

## Urban governance and social cohesion: Effects of urban restructuring policies in two Dutch cities

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Problems in distressed neighbourhoods in Western European cities are nowadays often linked to a decline in social cohesion. Recently, some authors have discussed the link between the concept of social cohesion and the concept of urban governance. One of the important questions they raise is whether the process of urban governance can create more social cohesion in a neighbourhood. We contribute to the discussion in this paper. Our specific perspective is the unintended effect of urban governance processes. Three different types of cohesion are introduced: horizontal, vertical, and institutional. Our aim is to ascertain to what extent aspects of urban governance, such as cooperation among different partners, affect these types of social cohesion. The paper is based on a research project that has recently been carried out in two early-post-WWII neighbourhoods in the Dutch cities of Utrecht and The Hague. Both neighbourhoods are subjected to urban restructuring policies.

*Keywords:* Social cohesion, urban governance, urban restructuring policy

### Introduction

Nowadays, almost all West European countries are facing problems with respect to a decreasing quality of life in many post-war neighbourhoods in urban areas: the quality of the housing stock has depreciated, the public space has deteriorated, and social conflicts are the order of the day (see, for example, [Murie et al., 2003](#); [Aalbers et al., 2003, 2004](#)). These areas cannot be regarded as distressed areas in only physical terms, but also in social and economic respects. In the larger cities in the Netherlands, there are some neighbourhoods that are adversely affected by a combination of problems such as drug abuse, youth gangs, organized crime and prostitution. Tensions among ethnic groups also occur, albeit on a very limited scale. Examples of problematic areas are Spangen, Afrikaanderwijk and Bospolder in Rotterdam, parts of the Western Garden Cities of Amsterdam, Schilderswijk and Transvaal in The Hague, Kanaleneiland and Hoograven in Utrecht. It is also common to find one or more problematic areas in smaller cities, often located in the pre-WWII or early post-WWII parts of the cities. Nevertheless, although regarded as problematic from a Dutch point of view, both the socio-economic and the physical problems in the Netherlands are not of the extent comparable with those in large housing estates in the United Kingdom, social housing projects in the United States or the French *Banlieues* (compare, for example, the description and analysis of Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago (see [Venkatesh, 2002](#)) and [Wacquant's](#) piece on the black American ghetto and the French peripheral housing estates ([Wacquant, 1993](#)) with recent descriptions of Dutch problematic housing estates by [Aalbers et al. \(2003, 2004\)](#))).

Local governments have adopted area-based and integrative policies to overcome the various problems. Restructuring policies are often carried out at neighbourhood level (see, for example, [Andersen, 2001](#)). In the Netherlands, the Big Cities Policy (GSB) is the main instrument to improve the situation of these distressed neighbourhoods. The policy rests on three pillars: the economic pillar, the physical infrastructure, and the social infrastructure ([Van Kempen, 2000](#)). The economic pillar is focused on a reduction of unemployment and the creation of better conditions for new and expanding firms in the

city. The physical pillar of this policy aims mainly at the restructuring of the housing stock, while the involvement and participation of the residents is considered of paramount importance within the social pillar of this policy.

The social effects of these targeted policies have been subjected to a considerable amount of research in the last few years, both in the Netherlands (see, for example, Bolt and Torrance, 2004; Kleinhans et al., 2000; Komter et al., 2000; Musterd and Goethals, 1999; Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen, 2002) and in other countries, especially in the United Kingdom (see, for example, Atkinson and Kintrea, 2002). The research questions in these studies were often directly related to different elements of social cohesion: (how) do old and new residents mix with each other? Are there new social contacts among different types of residents? Does a neighbourhood's facelift lead to a greater sense of community? Does building more expensive dwellings in distressed areas enhance the integration of old and new residents? The conclusions of these studies are generally the same: old and new residents have little in common. They are not likely to mix very well, they do not have intensive social contacts, they have different norms and values, and newcomers are often less attached to the neighbourhood. At best, these differences lead to mutual indifference, but this can develop into tension arising from contrasting norms and values related to different ways of life (Blokland, 2003). In the Netherlands, 'misunderstandings' among ethnic minority groups and indigenous residents can be regarded as an indication of tension, albeit on a very small scale. Mutual indifference is a term that aptly describes the majority of the neighbourhoods where social mixing policies are implemented.

The focus in this paper is not on the effects of the different targeted (*restructuring*) policies themselves, but on the effects of the processes that precede the implementation of these policies. In our opinion, this issue is still under-researched. We hypothesize that cooperation among the different actors involved in restructuring, such as local authority departments, social housing associations, neighbourhood councils, tenant platforms, and health organizations, enhances social cohesion indirectly at neighbourhood level, because cooperation offers an opportunity for people to meet each other. Social networks and feelings of attachment to the neighbourhood are important in this respect. Social contacts among the different participants can be established, and these could be useful in future partnerships and developments.

