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Integrated urban renewal in The Netherlands: a critical appraisal

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Urban renewal policies in The Netherlands already have a long history, which is characterised by varying attention for either smaller-scale (neighbourhood) or larger-scale (city) issues, and for either physical, social or economic questions. These variations run parallel with more general discourses on urban dynamics and perceptions of processes in (urban) society at large. In this paper the recent history of urban renewal policies will be briefly sketched, including their main orientations. Recent Big Cities Policies, currently in the third generation, will receive special attention and the actual policy discourse will be critically evaluated and confronted with some essential empirical findings. In this process, the Dutch policy on integrated urban renewal shows clear parallels with the experience in other Western European countries, demonstrating that a Western European paradigm of urban policies is in the making: integrated, area-based, with involvement of both public and market partners and residents. Nevertheless, the Dutch case is more outspoken than the approaches in other Western European countries, by paying more attention to the issue of social cohesion or integration and to the promotion of social mix as a solution for a lack of social cohesion in neighbourhoods. At the same time it is clear that this new paradigm of urban policies shows the characteristics of a discourse that is not based on research and on empirical facts, but that develops its own momentum from shared beliefs regarding the nature of urban problems and the appropriate policy responses. This new paradigm needs reconsideration.

Keywords: neighbourhood; urban renewal policies; social cohesion; social mix; area-based

1. Problems, policies and evaluation

The Netherlands may be called a ‘policy-dense’ country. That is certainly true in the realm of urban and regional social and economic issues. Urban problems have received ample policy attention for more than half a century. A wide array of responses to an equally wide array of defined problems can be shown. Looking back at what kinds of problems have been defined and what kinds of policies have been developed, it is possible to detect some structure in the dynamics. In this paper the changing articulations of urban problems and the changing and accompanying policy approaches towards these problems will be dealt with, first in a presentation of a brief history of urban policy approaches from World War II onwards (section 2), then with a particular focus on the most recent generations of the so-called ‘Big Cities Policies’ and its potential successor following the appointment of a Minister of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration in the newly established national government in February 2007 (section 3). This section will be followed by a critical evaluation of these recent urban restructuring policies (section 4). The evaluation will also confront the dominant discourses on problems in cities with empirical tests of the prevailing assumptions.

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In section 5, this Dutch experience will be placed in the context of Western Europe. We will show that a new paradigm of urban policies is developing and that the Dutch case forms an example of this. But it also becomes clear that the Dutch case shows its own peculiarities, preoccupied as it is with social mix in neighbourhoods. In section 6 some conclusions will be drawn and critical remarks will be made regarding the most recent policy objectives.

2. Urban problem definitions and urban policy responses

The Netherlands has a long history of developing urban policies to address urban problems. Most, if not all, of the attention paid to urban issues has been characterised by its area-based approach. In general, one could say that after a phase in which Central Business District (CBD) formation was regarded to be of crucial importance, attention has especially been focused on three types of approach: physical urban renewal and renovations; policies with a focus on economic questions and the city; and approaches in which social problems were of central importance, recently typically collected under two labels: first, 'social exclusion problems', and second, 'integration problems'. Over time, attention has shifted from one of these fields to another and has also showed varying views within each of these fields. From the Big Cities Policy onwards, the government has presented the policies in terms of an integrated approach, suggesting integration of the physical, economic and social (and safety) realms.

In Table 1 we present an overview of the different policy episodes, a brief indication of the main goals, the social orientation of the policies and the typical label or slogan that has been applied to 'brand' the policy.

Before World War II, the reinforcement of the CBD was the main idea of spatial policies with respect to cities; not only in The Netherlands, but also elsewhere. Following classic economic geographic theories (Alonso 1964, Muth 1969), central parts of cities were regarded as the core areas of the city, which should be stimulated economically and be made accessible to all via all sorts of infrastructure (Ostendorf 1992). Older neighbourhoods were destroyed in order to make room for firms, banks, shops and municipal government institutions. Housing policies were subordinate to this aim of accommodating

Table 1. Urban policies in The Netherlands.

