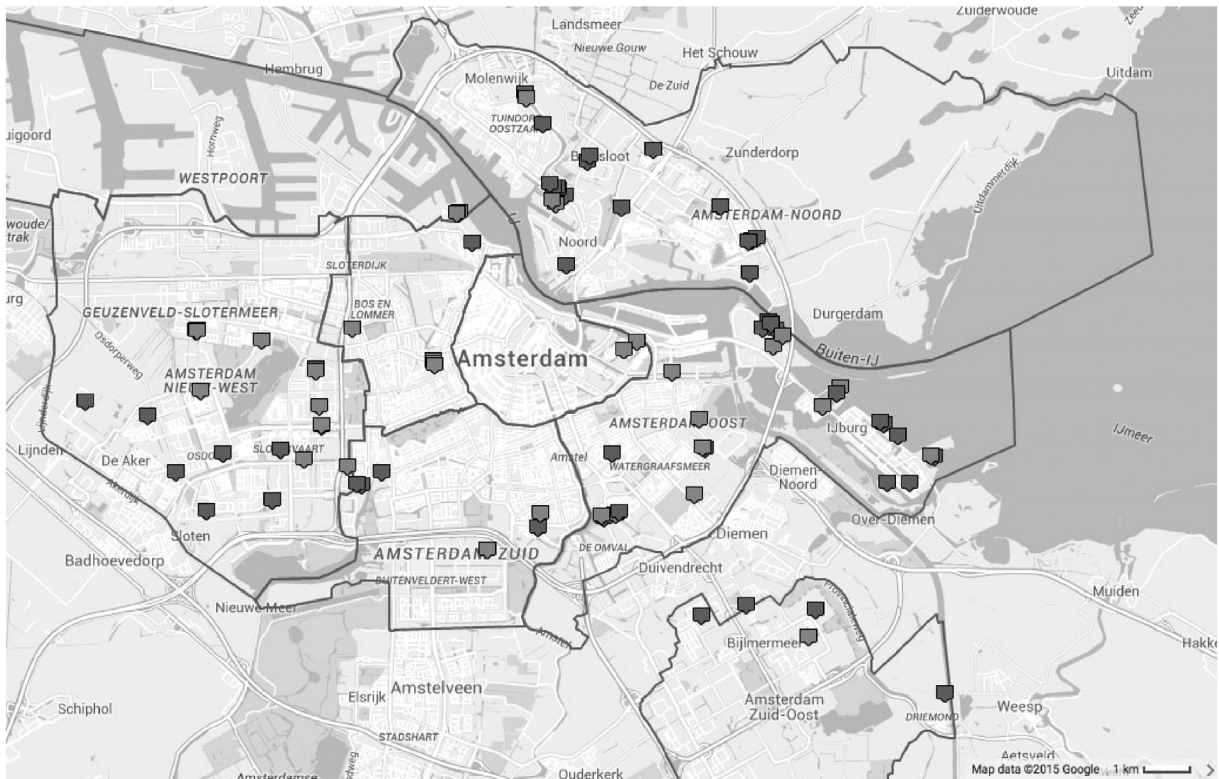


Fig. 7. Map of plots available for self-building initiatives. In dark gray the plots for groups of individuals, in light gray those for individual dwellers.