In this paper, we look at the ways in which social cohesion can be affected by the processes of urban governance, whether the effects are in a positive or a negative direction, and whether they were intended or were side effects. Our central question therefore reads as follows: How and under what circumstances does cooperation within urban restructuring policy affect different forms of social cohesion? To answer this question, we have interviewed (local) policy makers, the chairs of citizen platforms, welfare workers, representatives of housing associations, and so forth. All these key persons were related to one of the two neighbourhoods that we have selected as our research neighbourhoods: Nieuw-Hoograven in Utrecht and Bouwlust in The Hague.

The structure of this paper is as follows: in the next section we elaborate the concept of social cohesion and its elements. We then explore the concept of urban governance, its various elements, and the importance of this concept for our research project. In the fourth section, we link these two concepts and the major importance of urban governance in creating and maintaining social cohesion. The fifth section comprises a brief description of both research neighbourhoods; it is followed by a section on the different policies that are being carried out in these areas. The central (empirical) part of this paper is dedicated to an analysis of the effects of the processes of cooperation in urban restructuring policy on social cohesion in our research neighbourhoods. Finally, some conclusions drawn with respect to social cohesion on the basis of the four cases described are put forward.

## Social cohesion

Since the ideas of the sociologists Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies became popular in the early 20th century, researchers have been interested in the influence of rapid and fundamental change on social cohesion, especially on social cohesion in urban agglomerations (Tönnies, 1912; [Wirth, 1938](#)). Usually, social cohesion is regarded as something good that has declined since an unspecified moment in time ([Pahl, 1991](#)).

The concept of social cohesion now deserves the serious attention of European Research Programmes, government memoranda, and a place in the scientific debate. Social cohesion can be defined as *"the internal bonding of a social system (a family, a group, an organization, a University, a city or a society as a whole)"* (Schuyt, 1997, p. 18). Within this context, social cohesion is often regarded as a remedy for many societal problems such as individualism, social exclusion, and changing norms and values. In most cases, this concept is being linked to problems in distressed urban areas, where low-income households and ethnic minority groups concentrate (De Hart, 2002). This description might suggest that social cohesion is always something positive. There are also, however, some negative aspects of social cohesion, such as the exclusion of people from cohesive groups. This division can be experienced in an innocent way, for example when there are two competing football teams in a village; but the division can also be more serious as, for example, in a civil war, in which the social cohesion within a group is directly proportional to the fierceness of the conflict between groups (Schuyt, 1997).

With the context of the concept of social cohesion sketched out, we now consider the way in which it is used in international research. We focus on the aspects of social cohesion at neighbourhood level. Two elements of cohesion are important here: attachment to the neighbourhood (or place attachment); and social networks. As stated in the introduction, the problems of declining social cohesion are often linked to distressed urban neighbourhoods. These areas are increasingly inhabited by low-income households who have few opportunities on the housing market and thus have not made a positive choice for their new neighbourhood. As a consequence, attachment to the neighbourhood has gradually declined ([Brodsky et al., 1999](#)). Moreover, some types of households that have made a positive choice for their place of residence, such as starting households or students, are mostly attracted by the low rents and do not intend to live in these neighbourhoods for very long. They will therefore also be less attached to the neighbourhood than other types of households ([Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen, 2002](#); [Van der Horst et al., 2001](#)).

Social networks, the second element we analyse, can make an important difference in this context. Through participation, both formal and informal, the residents can maintain contacts within their neighbourhood. Many commentators have argued, following the line of reasoning put forward by [Wirth \(1938\)](#), that the role of the neighbourhood as the basis of social contacts has declined, thereby bringing about an erosion of society as a whole (community lost). However, Fischer (1981) pointed out that there was an enormous variety of contacts among urban residents, which is not a sign of an eroded society, but rather of increased opportunities for individuals to choose their own friends and other contacts ([Keller, 1968](#); [Komter et al., 2000](#); [Wellman, 1987](#)). The fact that residents are no longer focused only on the neighbourhood does not mean that the role of the neighbourhood has become unimportant. According to Wellman and Leighton (1979), most citizens have an extensive network, one in which neighbours usually play a relatively modest role. However, certain segments of the population still rely heavily on their neighbourhood for their social ties. Several studies have shown, for example, that low-income households in particular are still very much oriented towards the neighbourhood, perhaps

because their financial limitations prevent them from travelling far afield ([Ellen and Turner, 1997](#); [Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999](#); [Henning and Lieberg, 1996](#)).

There are a large variety of possible ties that bind neighbours, as Blokland (2003) shows in her very detailed description of social interactions in a Dutch neighbourhood in Rotterdam. She distinguishes four types of relationships: interdependencies, transactions, neighbour attachments and bonds. Each of these types may be applicable to relationships among neighbourhood residents. At the very least, there is some degree of interdependency between neighbours. Even in the absence of social relationships, residents are to some extent dependent on each other, as noisy neighbours or those who cause social problems may affect the residents' quality of life. *Transactions* are contacts where some kind of exchange takes place, for example the contact between a shop-owner and his customers or between a patient and a doctor. *Attachments* are formed through membership of organizations such as sports organizations or religious groups. Attachments to neighbours are not established out of affection for them, but because having a good relationship with neighbours is often seen to be important<sup>1</sup>. *Bonds*, finally, are relationships based on affection, like ties with family members and friends. Blokland's division emphasizes the complexity of relationships by showing that there is not one type of social cohesion to be found in a neighbourhood. Still, policymakers tend to speak of 'neighbourhood cohesion', as if there were only one type.