Name of policy	Main goal	Period	Orientation	Slogan
Creating CBDs	Stronger urban economy	To 1970	Efficiency	New jobs
Urban renewal	Improving urban housing	1970–1980	Social justice	New housing for neighbourhood
City renewal	Stronger urban economy	1980–1990	Efficiency	Stop urban degradation
Multiple-problem	Help disadvantaged neighbourhoods	1985–1990	Social justice	Stop cumulating problems
Social renewal	More social cohesion	1990–1994	Social justice	Higher participation
Big Cities Policy I	Mixed neighbourhoods	1994–1998	Social justice	Immigration of high incomes
Big Cities Policy II	Stable neighbourhoods	1998–2004	Social justice	Prevent leaving neighbourhood
Big Cities Policy III	Stronger neighbourhoods	2004–2009	Efficiency	Powerful cities
Big Cities Policy+	Integrated neighbourhoods	From 2007	Social justice	Prevent parallel societies

the urban economy. After World War II, in the era of reconstruction, this policy continued for a while. But the issue of decent housing grew in importance, for instance with respect to the creation of housing accommodation outside the city, in new towns. This too was a process that could be seen across cities in the Western world, especially in contexts where a great deal of government intervention could be observed (new towns in England; *villes nouvelles* in French cities; 'groeikernen' in The Netherlands; 'million housing' projects in Swedish cities). In this climate of responding to the housing needs of the population in a period of fast-rising incomes, the policy of creating more room for the CBD at the expense of residential areas soon became politically unacceptable. Moreover, suburbanisation of firms and jobs strongly decreased the need for more office space in the CBD. The policy changed to 'urban renewal' ('stadsvernieuwing'), a name that had to be understood very carefully in the context of that time. In an era of massive migration of firms from the (inner) city to the suburban zones, urban renewal did not concentrate at all on economic aims, such as the preservation of jobs in the city, but focused completely on housing for the urban poor: in poor neighbourhoods with bad housing conditions, urban renewal concentrated on the building of new houses and, in a later stage, on the improvement of existing houses, not for new residents, but for the poor residents already living in that area.

This changed in the 1980s, when it was realised that the urban economy had lost much of its strength due to suburbanisation and due to the focus on poor residents and on their housing provision as a leading principle. The name was almost the same, city renewal ('stedelijke vernieuwing'), but the goals were very different: not housing needs, but the reinforcement of the urban economy was most important, and the development of the compact city had to create a promising arena for the international economic competition, where city-marketing would persuade multinationals to engage in public-private partnerships bringing new economic growth to the city or city region (see, for example, Kotler *et al.* 1993).

At the end of the 1980s it was realised that pure economic goals were harming the necessary social cohesive forces in society. Policy concentrating on areas with multiple problems (problem-cumulating areas), and in a later stage the policy of social renewal had to repair this. The Dutch government realised that in an era of loosening ties (family, neighbourhood, church, work, and associations) a new social cohesive force was needed, but that the government would be unable to provide such a tool. Society itself had to take this responsibility; civic society had to be activated, firms in particular. The role of the policy of social renewal was to increase participation in society, via the labour market, but also via all kinds of social relations. The neighbourhood was also considered to be an important vehicle in this respect, because all kinds of social relations would be found and/or could be activated there.

In the 1990s, the Big Cities Policy I concentrated on what was called 'income neighbourhoods', a euphemism for areas that are homogeneous with respect to income. That is to say, the policy concentrated on urban neighbourhoods where a relatively large share of the population had a low income. The policy aimed at fighting this sort of segregation, because the rise of 'income ghettos' or social ghettos was particularly feared. Therefore, the policy concentrated on restructuring the urban housing market at the level of neighbourhoods; low-cost accommodation had to be destroyed and replaced and mixed with more expensive houses in order to attract better-off households to the neighbourhood. In later policies, and until today, these ideas about mixing the housing stock in order to mix the population at the level of the neighbourhood appeared to be a returning element. This was also true for Big Cities Policy II; however, under that policy regime the aim changed

slightly from efforts aimed at attracting new better-off households to the neighbourhood – which turned out to be a bridge too far – to offering better chances for the existing residents of the neighbourhood to find accommodation for a housing-career within the same neighbourhood, i.e. preventing the need to go to another neighbourhood for finding other and better accommodation. In subsequent Big Cities Policies III and III+, neighbourhood restructuring policies were continuously stimulated. Although major differences can be shown between these two policy ‘regimes’ (the first being more rigid and efficiency-based compared with the perhaps more ‘social’ second), the continuity is that both address social and ethnic compositions of neighbourhoods, albeit in different ‘tones’, and both start from the assumption that disadvantaged neighbourhoods are segregated neighbourhoods, which should become desegregated and ‘restructured’, first physically, after which social and ethnic mix is expected to follow. In particular in Big Cities Policies III+, the issue of the danger of the development of parallel societies is underlined: an increasing gap between the poor neighbourhoods and the rest is feared, the threat of a divide that will disconnect the poor from mainstream society.