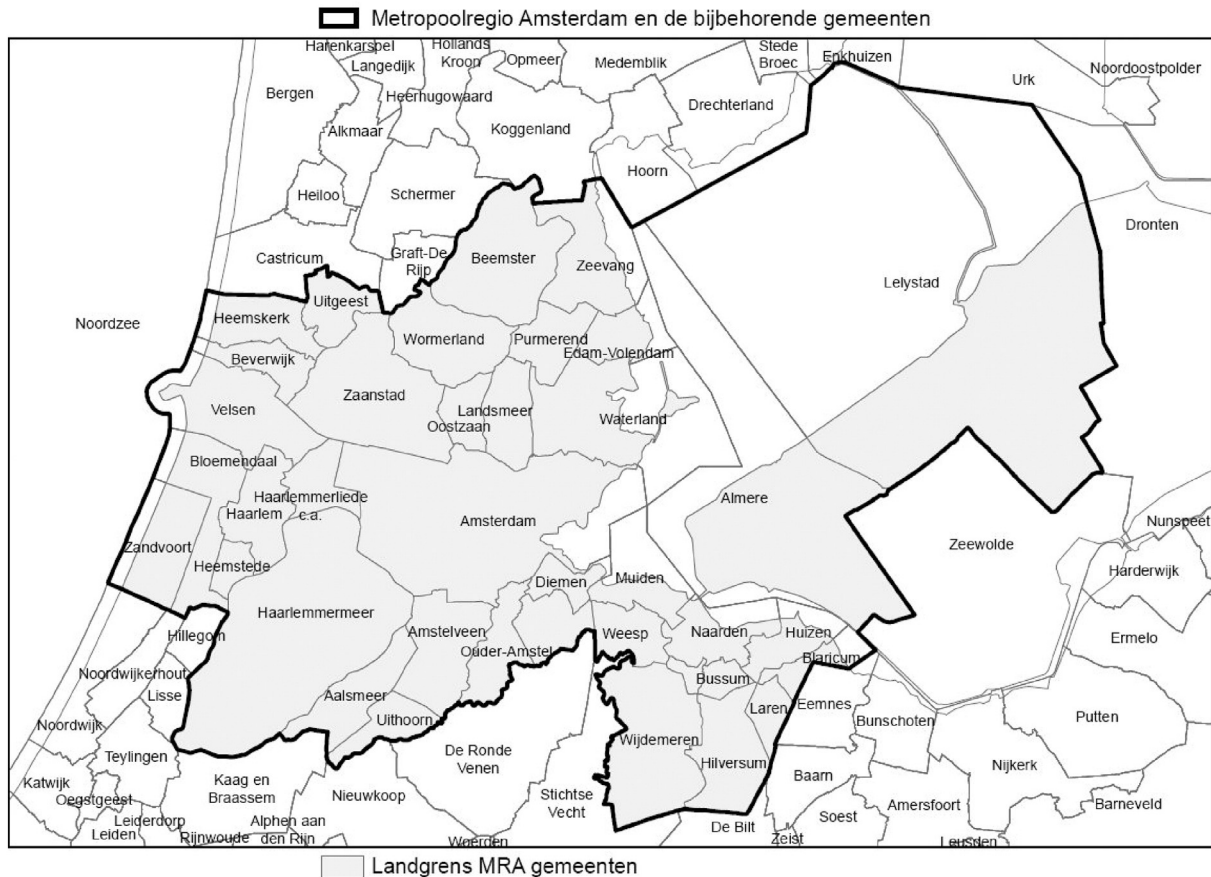


Fig. 8. The perimeter of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region.
Source: Province of North Holland.

frequently been described as super-diverse (Crul & Schneider, 2010; Nell & Rath, 2009).

Migration, from emerging economies, such as India, China and Brazil, and from European and other industrialized countries also reflect the changing economic position of Amsterdam. Particularly in the past 15 years, the city has reported consistently higher growth than the country as a whole. Despite its relatively small size, Amsterdam is well embedded in global networks and its economy is highly determined by services in financial, creative and knowledge-intensive sectors (GaWC, 2012; Musterd et al., 2006). Foreign companies, which often have a global or regional headquarters in the city bring in or attract foreign workers, who may be temporary or more permanently settling nearby. The spatial concentration of these ‘expats’ also leaves a mark on the character of some neighborhoods in the city, serving as a factor in gentrification processes that are abundant in the central areas (Sleutjes & Boterman, in press.).

Domestic demographic patterns have also changed: there is now a positive net migration with the region and the rest of the country is now positive and a growing number of families staying in the city have propelled demographic growth (Boterman, Karsten, & Musterd, 2010). Another important factor was the construction of new low-rise housing projects, such as IJburg. In the past decade, Amsterdam’s population grew by 100,000 inhabitants and is projected to continue (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2013). What is more, this population growth is increasingly caused by young and higher educated households. Particularly in the central parts of the city, middle class households are now the dominant group. Gentrification, which started in neighborhoods like Jordaan in the 1980s, and De Oude Pijp in the late 1990s is now

affecting most neighborhoods within the orbital A10 highway. The further upgrading of already gentrified or middle class areas ranks these locations currently as some of the most expensive residential neighborhoods in the country (Hochstenbach & Van Gent, 2015).

Despite widespread and intensive gentrification, the city still exhibits a very mixed population in terms of class and ethnicity, as well as relatively moderate levels of segregation (Musterd, 2005; Tammaru et al., 2016). Most gentrification areas used to be ranked among the poorest in the city and even the country. The upgrading of those areas hence initially leads to an even greater social mix and a quite equal dispersal of low incomes over urban space (Boterman & Van Gent, 2015). Nonetheless, politicians, policy makers, and academics are increasingly concerned about what they refer to as a growing polarization between the haves and have-nots. Since the crisis, poverty has increased markedly (Michon & Slot, 2014) while high incomes similarly continue to rise. Alongside concerns about diverging life chances between social groups in the city, this potential for inequality is also manifesting itself spatially. The A10 ring road, which separates the pre-war and post-war urban fabric, is increasingly seen as a barrier, both physically and mentally, dividing the rapidly gentrifying inner city neighborhoods from the relatively downgrading garden cities at the municipality’s peripheral boundary. The most recent policy proposal, as explained below, thus emphasizes the need to extend trends of gentrification and upgrading towards these areas, starting from the zones around the A10 ring road.