One way to achieve such neighbourhood cohesion is to create opportunities for social networks to evolve. These networks among the residents of a neighbourhood can be established, maintained or improved by using the policy instrument of formal participation. It is this kind of participation that politicians and other stakeholders often mean when they speak of 'citizen participation'. As Arnstein wrote in the late 1960s, there are many different forms of citizen participation. These 'rungs on a ladder of citizen participation' range from non-participation to full citizen control ([Arnstein, 1969](#)). Citizen participation can be an influence on social cohesion, because participation provides an instrument for citizens to discuss local politics and plans for the neighbourhood with stakeholders and local policymakers. In the next section we describe the importance of social networks and citizen participation within the context of urban governance.

### **Urban governance**

The concept of urban governance has gained the attention of many researchers in the last few years; it is often regarded as the opposite of 'traditional' urban government ([Vranken et al., 2003](#)). Urban governance can be seen as a political response to broader developments in society, such as globalization, internationalization, and privatization (see, among others: [Andersen and Van Kempen, 2001, 2003](#); [Friedrichs and Vranken, 2001](#); [Van Kempen, 2001](#); [Vranken et al., 2003](#)). According to these (and other) authors, a centralized and departmentbased government is no longer seen to be able to resolve the problems that have arisen with these developments. A more integrative approach, one that goes beyond the boundaries of the different departments (inter-departmental cooperation), should replace this political system. Andersen and Van Kempen (2003, p. 80) distinguish a number of changes that mark the shift from government to governance:

1. A replacement of universalistic policies by targeted policies.
2. A growing use of covenants as policy regulation.
3. An attempt to integrate policy fields from various departments into a unitary project organization.

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<sup>1</sup> Attachment in the typology of Blokland (2003) should not be confused with neighbourhood attachment, the first aspect of social cohesion. While neighbourhood attachment refers to a psychological sense of community, attachment according to Blokland's typology refers to a certain form of social ties.

4. A focus on the empowerment of residents and of cities and specific neighbourhoods.

The last two elements in particular have clear relationships with social cohesion: integrative policies stimulate cooperation and cohesion among shareholders, while the concept of empowerment is related to social networks within the neighbourhood (see, for example, Dekker and Van Kempen, 2004b). Empowerment and the integrative approach are the two main elements we stress here.

An integrative approach through cooperation initiatives and partnerships can be recognized in many distressed urban neighbourhoods. Rhodes (1997) as cited in Vranken et al. (2003, p. 23) states: "*Governance is broader than government, covering non-state agents*". Thus, not only are local governments involved, but also housing associations, private developers, other market parties, non-governmental organizations, and so forth. Partnerships of different coalitions have thus become commonplace throughout Europe. A partnership in urban governance can be defined as a coalition of interests brought together in order to prepare and oversee strategies for combating urban problems (Bailey et al., 1995; Elander and Blanc, 2001). When a partnership is effective, it leads to the emergence or strengthening of social cohesion between the different partners.

While the integrative approach may affect social cohesion between policymakers and other institutional parties, the focus on empowerment is more relevant to the social cohesion between policymakers and residents, especially where citizen participation is concerned. Citizen participation is only one aspect of empowerment, but nevertheless a very important one, as asserted by Andersen and Van Kempen (2003). It is widely agreed that citizens are not only stakeholders, but also informants: in general, citizens are interested in developments in the neighbourhood and the ways in which these developments affect their personal lives; they can also provide politicians and other stakeholders with important information about the neighbourhood (Buys and Van Grinsven, 1999).

### **Relationships between social cohesion and urban governance**

Urban governance and social cohesion are interrelated (see Kearns and Forrest, 2000). Social networks result partly from the way in which urban governance is organized. For example, where many people have the opportunity to participate in governance structures, the chance that social networks emerge is greater than in a situation where the residents in a neighbourhood are more or less excluded from policy processes. The reverse also applies: in neighbourhoods with tight social networks, political participation is easier to organize. The same holds for another aspect of social cohesion: place attachment. In areas where place attachment is high, it is easier to organize the residents; and when governance structures are able to organize people, place attachment becomes greater.

Participation, whether formal or informal, is hard to achieve when tenants do not know each other. Purdue (2001) stresses that non-governmental organizations can be very important in this respect. These organizations can arrange meetings where people meet each other, social networks can be established and different opinions put forward. In urban restructuring areas, for example, these opinions can be about plans for demolition and plans for building new houses.