It is obvious from the policy documents that, with the exception of the phase in which the formation of CBDs and strong urban economic centres were the primary goals, social issues are actually the key elements of all policy regimes that followed. The definition of ‘social issue’, however, changed from one period to another. The typical policy actions developed for tackling social issues also changed. In Table 2, the variations in these spheres have been put together. From the 1970s onwards, various social issues have taken centre stage. Sometimes a stronger urban economy was expected to help the poor; either directly, by offering new jobs, or indirectly, through a considerable economic growth that would also be beneficial to the poor. In other periods the ruling idea was that physical decline caused social exclusion, that concentrated poverty would intensify social exclu-

Table 2. Urban policies, social issues and policy actions.

Name of policy	Period	Definition of social issues	Typical policy actions
Creating CBDs	To 1970	None (stronger urban economy)	Demolition of old quarters
Urban renewal	1970–1980	Bad housing	New housing for neighbourhood residents
City renewal	1980–1990	Unemployment/ strength of economy	Improvement of economic climate
Multiple-problem	1985–1990	Disadvantaged in several respects	Moderate social policies, no physical upgrading
Social renewal	1990–1994	Lack of social cohesion	Moderate social policies stimulating participation
Big Cities Policy I	1994–1998	Homogeneous poor neighbourhood (segregated)	Neighbourhood restructuring, attract better-off
Big Cities Policy II	1998–2004	Housing career within neighbourhood	Creating opportunities in the neighbourhood
Big Cities Policy III	2004–2009	Ethnic concentrations/ integration	Neighbourhood restructuring, social mix
Big Cities Policy III+	From 2007	Ethnic and social integration	Neighbourhood restructuring, social mix, housing association involvement

sion, and that specific programmes of physical renewal would result in decreasing social exclusion.

After World War II, the housing shortage was problem number one in The Netherlands. This resulted in a focus on building new houses, not on renewal of the existing housing stock. As far as renewal was concerned, it concentrated on the strengthening of the city centres with the demolition of old central city quarters if necessary. For instance, in Utrecht a new city-centre Hoog Catharijne was developed, with shops, offices, parking facilities, sport facilities and a new central railway station. In Rotterdam, the city centre was destroyed during World War II and needed to be rebuilt. Next to this the further development of the harbour of Rotterdam and related industries got high priority. Amsterdam concentrated on the extension of the harbour in the western direction and developed plans to open up the central part of the city for private cars. However, in the 1960s it became clear that urban residents had begun to look beyond the city to meet their housing needs. A process of massive suburbanisation started, partly fuelled by the construction of new towns. This development diminished the housing shortage in cities and resulted in a reconsideration of the quality of the housing stock in cities, leading to policies of urban renewal. In the period of urban renewal, two very different neighbourhood developments could be observed. The first development relates to neighbourhoods where the housing stock was renewed under the label 'new construction for the neighbourhood'. Here the poor population did not change; the same applied to all problems related to poverty. By offering better housing, the policy implicitly hoped to fight the problem of poverty. However, although a lot of money was invested in these neighbourhoods, no upgrading in social respects could be found. That resulted in disappointment and finally in a change of the policy to city renewal (see Dieleman and van Engelsdorp Gastelaars 1992). The second development took place in neighbourhoods that were on the same list of urban renewal, but had not been renewed because of financial or organisational problems such as a fragmented pattern of ownership. In some of these neighbourhoods, especially the centrally located, a process of spontaneous renewal or gentrification took place. So, in these neighbourhoods a considerable upgrading in social and physical respects took place without any governmental finance. In the period of city renewal the focus on the urban economy was again dominant. The idea was to help the poor by improving the urban economy, but the poor were generally not clearly involved in these programmes.

The subsequent policy of helping areas with multiple problems was not very broad and did not succeed in upgrading disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The policy of social renewal created a reaction to the focus on the urban economy in the policy of city renewal: too much attention on the economic aspect while neglecting the problems of the people and of poverty. Instead the policy of social renewal concentrated on the improvement of social cohesion within neighbourhoods, but was soon replaced by the Big Cities Policy (BCP) I. This policy was based on the idea that urban poverty was still prevalent, in particular in some neighbourhoods, and that the existence of homogeneous poor neighbourhoods should be prevented by the promotion of social mix. In fact this idea of social mix is important in all four Big City Policies. Although the issue of housing – and diversifying the housing stock by demolition and new construction in order to promote a social mix in neighbourhoods – was most important in BCP I, the policy contained three so-called pillars: economic, physical, and social policies.