The changing geography of Amsterdam should however not just be considered at the municipal level: Amsterdam’s social landscape needs to be understood at the metropolitan level, with careful attention paid to the interdependencies between the peri-urban, suburban

spaces, and its center (Musterd et al., 2006; Savini, 2014). This relationship has become increasingly variegated. While the inner-city neighborhoods are gentrifying, the suburban areas are becoming more differentiated in terms of class, ethnicity and household composition. Additionally, some of the older parts of the post-war periphery now face processes of downgrading. While some pre-war suburban locations maintain their traditional position as a destination for upper middle class families, the oldest parts of the post-war New Towns like Almere, which used to be the destination for many middle class families coming from the city, are now witnessing demographic stagnation (Tzaninis & Boterman, 2014). Furthermore, the main influx of people into many of those suburban locations is composed of single-person households. As a result, while gentrification legitimizes inner city living for middle class families (Boterman, 2012), Amsterdam's suburbs are becoming less and less the exclusive domain of family households. To some extent, these opposite trends now challenge traditional suburban and urban dichotomies. Next to demographic differentiation, suburbanization of second-generation socially mobile immigrants also increases the ethnic heterogeneity of suburbs (De Groot, 2004). While most suburban locations are still quite homogeneously white, particularly less expensive post-war areas are now home to middle-class (and some working class) households with a non-Dutch background. In the center of Almere, for instance, about 30% of all residents have a non-western background (CBS, 2015).

These transitions in the past decades in Amsterdam fit into broader international trends of increasing diversity, gentrification of the urban core and variegating processes of suburbanization due to social mobility and changes in the relationship between periphery and core. In the highly regulated context of The Netherlands, it is paramount to link these transitions to institutional changes, notably, the crucial role of housing.

3. Housing and neighborhood renewal: liberalization and crisis

Amsterdam's socio-economic change has been both produced by and conducive to the city's new approach to urban regeneration and housing development since the mid-1990s and up until the financial crisis. In the late 1970s and 1980s, housing policy was dominated by urban renewal and revitalization of inner-city nineteenth century neighborhoods, which form a crescent around the 17th and 18th century city center. Originally slated for demolishing, protests and political crises led to regeneration programs which in turn minimized residential displacement and incorporated renovation (De Liagre Böhl, 2010). These housing and regeneration policies slowly expanded the share of regulated rental housing to its peak in 1995 (see above). At that time, several changes in the Dutch housing system and municipal policy would eventually lead to a decline of association housing to 45% in 2014. Since the late 1980s, national housing policy has shifted from a focus on general housing provision to the provision of owner occupied dwellings, particularly after the housing memorandum of 2001 (Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002; Van Ham, van Kempen, & van Weesep, 2006). Consequently, large subsidies for social housing construction were cut and new provisions to expand mortgage lending were introduced, including generous mortgage interest tax deductions (Aalbers, 2011). These changes would eventually lead to inflated housing prices and large consumer debts (IMF, 2009).

At the same time in the 1990s, housing associations were partly deregulated, meaning that they were given more leeway in managing their portfolios and their investments. While retaining favorable lending conditions and taxation, housing associations were expected to act entrepreneurially to cover the costs of social housing. One new tool used to raise liquidity for investments in new housing included the 'right to sell' social dwellings (Gruis, 2005).

These institutional changes were felt in Amsterdam, where domestic and foreign demand for housing has been steadily increasing since the late 1990s, and where the municipality had become geared towards

accommodating this demand for the sake of economic growth. The need to attract and retain skilled or 'creative' workers meant a need for a more accessible and less regulated housing market (Bontje & Musterd, 2009), an ambition clearly reflected in housing and planning policy strategies from the 2000s. Moreover, the 2008 housing memorandum makes clear that this should be at the expense of 'cheap housing' leading to policy aiming for an absolute decline in affordable housing and low income households (Van Gent, 2013; Kadi & Musterd, 2015). As a result of subsidy cuts for housing, higher demand for city living and increased mortgage lending leading to rising housing prices, owner occupancy increased from 8% of the total housing stock in 1990 to 29% in 2014. This also resulted from new business models adopted by housing associations which are more and more based on investments, tapping into value gaps, as well as by the municipality's choice to make housing more easily accessible for middle class workers.

This transformation of tenure structure has been a controlled effort and accomplished through three spatial strategies. First, in the 1990s and 2000s several new residential areas were developed such as Eastern Harbors, IJburg and several projects along the IJ-banks. These will be discussed below in more detail, but what is important to note is that over time, these developments progressively featured smaller shares of social housing. While the share has dropped from 50% (Eastern Harbors, see Kahn & van der Plas, 1999) to about 20% (Overhoeks), these developments still add social housing to the stock, yet these gains are not offset by the losses elsewhere.