When social cohesion is to be linked with urban governance, it is important to look beyond the level of cohesion among the residents. Urban governance also has relevance for the cooperation between policymakers and other stakeholders (Hamilton et al., 2004); the relationship between those institutions and the residents themselves is very important in this respect. We therefore introduce three types of social cohesion into our research: horizontal, vertical, and institutional. In our opinion, these concepts are helpful in interpreting and evaluating the links between governance and cohesion. *Horizontal cohesion* is the type that is often meant in research: cohesion among residents. Blokland (2003) provides

a sophisticated description of these contacts. By *institutional cohesion*, we refer to the cohesion among policymakers, stakeholders, and other parties who decide about development at neighbourhood or urban level. This type of cohesion is very similar to the 'horizontal dimension of governing systems', as explained by Hamilton et al. (2004, p. 152). *Vertical cohesion*, finally, can be defined as the contacts between citizens on the one hand and policymakers and stakeholders on the other. As the case studies described below show, one type of cohesion does not automatically imply the presence of another type. There may, for example, be strong horizontal cohesion, while there is no vertical cohesion at all.

The three different types of cohesion can be associated with the three models of citizen involvement distinguished by Sprinkhuizen (2001). These are: the voice model, the participation model, and the discussion model. In the *voice model*, citizen participation can be regarded as an instrument to give individual citizens the opportunity to protect themselves against plans that harm their interests. This model seems to have become outdated. Opportunities for citizens to reflect on policies and plans in their neighbourhood have become more widespread: instead of one official moment when a response is possible, there is now a constant flow of communication between policymakers and citizens. The voice model is most closely related to institutional cohesion, since plans are formulated within a closed circle of professionals. Citizens are only given the opportunity to react when the plan is in its final phase.

In the *participation model*, interaction between policymakers and residents is stimulated from the beginning: all the actors who should be involved (according to the organizing partner) are actually involved from the beginning. They are regarded as representatives who take care of the interests of the various groups and individuals in the neighbourhood. This model is most closely related to vertical cohesion, since the residents are part of the decision process, alongside the institutional players. The participation of residents is often acknowledged to be an important element of our democracy, but the legitimacy of a policy or plan is conditional on the representation of all residents by a smaller group. When the representatives are dominated by a certain subgroup in a neighbourhood, this bias may harm the horizontal cohesion, that is, the cohesion among the residents.

The *discussion model* is based on the idea of the ad hoc consultancy of residents with the aim of involving more citizens than could possibly be reached by 'traditional' ways of participation (as in the participation model). The discussion model is most closely related to horizontal cohesion. The point of departure is not the representation, but the involvement of as many residents as possible by organizing accessible activities and meetings. These may serve as a meeting place for residents (thereby strengthening horizontal cohesion), but also as a forum in which to discuss local problems with policymakers in order to find the best (local) solutions; there may be a positive effect on vertical cohesion.

In this research study, the three types of social cohesion have been analysed within the context of urban restructuring in urban neighbourhoods. After a short description of these neighbourhoods, we outline the restructuring policies in the Netherlands. The empirical results of this research study then follow.

### **The research neighbourhoods**

The Dutch social rented housing sector has always had a large market share and a relatively high quality. This large share can be attributed to the rapid expansion of the social housing stock shortly after World War II. Government involvement then increased in order to resolve the huge housing shortage. These post-WWII neighbourhoods as they are called were very similar from city to city with respect to, for example, the type of dwelling (mostly four-story apartment blocks without elevators), the public spaces (very green and open), and the location of shops (concentrated in a few central places). At first, the

population composition of these neighbourhoods was quite homogeneous: families with children and other middle-income households. But, in the 1970s and 1980s, new neighbourhoods were built and many households left the post-WWII neighbourhoods. These residents were mainly replaced by low-income households, often ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, because of the low rents and the relatively good quality, post-WWII neighbourhoods were, and remain, attractive to other types of household, such as new entrants or students. Not only tenants with a low income, but also middle- and even higher incomes live in this sector. Social rented housing in the Netherlands has never been regarded as a segment serving only to house the poor (Van [Kempen and Priemus, 2002](#)).

The two post-WWII neighbourhoods that are central in this paper, Bouwlust (16,000 residents) in The Hague and Nieuw-Hoograven (6,000 residents) in Utrecht, can be regarded as 'socially mixed' with respect to income and ethnicity. However, low-income households predominate and the number of minority ethnic households is increasing. The research neighbourhoods are located on the fringes of the third and the fourth largest city in the Netherlands, respectively. The major housing stock consists of four-storey apartment blocks without elevators; some blocks are better maintained than others. In general, the dwellings have 3, 4 or 5 rooms. The relatively good blocks are still very attractive to new entrants, because of the low rents. Many social rented dwellings are being sold on the housing market or demolished to make way for new dwellings. In Nieuw-Hoograven, a few hundred dwellings have recently been knocked down and another few hundred will be demolished in the next few years, whereas in Bouwlust and the other post-WWII-areas in The Hague, some thousands of dwellings will be demolished in the same period.