BCP I hoped to attract new affluent households to areas of urban restructuring, but was criticised on the grounds that poor people were not necessarily helped by being given new neighbours. Moreover, this idea did not work very well, because the idea of attracting the

better-off to settle in disadvantaged neighbourhoods appeared not to work. So, in a later stage BCP II was adapted by aiming at reaching the 'comprehensive city' and prevention of downgrading through outmigration of successful residents. This operated by offering such residents opportunities for a housing career within the neighbourhood rather than through outmigration. BCP III followed BCP II but changed its slogan to: 'collaborate for a powerful city'. At this stage the many budgets available for urban policy were finally brought together in three big funds; cities could apply for money from these funds, and to quite some extent they could decide what to do with it. This simplification may seem like a step forward. However, at the same time a paradox was introduced. The three funds were typically a physical, a social and an economic fund. This, in fact, reintroduced the three policy pillars separately, which logically was not stimulating 'integrated' policies. With BCP III, a shift towards more attention to issues of safety and 'liveability' was introduced, but statements regarding stimulating the economic strength of the cities were also more frequently found. With the newly established government (2007), BCPs will be continued.

All Big Cities Policies are characterised by efforts aimed at combating segregation and stimulating integration through area-based more or less integrated policies. However, in all BCPs so far, it appears to have been difficult, if not impossible, to really create a social mix integrating the disadvantaged and the more advantaged within the neighbourhood. Disadvantaged people continue to migrate to the neighbourhoods in least demand, while advantaged inhabitants tend to leave these neighbourhoods as soon as they have the opportunity to do so. And if they stay together in the same neighbourhood, interaction between them remains an exception and not the rule (Blokland 2003). In the following section we will elaborate and concentrate on the recent BCPs in particular.

3. Recent Big Cities Policies

Over the past 10 to 15 years, Dutch urban policy has combined expertise with financial and human resources in dealing with the economic, social and physical aspects of cities in an integrated and area-based way, while simultaneously bringing resources and responsibilities to decentralised levels of government. The underlying objective initially was to create 'the comprehensive city', which later evolved into ambitions to create the 'powerful city' or the 'safe' and 'liveable' city; these cities have neighbourhoods where everyone feels at home, they have thriving economies, jobs for job-seekers, pleasant living conditions, liveable neighbourhoods, safe streets and communities that include everyone and do not exclude a person. For this aim of the comprehensive city, three or four types of policies were seen as needed – the three or four pillars of the Big Cities Policy: economic, physical, social and safety.

All BCPs were aimed at reducing the number of persons with inadequate educational skills; intended to reduce integration problems, diminish criminality and unsafe environments, tackle high unemployment rates, reduce outmigration of the dwindling middle class, and support economic vitality. Moreover, the policies intended to remove dilapidated housing and commercial buildings, to overcome inadequate infrastructures and the resulting poor accessibility, which create obstacles to progress. Often, the problems accumulate and become concentrated in specific districts and the issues are clearly associated with each other. In fact, the dominant problematic and the interconnectedness of several urban issues were the main drivers behind the launching of large-scale, integrated area-based approaches to urban problems. Key concepts in organisational terms are: 'integrated', 'area-based' and 'decentralised'.

Integration of 'pillars'

The specially appointed Minister of Big Cities Policies enhanced urban policy by supporting horizontal coordination between different policy areas, which is essential to the integrated approach. He also facilitated cooperation between levels of government in The Netherlands and Europe. His tasks focused on urban issues. As was mentioned before, urban policy rested on three pillars, an economic, a physical and a social pillar.¹

The first pillar (the employment and economic pillar) ought to bolster a city's economic vitality. This is regarded as absolutely crucial in renewing and revitalising deprived neighbourhoods. The small and medium-sized business sector plays a major role in urban economies because of the creation of many new jobs. Among other things, work training programmes have been introduced in sectors with growth potential. Extra attention was also being invested in encouraging ethnic entrepreneurship. The success of these efforts depends largely on the active participation and involvement of small and medium-sized businesses and various other organisations in the target neighbourhoods.