Second, in the 1990s, large-scale urban regeneration programs moved on to the post-war areas in the urban periphery outside the A10 ring road. Rather than minimizing displacement, renewal was dependent upon the demolishing of abundant social housing in favor of more owner-occupied housing. These efforts were partly covered by the housing sales, but gaps were funded by national subsidies, the municipality and to a lesser degree, by housing associations. The strategy was not only implemented for the purpose of de-concentrating poverty and increasing social equity, but also to improve social manageability and restructure the housing stock (Uitermark, 2003; Van Gent, 2013). While these programs resulted in persuasive physical changes, particularly in Bijlmermeer (Helleman & Wassenberg, 2004), they were less successful in instituting lasting social change in terms of social composition (despite the displacement of dwellers as a consequence of these policies). This is not only because negative reputations proved persistent, but also due to the fact that large-scale urban renewal projects were aborted or delayed after subsidies were cut and demand fell following the 2008 financial and budgetary crises.

Third, the historic city center has undergone a process of gentrification since the 1980s, which slowly expanded into the nineteenth century belt in the late 1990s and moved further outwards in the 2000s. As mentioned earlier, the municipality facilitated and pushed this process by negotiating the sale of social housing, allowing for more amenities, leisure and consumption, and by investing in public space. The 2008 municipal housing memorandum literally states that gentrification should be furthered. The 'roll-out of the city center' also encompassed regeneration of pre-war neighborhoods within the ring road area. Rather than implementing large-scale renewal like in the post-war city, renovation and subsequent sale of parts of the social housing stock have become the *modus operandi* (Van Gent, 2013).

These shifts in the city's housing market structure brought about significant socio-spatial change, altering the accessibility of housing (Boterman & Gent, 2014; Boterman & Van Gent, 2015; Kadi & Musterd, 2015). Yet, while in decline, housing associations have continued to construct new social housing units. What's more, regulated rental housing still accounts for 58% of the housing stock in 2013 (OIS, 2015). These rents are maximized based on dwelling size, number of rooms, amenities and location. In recent decades, rents have been 'liberalized' by allowing higher rents for dwellings in high-demand regions like Amsterdam (*Donnerpunten*) and very recently with the 2015 Housing Law, by coupling rents to market value. Initially, new tenants were

hardly confronted with rent increases as a result of EU-induced regulations which required housing associations to rent out almost all of their dwellings within the regulated sector (Gruis & Priemus, 2008). The budgetary crisis however appeared to have sped up the demise of the social sector (Boelhouwer & Priemus, 2014). To cover budget deficits, housing associations and private renters were heavily taxed, and to compensate, were allowed to charge additional rent increases. These measures effectively nudge middle class tenants to deregulated rent and owner occupancy. With middle classers being ousted and accessibility curtailed, regulated rental housing is becoming more residualized and its tenants are ageing (Musterd, 2014). As a result, the large, yet increasingly inaccessible regulated sector is becoming politically unviable in a high-demand city. Currently, the municipality is expressing a wish for more 'middle segment housing', meaning reasonably priced owner-occupancy housing or rental housing, at the expense of the regulated rental sector (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2013). In short, the 2008 debt-crisis and subsequent new policies will very likely lead to further changes in Amsterdam's social structure.

The economic downturn had a further impact upon regeneration. National urban policies and regeneration budgets have been stopped and the first years of the crisis saw both housing associations and municipalities struggling with solvability. As a result, planned housing construction in low-demand post-war areas was put on hold and large-scale renewal of the Western Garden Cities was delayed indefinitely. Instead, the municipality turned its focus towards the institutionalization of active citizen involvement and facilitating small-scale 'organic' experiments (see below). This resonates with the idea of 'Big Society', and with an urban welfare system pinned on self-organized citizens and small-scale market actors (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012). Renewal and new housing development in post-war areas and on brown field sites have become almost exclusively private oriented, as housing associations are restrained by the new taxes and regulations. Nevertheless, new housing policies continue to see housing associations as important actors in neighborhood regeneration. While their commercial activities are curtailed, they are still allowed to develop private housing under favorable conditions in low-demand areas, albeit under the direction of the municipality.

In contrast to the post-war periphery, the municipality does not waver in its ambitions for the high-demand area within the ring road. In its 2013 strategic planning agenda, the Amsterdam municipality is choosing "an active role in urban development in those areas where high-density urban living and working environments are possible, where accessibility is optimal, and where most money can be earned. This is the Ring Zone" (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2013, p. 8, translation by authors).

4. Urban developments: from large scale to organic

Since the 1990s, the municipality – in close cooperation with market actors and social housing associations – embraced a strategy of large-scale development projects to redevelop strategic parts of the city (Healey, 2007; Jolles, Klusman, & Teunissen, 2003). As in many other cities, such projects were driven by an international economic transition towards a service and leisure economy and became key spatial and symbolic markers of a 'rediscovery' of cities as places in which to work, live and play (Moulaert & Rodríguez, 2003; Salet & Gualini, 2007; Van der Cammen, de Klerk, Dekker, & Witsen, 2012). In Amsterdam, new practices of public organization and public-private cooperation have emerged to streamline planning and delivery (Gualini & Majoor, 2007). Geographically, the concentration of these projects could be found on the banks of the IJ estuary, and around the newly completed highway/metro ring in the west, south and southeast parts of the city.