Small differences aside, Nieuw-Hoograven and Bouwlust share a very similar history. Both research neighbourhoods have experienced many changes; these can best be summarized as a 'general decay of the neighbourhood'. The aspects of their decay are: rising crime rates, decreasing social cohesion, deteriorating housing stock, vandalism, and an inflow of socially vulnerable groups, such as the unemployed and people on social benefit. Increasingly, both neighbourhoods have developed from a predominantly Dutch to a multi-ethnic area. A survey in both neighbourhoods revealed that ethnic minorities have a higher level of social cohesion in both domains than native Dutch residents ([Dekker and Bolt, 2005](#)). Ethnic minorities were found to have relatively more close ties within the neighbourhood, and to have stronger feelings of attachment. Although this may indicate diverging lifestyles, this does not lead to considerable conflict among groups of residents. Nevertheless, many native Dutch residents complain about the increasing proportion of ethnic minorities in their neighbourhood. This dissatisfaction with the population composition seems to have a very negative impact on the feeling of attachment to the neighbourhood.

Urban restructuring policies such as the Big Cities Policy (GSB) and the 'Our Neighbourhood Moves project' (OBAZ) are aimed to resolve many of the problems in urban neighbourhoods, like Nieuw-Hoograven and Bouwlust, through a range of social, physical, and economic measures (see next section). The urban restructuring policies are implemented on national as well as local levels such as the neighbourhood, the street, the apartment block, and even the doorway. We stress the role of urban governance in this respect by looking at the various actors involved in the restructuring process, the way in which partnerships are established and maintained, and the way in which citizen participation is used as a valuable policy 'instrument' to enhance the involvement of local tenants.

### **Urban restructuring policies in the Netherlands**

During the 1990s, certain urban renewal policies were implemented to deal with the various problems that have arisen since the 1980s. The urban restructuring policies that have been implemented in the



last few years can be seen as the successor to those urban renewal programmes. In 1994, the Big Cities Policy (GSB) was implemented. At first, the policy was targeted at the four largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht), but later on, 26 other, smaller cities joined this policy (referred to as the G26). The resulting important and well known policy now covers 30 cities in the Netherlands ([www.minbzk.nl](http://www.minbzk.nl)).

Dekker and Van Kempen (2004a, p. 109) describe the Big Cities Policy as *“integrative, area-based, governance-oriented, and based on contracts”*. According to Andersen and Van Kempen (2003, p. 80), this governance-orientation comprises *“a shift from government to governance”* and *“a focus on the empowerment of the residents of cities and specific neighbourhoods”*. This empowerment of residents can be observed in the Our Neighbourhood Moves project (OBAZ), where the residents themselves have to apply for money that has been made available to improve the quality of life, the (horizontal) social cohesion, and the social safety in distressed urban areas such as Bouwlust and Nieuw-Hoograven. The project started in 2001 as an extra impulse to counteract the decay in 40 selected neighbourhoods. Although the general outline of this project was drawn up at the national Department of Internal Affairs, all the neighbourhoods concerned were able to select the most urgent problems to be solved locally and decide how the money would be spent (tailor-made policies). At neighbourhood level, various actors, such as social housing associations, local non-profit organizations, and citizen platforms are also involved in other types of partnership that could affect vertical and institutional cohesion at the neighbourhood level. Urban restructuring can therefore no longer be characterized as something physical, but more as a full package of instruments to improve the quality of life, the quality of the housing, and the social climate in distressed urban neighbourhoods. Sometimes enhancing social cohesion is a direct goal of these policies, but it can also be the indirect result of other policies, such as the opening of a new office in the neighbourhood to provide information on available jobs, which also creates opportunities for citizens to meet each other there. These contacts are in most cases attachments according to Blokland's (2003) typology, but may occasionally lead to bonds, if ties based on affection start to develop. In the next section we elaborate on the positive as well as negative effects of urban restructuring policies on social cohesion.

### **Urban governance and social cohesion: empirical results**

We selected a small sample of partnerships in the two neighbourhoods in order to investigate the relationship between urban governance and social cohesion. Our principal objective was to find out in what ways cooperation between partners affects different forms of social cohesion. We interviewed more than 25 local policymakers and other stakeholders in Nieuw-Hoograven and Bouwlust. Among them were local government cabinet members, members of community groups, chairmen of neighbourhood councils and council committees, representatives of housing associations, and so forth. The interviews were based on a structured list of questions; they lasted between one and two hours.

#### *Hoograven's Heart*

A good example of reinforced social cohesion that occurred without the local government authority's explicit intention is the way in which the restructuring plans were carried out for Hoograven's Heart. This area comprises the main shopping street and its surrounding building blocks. This case showed that social cohesion could be both enhanced and hindered by launching poor plans, or by the mismanagement of the responsible parties. In the heart of this post-WWII neighbourhood several problems were rife: vandalism, crime, drug abuse, the poor quality of the dwellings, traffic congestion, and so forth. In 1996, the local authority, a housing association, and a commercial developer joined together in partnership to



counter further deterioration of the area. Their plan consisted of the demolition of several blocks, the building of new dwellings (both rental and owner-occupied), a large-scale improvement of the shopping centre, and the refurbishment of the public space, including the busy four-lane road that cuts the neighbourhood in two, dividing it into a northern and a southern part.