The second pillar (the physical development pillar) is closely related to the first pillar, in that a city's economic function depends in part on how favourable its environment is for businesses. Physical development involves making provisions to improve the quality of and access to housing, the workplace and the general living environment. In the international urban economic literature this is regarded to be of increasing importance. Relevant measures include revitalising and restructuring the supply of housing, renovating and opening industrial areas, fine-tuning open-space planning and other physical measures for ensuring and improving safety in traffic, the physical environment and society. Municipal authorities have joined forces with store owners, entrepreneurs, project developers, investment companies and building cooperatives to establish an integrated, specialised approach. Extra efforts are also being invested in intensifying the residents' involvement in their living environment, especially the participation of ethnic minorities.

The third pillar (the social pillar) goes beyond the provision of adequate housing in a pleasant, safe neighbourhood. This pillar also includes employment, proximity to shopping areas, educational facilities and social cohesion. The social pillar focuses on advancing and improving the social infrastructure, a task that calls for attention to numerous aspects. These include care, assistance, overall safety, youth policy, quality of life, social involvement and participation on the part of immigrants and the native Dutch population alike.

The core idea is that simultaneous and coordinated investments in each of these pillars will provide extra benefits and more opportunities for success in each of the separate policy fields: renovating an area and simultaneously raising the educational level of the inhabitants through special programmes, while at the same time introducing programmes to improve mutual respect and reduce local criminality, may give a powerful boost to the neighbourhood under consideration.

Area-based approach

The initiatives are aimed at integrating a range of interventions at a certain spatial scale. From that perspective it seems to make sense that integrated policies are being developed as area-based policies. This requires proper analyses to determine which areas should be targeted. In The Netherlands, considerable competition resulted from the first area assignments. In 1994 there were only four (the biggest) cities targeted, and

within these cities specific neighbourhoods; however, in 1995 another 15 cities succeeded in getting a piece of the cake as well; in 1996 it was 21 cities; and in 2007, 31 cities are involved. This development also says much about the area-based approach itself (see section 4).

Decentralised approach

Although a special Minister for Urban and Integration Policy was appointed until 2002, and a Minister for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration from 2007 onwards, this was not meant to express a preference for centralised governance. The special minister was established mainly in order to emphasise the importance of urban policy and maximise its effectiveness within central government. At central government level a structure was in place from 1994 onwards that supported the coordinating function of the Minister and the necessary coordination between and within the three pillars. The official Inter-ministerial Committee on Urban Policy and the Ministerial Council for Urban Policy supported coordinated pooling of government resources and commitment on the part of the specialised ministers to the field of urban policy. A crucial element in the BCP era was and is the development of covenants between the state and the municipalities involved. These covenants include detailed objectives and targets for each pillar. The municipalities safeguard local integration by working in close consultation with residents, as well as in cooperation with public and private sector partners, to introduce visible structural improvements. This decentralised approach allowed each city to focus on the problems they regarded to be most important and to develop a vision of their own. It also provided for assistance from central government to local government bodies in developing their own visions and strategies. Thus, cities could choose their own priorities within the framework of goals established in agreement with central government. These priorities were based on active contributions from residents and efforts were made to encourage these.

Dutch cities have established their visions and strategies and objectives for becoming comprehensive cities in multi-year development programmes. A number of measurable goals have been incorporated into these programmes. Central government has drawn up municipal agreements with each city regarding target results. Progress towards target results was supervised by means of careful monitoring and on-site visits. This strategy made it possible to intervene where necessary.

Local funding did not just come from the national government, but also from other sources, including from Europe. Several of the BCP-targeted areas also received support from European integrated programmes, which also aim at creating 'the comprehensive city'. Since 1994, two of the four European Union Structural Funds have granted resources to The Netherlands, as a member state, in connection with urban policy efforts. These are the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). The European Commission also allotted funds for the new Structural Fund period (2000–2006). These funds were intended for the realization of priority objectives (objectives 2 and 3) and community initiatives (URBAN 2, EQUAL).²

As mentioned in section 2, urban policies do not remain constant over time. Some important changes have occurred over the years, although remarkably constant elements can also be observed. Changes may be partly ascribed to the changing colours and objectives of subsequent governments. However, some unchanged and essential objectives appeared to survive opposing governments.