Redeveloping the banks of the IJ has been an important item of professional, public and political debate in the city since the 1980s (Feddes & Mader, 2012). Initially, in the early 1990s, ambitious redevelopment plans for the IJ banks around Central Station were supported by a large

public-private joint venture (Rooijendijk, 2005). This Amsterdam Waterfront Public Private Partnership collapsed in 1993 due to a financial crisis and changing market preferences. Soon after, the municipality started to rethink its development strategy for the area. A more piecemeal incremental strategy was chosen, supported by up-front public investments in public buildings and a bigger emphasis on housing development (Schram, Van Ruyven, & Van Der Made, 2012). More to the east, the underused 'Eastern Harbors' were developed into dense and attractive residential areas, financially supported by a national 'Key Project' policy aimed at strengthening cities and developing them in a compact way via in-fill housing projects (Schuiling, 1996). After the turn of the millennium, the strategy of constructing dense housing development alongside the waterfront continued to the west side of the Central Station, with the Westerdokseiland and Houhavens developments. In the far east of the city a completely new urban district, IJburg, was planned in the 2000s as a series of artificial islands in the IJsselmeer. Today it houses 22,000 inhabitants and combines both high and low density zones, experimental architecture and a mixture of tenure forms (Lupi, 2008).

In contrast to the southern banks, the transformation of the northern IJ-banks shows a different organization of land development, more focused on piece-meal and punctual interventions in space. The north shore of the estuary suffered just as hard as the south as a result of industrial restructuring and closure of wharfs. Here, however, there was no market interest in the underused sites, which were not easily accessible and suffered from the negative image of being 'at the other side of the IJ' (Donkers, 2013). These looming costs led to reluctance among the left-wing politicians in district government, effectively blocking any large redevelopment ambitions, which were happening in the rest of the city. After a cumbersome political process between the central city and the district authority, the Masterplan for the Northern IJ-banks (2003) set out the long term strategic goals with a strategy based on piecemeal transformations. The re-development was grounded on cultural heritage, creative industries (particularly in the NDSM wharf area) and symbolic interventions to smooth transition and generate market pressure. In the mid 2000s, the central Overhoeks location also became the first stepping-stone in a clearly high-end housing oriented investment, aimed at infusing a process of social and economic change in the working class neighborhoods around it (Savini, 2013a, b).

Still, the efforts around the IJ represented a monocentric vision for planned urbanization, one in which the position of the city center as the main commercial epicenter prevails. However, at the same time in the mid-1990s, spatial and economic policies were prepared and executed with a more polycentric form in mind (Bertolini & Salet, 2003). Reacting strongly to market pressures, the municipality allowed the realization of large office buildings at the western, southern and southeastern perimeters of the central city, demarcated by the then completed A10 ring road and the emerging train and light rail network. This occurred not only as a means for accommodating a burgeoning demand for accessible and modern facilities, but also to protect the pre-war inner city against new large-scale constructions (Ploeger, 2004). This model was also inspired by internationally widespread ideas of Transit Oriented Development, specifically focusing on tailoring office development to regional railway networks (Pojani & Stead, 2014). The policy concerning the Bijlmer Arena area and what came to be known as the South Axis (Zuidas), aimed to create more than the traditional mono-functional office enclaves – instead, by emphasizing the notion of a 'financial headquarters', mixed use policy in these areas combined the integration of exclusive living (South Axis) and large-scale entertainment and shopping amenities (Bijlmer Arena) (Evers, 2008; Majoor, 2009; Wagenaar, 2011).

All these projects are exemplificative interventions initiated from the mid-1990s until the economic crisis in 2008. Guided by optimistic expectations regarding economic growth and an increasing housing demand, these projects, and more particularly, those alongside the river IJ,

were supported by ample municipal funds, a steady supply of credit and active housing associations. Grounded in a political acceptance of a directive role of public authorities in this domain, the municipality of Amsterdam played an active role in their development, a quintessential characteristic of Dutch planning in the second half of the twentieth century (Needham, 2014). This practice and culture was made possible by public ownership of most of the land, which Amsterdam exploited and controlled via a land-lease system (*erfpacht*). Despite land ownership, the municipality of Amsterdam was – like all municipalities in The Netherlands – dependent on subsidies from the national government for large-scale infrastructure investments. This led to complex political negotiations, like, for example, those around the newly planned and highly controversial north–south subway line.