At first, the tenants' organization and the shopkeepers' organization were also involved in this partnership. However, because the responsibilities were not properly defined, the developments planned did not really get off the ground. There was no financial section in the restructuring plan, which gave the local authority the opportunity to withdraw part of the money it had previously promised to invest. This withdrawal provoked negative reactions from both the other professional partners and the tenants themselves. Together with a lack of communication about progress, and the different – even conflicting – interests of the respective partners, the plan was doomed to fail. Tenants started to complain and were finally so disillusioned they abandoned the partnership, which of course damaged the vertical cohesion in the area (the relationships between the residents and the other partners). The tenants cannot be expected to be very enthusiastic about future cooperation with the same partners now that their faith in these persons or organizations has been so severely damaged by this negative experience. Institutional cohesion was also damaged: no one took the blame for the failure of the project and all the participants lost confidence in each other. The only reason why this partnership continued was because the partners had signed a covenant from which they could not withdraw. At the same time, the tenants who had abandoned the cooperation initiative felt strong bonds with each other, because they were all 'victims' of this project. The aspect of attachment as formulated by Blokland (2003) is clearly visible here: by being part of a group that shared the same fate (the disadvantaged), the residents that had participated strengthened their mutual ties. The feelings of belonging (neighbourhood attachment) of the other residents were also strengthened, as there was widespread unanimity behind the concerns about the plans to demolish dwellings (in combination with the lack of new affordable dwellings). In other words, the local authority, the housing association, and the developer became 'the enemy'. And as one of the key persons interviewed said: *"There is no better way to achieve social cohesion than to make poor plans"*. Thus, although it was unintended, there was an increase in horizontal cohesion.

This example indicates that a high horizontal cohesion can exist very well alongside a low vertical and institutional social cohesion. Links among residents do not translate automatically into good links and contacts with institutions.

#### *Tenant platform Bouwlust*

Another case, namely Bouwlust in The Hague, showed that existing forms of social cohesion could hinder the further extension of social contacts in the neighbourhood. Bouwlust is a neighbourhood with a very strong involvement of citizens in local policy. The Tenant Platform is the successor of another citizen organization; it is considered to be representative of the neighbourhood. This small group of residents meets on a regular basis to discuss developments in the neighbourhood and in the city district. Their prime goal is to safeguard the general interests of the neighbourhood by informing and consulting the residents about any developments that affect the neighbourhood, such as the planning of a new playground for small children or problems with the steady departure of general practitioners and other medical services from the neighbourhood. The Tenant Platform has also drawn up a development plan for the neighbourhood in cooperation with the Local Authority Department of Urban Development. In this document, the most important long-term developments are discussed. The content of the development plan is partly based on the ideas of the neighbourhood residents who were consulted about various issues. On a smaller scale, the tenant platform also organizes ad hoc activities, such as a joint dinner to

celebrate the end of Ramadan or day-trips for the elderly, with a view to improving integration and social cohesion at neighbourhood level.

Having acquired a substantial amount of information about the neighbourhood and its residents as well as being able to organize opposition to undesired developments, this tenant platform is a regular discussion partner of the local government authority and other decision makers in this area. Although departments such as Urban Development (DSO) are not always willing to hold discussions with the Tenant Platform, they are aware of the fact that they cannot ignore its presence or its commitment to developments in their neighbourhood. A representative of the Department of Urban Development says: *"There are colleagues who say: 'Do we have to discuss things with the tenant platform again?' They [the colleagues] are not very enthusiastic. But to say we don't want to cooperate with the tenant platform, that is not the case either"* (Van Marissing et al., 2005, p. 116). We might categorize this form of cohesion as *forced* vertical cohesion.

Things have changed in the course of time. Whereas the 'pioneers'<sup>2</sup> of the 1960s were very homogeneous with respect to social class, level of education, and income, the neighbourhood nowadays comprises a mix of all kinds of households and residents: ethnic minorities have entered the neighbourhood; old and young couples and single person households, many of them with low incomes, are still there; however, many higher-income households have moved away. The elderly still form a significant share of the population. The Tenant Platform, which aims to represent the neighbourhood and stand up for the interests of all residents, now consists mainly of 'old grey men' who have lived in the neighbourhood for years (if not from the beginning) and have known each other for a long time. The new types of household hardly participate in this platform. The horizontal social cohesion within the platform may be very high, but outsiders have the feeling their presence is not welcome in this 'closed community'. This situation is clearly one in which cohesion is present, but only among a very limited circle of people. Blokland (2003) explains this as follows: the 'rightful owners', as she calls the original residents, increasingly derive their identity from emphasizing the contrasts with new groups of residents, mainly ethnic minorities. In her study in Rotterdam, she found that some original residents use the public spaces as a meeting place so often, that they actually start believing it is theirs. This also holds for the 'pioneers' in Bouwlust. As a result, the original residents of this neighbourhood are very conservative about changes proposed by the local municipality or social housing organizations and do not accept the changes as easily as the new residents do (new entrance households and ethnic minorities), because the latter feel less attached to the neighbourhood.