Here we highlight a few clear shifts in the BCP arenas and also a few clear constant objectives in subsequent policy episodes. First of all the shifts; with the appointment of a minister for BCP in 1994, a start was made on the development of an integrated area-based decentralised urban policy; initially the physical dimension was still absolutely dominant and although several pillars operated, they seldom worked together. In terms of content, the debate was mainly aimed at improving housing and employment situations; social dimensions were predominant at the start. Especially during BCPII, huge amounts of money became available for urban policies (more than €10 billion for a five-year programme). In 2002 things changed. The political climate changed rapidly, with more tension in society because some sections of the population firmly or sometimes aggressively addressed conflicts between the already settled Dutch population and some categories of immigrants in the cities, mainly Muslims, but also immigrants from the Dutch Antilles. The change in climate was also expressed in the establishment of a series of new governments, which put 'integration' much higher on the agenda, but partly also in a more defensive way. Between 2002 and 2007 there was no longer a special minister for BCP. During that period the issue of integration was part of the Ministry of Justice, and increasingly integration was redefined from a process in which multicultural aspects in society were celebrated towards a field in which more or less forced assimilation was the main objective together with a much stricter immigration policy. In this harsher climate naturalization and integration, as well as immigration restrictions, received most attention. The Ministry of Housing tried to assist this policy by selecting a number of neighbourhoods in the country that required special attention and by supporting rather extreme policy proposals coming from the local Rotterdam government in which selective policies, which worked as a means to avoid large concentrations of certain population categories, were approved (the 'Rotterdam law'). This implies that the municipality of Rotterdam is entitled to refuse the settlement of new population with low income and low education in neighbourhoods that already contain a large share of such a population. This regulation is particularly aimed at preventing the further immigration and settlement of Antilleans (the Antilles in the Caribbean are part of The Netherlands) in deprived neighbourhoods. It is not yet clear to what extent this Rotterdam law has been effective.

With the latest elections the dominant opinions changed once more, and in February 2007 again a separate Minister for Housing, Neighbourhood and Integration was appointed (and housed in the Ministry of Housing). Actually, that appointment implied a move of the integration policy away from the Ministry of Justice, to the Ministry of Housing; the link with housing was also given extra weight because of the renewed attention to the role of housing associations in urban renewal processes. From approximately 1990 onwards the housing market had been characterised by a shift to more privatisation. Housing associations were also differently positioned (with less state subsidies and more responsibility for their own finances). However, very recently the housing associations seem to have become pushed into a new social role. They are supposed to firmly support the new physical and social renewal programmes, even though by law their first task is to provide social housing in a stricter sense.

In contrast to all these changes, there are also constant elements; the shift of urban and integration policies from Justice to Housing confirms the strong belief in the relation between integration and housing and neighbourhoods; this is typically the constant element in the discourse on urban policies and on social and ethnic integration issues over the past 15 years, and an issue we will address critically in the following section.

4. Evaluation of recent policies

In short, the constant elements of recent urban renewal or urban restructuring policies in The Netherlands are its formula of targeting urban social issues through integrated area-based policies in a selected number of neighbourhoods in a selected number of cities in The Netherlands. These policies have been criticised in national debates and in international evaluations. 'Integrated policies' sounds good, but in reality it remains to be seen how integrated these policies are. Initially, Dutch urban 'integrated' policies were highly focused on physical interventions in particular. The 'restructuring' policies were often policies in which (good-quality) housing was demolished and replaced by more expensive dwellings, aiming to create a diverse housing stock in order to promote social mix. This sometimes resulted in social upgrading, but also in displacement of social problems to other neighbourhoods (Musterd and Ostendorf 2005). In more recent BCP practice, the focus has changed to give more attention to neighbourhood quality and 'community', next to attention for physical restructuring. However, the level of integration is still criticised. In a recent report of the Dutch Council for Housing and Spatial Planning (VROM Raad report 054, 2007) the authors state that current urban renewal has become disconnected from the objectives and ambitions of citizens. It is said that the wish of inhabitants to achieve social mobility has become subordinate to the ambition to improve the physical quality and liveability of the neighbourhood and efforts aimed at improving social cohesion at the local level. The recommendations of the Council therefore accentuate policies that lead to social mobility, investments in education, offering the opportunity to realise small steps on the housing ladder and refraining from physical interventions. These recommendations are in line with research evaluating the idea of social mix (Musterd *et al.* 2003).