The state-led (yet private-oriented) development model was managed by municipal project bureaus, each with their own focus upon a specific area of the city. These project offices had the task to create an integral area-based approach, connecting municipal departments. In this way, the municipality embraced a ‘project-oriented view’, in which certain demarcated areas were prioritized as projects with a specific timeline of public and private investments, and a detailed program with urban design guidelines. The quantitative and qualitative results of these planned projects have often been praised (Fainstein, 2008; Healey, 2007). Particularly the redevelopment of the southern IJ-banks has been celebrated as an attractive, dense and relatively mixed-use area. Yet currently, some of these projects are revealing weaknesses in terms of composition and use. While decades of consolidated and state-led development have led to well-functioning new neighborhoods, they are not always socially mixed (see the previous discussion concerning the diminishing ratio of affordable housing in new projects). Further, results alongside the ring road are less certain, where vulnerable monofunctional office sites (Sloterdijk, Diemen, Amstel III) and denser mixed developments of the South Axis and the Bijlmer Arena area fall short in terms of functional diversification (Majoer, 2015).

The recent global financial crisis changed, quite abruptly, the political, institutional and financial pillars of this development model. The rapidly planned and mechanically organized nature of these projects, which sought to institute quick urban change, proved to be untenable. The demand for new office buildings almost disappeared, revealing the fact that the city’s active land policy and optimistic planning had contributed to an enormous oversupply of office space (Janssen-Jansen & Salet, 2009). The rapidly decreasing returns from new municipal land leases, further aggravated by budget overruns in its major north/south subway project, led to financial rockiness. As a result, the municipality effectively halted its active land policy and instituted austerity measures, closing the formerly responsible project bureaus, removing the key pilot agents for public coordination of complex interventions, and re-integrating development responsibilities into the municipal organization.

In addition, crisis and austerity meant a political reorientation of the city’s development strategies. Rather than taking the lead, the state adopted a facilitating approach. Ideas for co-production, temporality and self-organization have gained political and societal currency (Peck, 2012). In the post-crisis era, the main mantra became small-scale, plot-by-plot development (*kavelsturing*). Several large projects, which were already set in motion like the South Axis, IJburg, Sloterdijk, and Amstel III, were re-imagined along these lines in order to sustain their development. The renewal projects in the urban periphery, by contrast, were cancelled (see above).

Currently, the municipality is fostering a planning approach which attempts to be less interventionist and more oriented towards stimulating both markets and social engagement via ‘creative communities’, for example in the re-use of empty office buildings or the temporary use of vacant plots in the city (PMB/Leerhuis, 2012). Such an approach is defined as ‘organic’, a planning attitude which responds to emergent needs rather than setting out a blueprint for the future. Despite its

rhetoric of innovation and *sociocratic* logic, the practice of organic planning is still highly controlled. Organic planning is only practiced in particular areas and at a larger scale, like Zeeburgereiland, Houthavens and Buiksloterham, which are carefully selected by the government. Here, the process of self-built housing and temporary usage is closely managed. The municipality continues to set land-use prices and building conditions. Environmental rules and institutionalized practices of area development hamper completely new arrangements, for example around alternative energy provision, and often frustrate initiators (Dembski, 2013). Despite lofty social goals, new practices are still dominated by middle-class values and outcomes. It is not yet clear whether they will be able to cater to the wider needs of the city, particularly regarding affordable housing and inclusive development.

5. Metropolitan governance: from experimentation to fragmentation

The last two decades have witnessed an increase in the functional interdependency between Amsterdam and its surrounding municipalities, a relationship that has stimulated a series of experiments in metropolitan coordination. Today, regional planning demands new forms of coordination (Janssen-Jansen, 2011) more geared to address issues of political fragmentation and competitive growth between municipalities. The city of Amsterdam has always been dependent on its surrounding municipalities for its economic and social condition. Since the 1960s both large logistic facilities and important residential areas have developed outside of the city, but remained strongly connected to the core: for many years Almere was considered a twin-city of Amsterdam and Schiphol served as a city airport, but also connected to the large housing sector of the adjacent municipality of Haarlemmermeer. In fact, between 1989 and 2003, around 57% of the total new developments in the metropolitan area took place within fringe and outer areas (Hamers & Piek, 2012).

In the 1970s, metropolitan coordination had already gained some political urgency due to the increased socio-economic asymmetry between the declining core municipality and the growing suburban New Towns. Such a regional distribution of functions has been further sustained by the centralized fiscal system (see previous section). The raising asymmetry between growing outer cities and the declining inner city made the issue of regional coordination highly politicized. In the 1990s, important experiments of inter-municipal, metropolitan and regional cooperation were undertaken. In order to achieve economic growth, a need for a system of regional coordination able to govern housing development, to connect different growing economic poles through efficient infrastructure, and to control the side effects on the green spaces of the Green Hart became a priority. In this period, an assemblage of different methods of coordination between municipalities was at play. During this time, elected officials of the G4 cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) effectively lobbied for large national programs aimed at housing renewal. These efforts led to a national growth coalition and policies such as Big City Policy (*Grotesteden Beleid*) and the National Key Projects, first and second generation (*Sleutelprojecten*) (Majoer & Schuiling, 2008). Ten years later the state approves a national vision for the region of the Randstad (Randstad 2040).