#### *Pius-X church*

Of course, there are also some positive stories to relate. In the same neighbourhood (Bouwlust), the residents and a housing association joined together to save a former church from demolition. Together with local government representatives, they drew up a new plan in which this building could be transformed into a health centre, which would accommodate doctors, therapists, a pharmacist, and other health-related organizations. Horizontal cohesion played an important part. Many residents are attached to the church; it is one of the few examples of appealing architecture in the neighbourhood. The building served as a meeting point for the residents and will continue to have that function in the future, albeit in a somewhat different form. The existence of social networks, a chief element of horizontal social

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<sup>2</sup> The first (active) residents of Southwest The Hague were called 'pioneers', because in the beginning there were many new dwellings, but few public services. Moreover, social relationships were not very strong because the people were all new to the area. But because they had to cope with the same problems, this situation changed over time. Today, a sort of bond can still be sensed linking the first generation of residents.

cohesion, was an important prerequisite for the success of the plan. The short lines of communication between policymakers and residents (vertical cohesion) enabled them to draw up the plan together.

#### *The 'Our Neighbourhood Moves' project*

Another positive example can be found in Nieuw-Hoograven in Utrecht. Here, short-term small-scale projects on the level of a single street turned out to be very useful. Places and activities where people could meet each other were created as a consequence of these projects. They have generated the most direct effects for social cohesion, because improving social contacts and stimulating participation are often project goals. Nieuw-Hoograven applied to the national Department of Internal Affairs (BZK) for a budget, which can be seen as an extra grant apart from the money received under the Big Cities Policy. This project, entitled 'Our Neighbourhood Moves' (OBAZ), was designed to improve social structures and (re)activate the residents of a neighbourhood in order to improve social safety and the general quality of life. In Nieuw-Hoograven, the successes were clearly visible: the seven most urgent problems to be resolved were selected after detailed consultation with the tenants, both Dutch and foreign-born; young and old; male and female. One of the projects was aimed at engaging the personal qualities of the residents in the service of the neighbourhood. With this Asset-Based Community Development method (ABCD), more than 60 people were identified who were willing and able to become active in the neighbourhood, for instance as a handyman, or as a cooking instructor (Wonen en Milieu, 2003). Other projects comprised, for example, the development of a local information office, where residents could walk in with all kinds of questions about OBAZ; the refurbishing of a fountain in the heart of the neighbourhood and a social safety programme in cooperation with local schools.

This programme has affected both horizontal and vertical cohesion: regular and informal contacts between the participants and the project manager have improved the vertical relationships in the neighbourhood, while participants and other residents of Nieuw-Hoograven have got to know each other through the various activities. Although the OBAZ project was very successful, one remark should be made: the cohesion that was generated through the different programmes was mainly limited to cohesion within the seven project groups. Hardly any interaction among the participants of different programmes was achieved, which concurs with Blokland's ideas on interaction between groups, that people often look for contacts that are useful to achieve personal goals. It would be very unrealistic to expect them to interact with others at random. The Our Neighbourhood Moves Programme has influenced the institutional cohesion in a positive way, by bringing the various parties and actors together and giving them a sort of 'collective responsibility'.

The success of the whole OBAZ programme can be attributed to a few characteristics of the process: first of all, the residents themselves were involved from the beginning, which encouraged their feelings of attachment and commitment to the neighbourhood. Second, in contrast with the plan for Hoograven's Heart described above, here the financial conditions as well as the responsibilities of the different parties were set out in a contract and signed by all partners. The open character of this process clearly had a positive impact on the social networks in the area. Third, and of importance here, is the short-term character of the project, which lowered the threshold for people to participate: often residents do not want to be involved over a long time period.

#### **Conclusions**

The relationship between urban governance and social cohesion is not an easy one. The concepts could even be said to be partially overlapping. Social cohesion is concerned, among other things, with social contacts and partnerships within the process of urban governance; it consists at least partially of social

contacts. Nevertheless, we have tried to unravel some possible links between urban governance and social cohesion, because in our opinion both concepts are highly relevant for urban development in general and for the future of distressed neighbourhoods in particular. We have deliberately avoided a focus on the direct and unintended effects of policies on social cohesion, because the results of this kind of research have been reported elsewhere. Our specific focus has been on the effects of the *process* of urban governance. This emphasis has led us to focus on different kinds of partnerships.

To link social cohesion with urban governance, we have introduced three concepts of cohesion: horizontal (cohesion among citizens, persons, residents, and so forth; as exemplified by Blokland's typology), institutional (cohesion among decision makers) and vertical (cohesion between citizens on the one hand and decision makers on the other). These three concepts of social cohesion have also been linked with three models of citizen involvement: the discussion model (which can be linked with horizontal cohesion), the participation model (linked with vertical cohesion) and the voice model (linked with institutional cohesion). On the basis of fieldwork undertaken in two neighbourhoods in the Dutch cities of Utrecht and The Hague, we have described how cooperation (partnerships) within urban restructuring policy affects these different forms of social cohesion. Both neighbourhoods can be characterized as post-WWII neighbourhoods with a relatively large number of different problems that are now being attacked by urban restructuring policies.

At the start of the paper, we formulated our research question as follows: How and under what circumstances does cooperation within urban restructuring policy affect different forms of social cohesion? The answer to this question can now be given with the help of our threefold division of the concept of social cohesion.