These criticisms are partly related to another set of comments on current urban policies. These refer to the contents of the policy and the stable element in the BCP discourse over the past 10 or 15 years, not only in The Netherlands, but also abroad. Here we refer to the idea that neighbourhoods in decline are highly segregated neighbourhoods, that segregation is increasing, and that this segregation is producing its own negative effects; and that these neighbourhoods should be desegregated and 'restructured' in order to enable the required integration of the neighbourhood population in society at large.

In The Netherlands there is empirical evidence showing the opposite. Social and ethnic segregation levels are moderate relative to other European cities (Musterd 2005) and not increasing (Musterd and Ostendorf 2007). Social mix is already the reality in Dutch neighbourhoods: segregation of the lowest-income quintile in the three big cities of The Netherlands reaches levels of only 29 in The Hague, 24 in Rotterdam and 19 in Amsterdam. Higher incomes are more segregated than lower incomes (Pinkster 2006), while lower-income households are not at all disconnected from the middle class. In the poorest neighbourhoods of each of the three largest Dutch cities, the share of middle-income households turned out to be larger than the share of poor households (see Table 3). This is an important finding, because this implies that the poor are not cut off from society, even in the poorest neighbourhoods. Between 1998 and 2004 ethnic segregation levels dropped in Rotterdam (Turks, from 50 to 44; Moroccans, from 45 to 40; Surinamese, from 25 to 21) and was almost stable in The Hague (slightly higher compared to Rotterdam) and Amsterdam (slightly lower compared to Rotterdam). These studies also showed convergence in terms of positions of immigrants and the rest of the population as far as labour market participation and participation in education are concerned. So, academic

Table 3. Income distribution in the poorest neighbourhood of each of the three big cities in The Netherlands.

Income	The Hague	Rotterdam	Amsterdam
Lowest quintile	46%	40%	34%
Middle quintile	49%	56%	59%
Highest quintile	5%	4%	7%

Source: Pinkster (2006).

research does not produce evidence that supports the political debate (Musterd and Ostendorf 2007). This indicates that the main aim of the Big Cities policy, creating a social mix, is to a large extent not necessary, because in the welfare state of The Netherlands social mix in neighbourhoods is already a reality. The Minister, and other politicians, fears a problem (no social mix, but 'income neighbourhoods') that does not exist.

The history of urban policies in The Netherlands can be summarised as follows: a strong focus on area-based approaches in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, aiming to change the housing stock in order to create a social mix. With this ambition the picture of the real situation is out of sight. This is problematic, because the empirical situation differs considerably from the political perceptions and discourses.

5. A Western European paradigm of urban policies

The picture, sketched above, of the Dutch experience with urban renewal policies in the last decades automatically poses the question to what extent the Dutch case is unique compared to other, neighbouring, countries. The answer is that the Dutch case resembles the experience in other Western European countries, but may be slightly more pronounced.

Based on EU-funded research on urban policies since the mid-1990s, comparative information has become available. Parkinson (1998) indicated that the struggle against social exclusion has taken the form of area-based programmes, creating partnerships with the public sector and aiming at empowering the residents and communities involved. Musterd and Ostendorf (1998) pointed to the role of the welfare state in the struggle against segregation and exclusion. This view was followed by EU-funded research, such as URBEX on urban social exclusion (Musterd *et al.* 2006). Atkinson (2000) speaks of combating social exclusion in Europe as the new urban policy challenge and indicates that a discourse is developing of partnership and empowerment in contemporary British urban regeneration (Atkinson 1999). Jacquier (2001) points to the need to overcome the contradictions between economic competitiveness and social exclusion. He indicates that the area-based approach as a revitalization policy is the common answer to urban fragmentation and he sees a new pattern of urban governance. Andersen (2001) also sees the development of an area-based approach as a new urban policy in Europe. De Decker *et al.* (2003) evaluated European urban development plans in nine European countries and come to a similar view.

Van Kempen *et al.* (2005) speak of the development of a similar paradigm, but demonstrate that this paradigm is not (yet) applicable in Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, physical deficiencies in the housing stock are still very prevalent (Van Kempen *et al.* 2006). In Western European countries, urban policies have addressed these physical shortcomings in earlier decades. Since the 1990s social issues have become the most important,

using terms like poverty, unemployment, criminality, social cohesion, social exclusion, and integration. Western European countries are faced with the ambition of combining economic growth with the prevention of social exclusion; and this has promoted the development of a discourse and a paradigm of an area-based approach to urban deprivation. The solution to this urban deprivation does not appear to be at all simple. In fact, success in the struggle against urban poverty via area-based policies appears to be very modest. Atkinson *et al.* (2006) speak in this connection of 'the wicked problems', problems that are not solved despite years and years of (different) policies.