These regional policies were supported by a growth coalition formed by national and local interests around objectives of urban growth. They also built on the capacity of Amsterdam politics to consolidate a strong consensus around objectives of urban redevelopment at the regional level (Terhorst & Van De Ven, 1995). In the mid-90s, these coalitions set the conditions for new forms of regionalism and alternative models of soft-governance between Amsterdam and its surrounding cities. The *Stadsregio* was formed as a regional body, with actual budget, tasked to govern housing growth and transport within Amsterdam and its first belt of neighboring cities. Secondly, the experiment with the *Noordvleugelconferenties* (North Wing Conferences), later named Amsterdam Metropolitan Region (*Metropoolregio Amsterdam, MRA*), provided a continuous self-organized platform under the coordination

of Amsterdam municipality. The MRA further functioned as a platform to discuss regional infrastructural, environmental, and residential development issues with an impact on the region. This latter experiment was particularly successful in its capacity to focus on specific issues while limiting institutionalization, and also due to the direct engagement of many municipal officials.

These experiments in governance were functional in governing goals related to economic growth, housing production, national infrastructure investments and in raising concern about sustainability at a regional scale. Regional cooperation was specifically geared to coordinate both local strategies of urban and economic development at regional level and to reduce any counterproductive competition between neighboring municipalities. Yet, these experiments also functioned as systems of coordination for incoming funds and resources from the national government. The national government provided great economic support for urban development, including financial incentives for inner city restructuring, ambitious infrastructural programs, suburban residential development (VINEX) and high-speed trains. The experiences of the Amsterdam metropolitan region gained consensus because of a strong impulse of infrastructural and environmental investment from the state and from the widespread feeling that the region was a growing economy (Salet, 2006). Regional governance was, therefore, a means to ensure that all public stakeholders involved could share a piece of the economic wealth.

Like the housing, renewal and infrastructure projects (see discussion in previous sections), the 2008 crisis changed the conditions under which metropolitan governance could flourish. Three major changes radically undermined the political commitment for regional cooperation. First, the position of the national government was reduced, following programs of decentralization and austerity and through the introduction of a new spatial planning act that gave each level of governance more authority. Today, the national government does not produce any national spatial vision, but focuses instead on specific competitive areas within its *Structuurvisie Infrastructuur en Ruimte* (Structural Vision on Infrastructure and Space). The former Ministry of Environment and Planning and Housing Affairs (VROM) no longer functions as a standalone government entity and most of the punctual support to projects takes place via non-regulatory and non-financial instruments (Savini, 2013a). Further, in current policy documents the region of the Randstad is no longer referred to as a spatial and political reference (Roodbol-Mekkes, van der Valk, & Korthals Altes, 2012). Secondly, as explained above, the mid 2000s saw the revival of the core city and an appreciation of its mix, density and urbanity in contraposition to suburban living. Together, including the area of Haarlemmermeer (Schiphol Airport), Amsterdam is the only municipality economically growing within the region since 2008 and it does so beyond the national average. This relates to new economic activities related to cognitive-cultural economies, which are blossoming in the central areas of the city (Scott, 2008; see also Kloosterman, 2010). The economic performance of Amsterdam is overtaking that of its surroundings.² This has political implications both at the urban and regional level. Amsterdam's political landscape has, surprisingly, recently changed. The last elections in March of 2014 were the last manifestation of a turn in city and regional politics, with an increased consensus of socialist and liberal parties and a decrease in electoral turnout of the socio-democratic party, which for the first time since WWII falls outside of the city executive.

The experiments of metropolitan governance in Amsterdam city-region have been politically driven and, most of all, were centered on the economic and political leadership of the municipality of Amsterdam. This centrality of the city eventually decreased consensus in the formal bodies of regional cooperation by the surrounding cities, which suffered from this asymmetry in policy making. Today, Amsterdam's political landscape is much more diversified in both the city and the surrounding

region, also because of its consolidating socio-economic polycentrism. Within the municipality, emerging progressive liberal parties confront the traditionally consolidated labor party on key issues for the development of the region as a whole. These issues are the role of the logistic industry vis à vis the growing creative sector: the position of financial services and their business districts, the role of Schiphol airport vis à vis Lelystad, the financial sustainability of large projects vis à vis smaller urban interventions of entrepreneurial urbanism and the social housing balance. These cleavages express the emerging dilemmas of post-crisis urban and economic planning in the city (Savini, 2013a, b), yet at the same time, undermine the general consensus concerning regional growth that sustained earlier examples of regionalism.