In urban research, the concept of social cohesion is usually applied to the residents of a city: How are their social networks characterized? Do the residents share common values, and to what extent do they feel attached to their residential environment? (see, for example, Forrest and [Kearns, 2001](#) and Blokland, 2003). We have labelled this form of social cohesion *horizontal social cohesion*. Improving this form of social cohesion is an important goal of the social pillar of Dutch urban restructuring policy. The result of the way in which different social programmes such as 'Our Neighbourhood Moves' (OBAZ) were carried out can be regarded as positive horizontal social cohesion: contacts among residents were indeed made and maintained. In Blokland's (2003) terminology, ties based on attachment increased by making residents belong to a group they can identify with. Putting residents at the heart of the programme (as with OBAZ) seems to work very well, especially when they are responsible for highly crucial items, such as raising funds. Furthermore, using the residents' individual qualities seems to achieve better results than looking for residents to fill a certain vacancy, as the analysis of the tenant platform in Bouwlust exemplifies.

The role of the kind of activity and its duration should not be underestimated. In general, we can conclude that actions focused on 'achieving specific things' with a limited duration (OBAZ) are more successful in bringing residents together than projects that are orientated more to the long-term and consist more of 'thinking' (discussing things) than acting. Participation in an activity is a very important tool for creating horizontal social cohesion. When participation leads to a (more or less immediate) measurable success, participating people might already be thinking about a new project and involving new people. When organizations are composed of only "old grey men" who are not particularly focused on specific actions with a clear duration, social cohesion will be limited to just the small participating group. Cohesion within this group may be high, exactly because the neighbourhood is divided into different groups (Blokland, 2003).

*Institutional cohesion* is not a direct goal of governance processes, which makes it probably the most difficult type of cohesion to analyse. Can we speak of social cohesion when many policymakers and other stakeholders meet each other on a regular basis, the city district management for example? Sometimes the social networks can probably be better described as 'forced cooperation', because the different local authority departments or stakeholders just need each other to gain better results, since integrative approaches and targeted policies are considered more efficient than the 'traditional policies'.

In general, institutional cohesion can be seen as a positive side effect of governance processes, unless the relationships between the different participants are severely disturbed. The most important conclusion in this respect is that the different participants should not put their own interests to the fore, but should regard them as of secondary importance after the shared interests or common goals of the respective partnership.

As the case of Hoograven's Heart showed, increased horizontal cohesion can also be the unintended positive result of a negative governance process. Disillusioned citizen participants have found each other because they were all opposed to 'the enemy' (the local authority, the housing association concerned, and the commercial developer). It is of course hard to translate this experience into a policy recommendation, because one cannot simply say: "Making poor plans is good for social cohesion at neighbourhood level". Although horizontal cohesion may be enhanced, this does not necessarily improve the other types of cohesion. Furthermore, the positive impulse for horizontal cohesion is only short-term, not structural. By the time the plans have been executed, many opposing residents will have lost interest in their neighbours, because their collective basis has disappeared.

*Vertical cohesion*, finally, is about contacts between residents on the one hand and policymakers and other stakeholders on the other. These contacts partly determine the success of future partnerships by maintaining a social network in which all members trust each other and have a common goal, even when interests differ.

The example of the Tenant Platform Bouwlust showed that vertical cohesion is sometimes the result of a long tradition of discussions and meetings where the same parties are invited each and every time. When the local government wants to know the opinion of the residents, for example, it turns to the tenant platform, because it is perceived to be representative of the whole neighbourhood population. Through this selective approach, the local government excludes new groups of residents, because they are not part of that Platform. Vertical cohesion can thus be present, but not in a form that can be seen to be truly representative.

Trust seems to be a central issue in the case of vertical cohesion. In one of our examples (Hoograven's Heart), the relationships between the residents on the one hand and local government, the housing association and the developer on the other were severely damaged, because agreements had been breached. The resulting mutual mistrust resulted in a delay of the project of several years. Because relationships between the parties were so severely disturbed, making a new start was virtually impossible. When a project works well, and everybody is satisfied with each other, trust can be maintained or even enhanced, and new projects may ensue.

Contemplating further research into the relationship between urban governance and social cohesion is intriguing for several reasons. On a more theoretical level, both concepts are difficult to define and to unravel. In the present paper we have taken a small step by making a threefold division of social cohesion. But more can be done: different kinds of partnerships in different national and local contexts will probably have differential effects on social cohesion. Finding these differences might be crucial for the evaluation of the success of different kinds of partnership. Good analyses of local

initiatives might lead to an inventory of success and fail factors, which could be useful in the implementation of similar policies in other spatial contexts.

Both urban governance and social cohesion have been central in many scientific articles. At the same time, aspects of these concepts can increasingly be found in national and municipal memorandums that aim to improve urban life. Policymakers should, however, be aware that: (a) urban governance must be seen as a concept that appears in many forms and can have different effects in different situations; (b) social cohesion is a concept with many dimensions and success on one dimension is definitely no guarantee of success on another dimension.

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