Today, coordination is more about sharing the costs of the crisis rather than dividing the revenues of growth, and concerned more with boosting selected competitive areas of the region. The MRA is criticized for its heavy focus on the performance of the core city and has actually failed to achieve the structural goals once promised (Vink, 2015). Moreover, national and municipal policies of austerity seem to weaken the capacity to engage in discussions and experimentations concerning long-term regional governance. Metropolitan governance is oriented to selectively reduce development projects. The PLABEKA (*Platform Bedrijven en Kantoren*), coordinated by the department of economic affairs in Amsterdam, is an experiment in regional coordination aimed at reprogramming office development in light of the lower demand for office space. The MRA is also largely active in few state-sponsored urban-infrastructure projects such as the SMASH (the structural vision for *Amsterdam-Schiphol-Haarlemmermeer*), the South Axis and the Amsterdam–Almere link. Metropolitan divisions instead interest the enlargement of Amsterdam harbor, already planned in the mid-90s, vis à vis the need of resizing harbor space for housing production and energy transition goals. Housing is another issue to be tackled as Amsterdam's decreasing social housing stock and an increase in housing demand place pressure on the outer fringes. Inter-municipal coordination is, today, more necessary than ever. Yet, the economic and institutional conditions of Amsterdam city region seem to hinder a fruitful cooperation. The recent revival of urbanity as an attractive quality for the housing market tends to increase the pressure over areas within the city, while also demonizing the 'boring' suburban areas outside. In order to protect ongoing development, the core city selectively focuses on competitive functions mostly within its borders, pushing for densification rather than rethinking a regional strategy of regional polycentrism.

6. Amsterdam today: trends, continuity and challenges

In this article we sketched the current social, economic, spatial and political profile of the Amsterdam city region. We particularly chose to extract four particular dimension of the Amsterdam complex urban condition in order to depict a concise, yet multidimensional and precise, view of the city. First, we gave attention to the socio-spatial changes occurring within the city in relationship to its region. Second, we substantiated these changes by looking at how housing policies and area regeneration both respond to and reinforce these trends. Third, we scrutinized the practices and strategies of instituting comprehensive spatial change – how new urban spaces are produced to respond to changed socio-economic conditions. Fourth, we briefly explained how these trends impinge on urban and metropolitan politics and raises important issues for present and future debates.

Today, Amsterdam is characterized by a few important and highly distinctive trends. The city is more diverse than ever, both ethnically and socially. Moreover, the social geography of Amsterdam shows a growing core–periphery divide, which underlines important economic and cultural asymmetries. The central quarters of Amsterdam are a growing pole within the city, and within the country, selectively attracting affluent middle classers connected to its cognitive-cultural economy. The housing market appears to follow these trends. The tradition of public subsidies and regulated housing now allows for state-led

² Economische Verkenningen Metropoolregio Amsterdam, 2015.

gentrification within inner city neighborhoods. The public support for homeownership, increased in the last 10 years, is changing the balance between social, middle and high-end housing segments, impacting the city's social geography. The tradition of large-scale interventions and strong public planning is also changing. In times of austerity, the city is rethinking the role of public planning and its organization to boost spatial interventions in spite of the economic crisis. Current projects focus on small-scale and piecemeal interventions, particularly oriented to stimulate entrepreneurialism in areas where increased land values can be pursued. Often, these interventions are becoming increasingly related to creative economies and sustainable development. These trends also outline a destabilization (although not yet mature) of the long-term stability of Amsterdam's social democracy. New political groups emerge, claiming more liberal discourses of entrepreneurialism and urban change. At the regional level, the successful experiments of inter-municipal cooperation seem to suffer from pressures related to competition for spatial resources, while the role of the national government in balancing regional development is weakened.

Despite a clear path towards change, Amsterdam still shows important continuities, which affect its current social and economic condition. In this article we chose to focus on patterns of change in spite of important elements of institutional continuity. While ongoing urban entrepreneurialism and straightforward market-oriented policies adhere to traits of neoliberal urbanism, Amsterdam's social inequality is still mitigated by extensive public land ownership, a centralized fiscal system and a strongly proactive role of municipal government in planning and urban policies. These need to be recognized as important conditions that govern the potential exclusionary effects of increasing policies of economic growth, housing privatization and entrepreneurialism. Still, today, the revenues received from land ownership amount to 4% of the total municipal budget (a total of €5.9 billion) and 19% of municipal revenues come from the public fees associated with land development. The land market remains highly controlled, and even today, social spending is increasing.

The combination of the above-outlined trends with these elements of continuity suggests several important challenges that the city will face in the future. First, above all, in order to protect diversity and social and spatial cohesion, Amsterdam must strive for an internal balance of ethnicity and income, mitigating the polarization between core and outer neighborhoods. This cannot be done without a careful policy aimed at protecting affordable housing within the core city. In times of volatile real-estate markets, new financial and organizational instruments might be required to promote less profitable development. The practice of organic development might in this sense bear positive conditions for new ways to support and provide good quality spaces. Yet, the city should avoid a blind reliance on market entrepreneurialism and carefully mediate between emerging spatial trends and the existent social needs in the city and its social diversity. On an urban scale, policies should explicitly address growing socio-economic and spatial cleavages and reorient housing and planning policies to sustain Amsterdam's heritage of a well-planned livable city. On a regional scale, it is therefore crucial to stabilize a political tradition of inter-municipal cooperation wherein regional policies oriented to balance economic asymmetries can be sustained.

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