This overview indicates that many characteristics of the Dutch case of integrated urban renewal are fairly common in Western Europe; they may even be part of a new Western European policy paradigm. However, the Dutch case is rather special in the emphasis placed on an increasing gap dividing the disadvantaged neighbourhoods from mainstream society, as well as in a belief that the solution lies in a diverse housing stock and the resulting social mix. These ideas are not absent from other countries, but they are certainly more pertinent in The Netherlands. The call for social mix can be heard in many places across Europe where diversifying the local (neighbourhood) housing market takes priority (Atkinson and Kintrea 2001, Préteceille 2003, Donzelot *et al.* 2003, Musterd *et al.* 2003, Andersson and Bråmås 2004) and even in the United States, where 'moving-to-opportunity' policies aim at more mix as well (Briggs 1997, Rosenbaum *et al.* 2002). Buck *et al.* (2005) speak for the UK about the new conventional wisdom (NCW) related to cities, pointing to the consensus that has developed and that expects healing capacity from competitiveness, cohesion and governance. Also in the UK, one can point to the discussion between Trevor Phillips (2005) and Ceri Peach (2007). Phillips sees segregation increasing and expects a social breakdown of British society as a consequence: 'sleepwalking into ghettoisation'. Peach indicates that segregation is not increasing and provides a much more diverse picture of integration.

This last example of the discussion between Phillips and Peach is perhaps illustrative of the Dutch situation: the discourse on urban problems and on the healing power of urban policies has become detached from research and empirical findings. The discourse indicates that segregation is increasing, as well as polarisation, that integration of ethnic minorities has failed, and that the promotion of a diverse housing stock in neighbourhoods will result in social mix, in successful integration and in upward social mobility. Research indicates that segregation is not increasing (Musterd and Ostendorf 2007), that an ethnic middleclass is emerging (SCP 2006) and that the curative effects of social mix are thin, to say the least (Musterd *et al.* 2003, Ostendorf and Droogleever Fortuijn 2006).

But in these aspects some parallels with the Dutch case can also be found across Europe: many politicians, for instance, believe that segregation has reached unacceptable levels, that levels are increasing and that these levels 'cause' poor integration of neighbourhood populations in the wider society (Musterd *et al.* 1998). So, separation between discourse and research is also common outside The Netherlands. For instance, in international comparisons area targeting has been criticised frequently. Poverty is not confined to poor urban neighbourhoods. As Robson *et al.* (2000) argued, an area focus cannot by itself tackle the broader structural problems, such as unemployment, that underlie the problems of small areas. Moreover, many people in need of assistance will be missed via area-based policies. In Sweden, only five per cent of the poor were reached via area-based policies (Andersson and Musterd 2005).

6. Conclusions

Well-established discourses on the existence of a negative relation between segregation and integration drive the policies of several Western European countries and cities. The discourses result in strong interventions, and sometimes billions of Euros are spent on attempts to reverse spatial inequalities, which are not always quite as they are presented. In this paper we demonstrated the persistence of policies of this type, in The Netherlands, but also pointed out that they exist in other countries; however, we could also provide evidence for another view on these issues. Segregation levels appear to be moderate; segregation is not generally increasing; integration processes are not always very negative; and many poor neighbourhoods are also characterised by a significant middle-class presence, even in the poorest neighbourhoods, and thus are mixed already. Moreover, area-based interventions may result in missing the social targets to a great extent, as was the case in Swedish area-based policies.

This is not to say that integrated policies may not be helpful to overcome certain social problems in cities. It may make sense if simultaneously social, economic and physical policies are being carried out, with reference to each other. However, the focus on neighbourhood should not be taken as the only, or as the dominant, way out: social life and social interactions are no longer confined to neighbourhoods, while social opportunities may not be neighbourhood-related. The 'community' may have partly lost its territorial neighbourhood link. This implies that other options should also be kept open. The social mobility of individuals must be addressed, and some individuals who lack social mobility are indeed in need of support. Support can, partly, also be provided via urban policies, but not necessarily, and perhaps preferably not, along the lines of a belief in strong relations between neighbourhood segregation and social participation. An uncritical adoption of ideas which follow that path may in the end result in considerable disappointment over the ineffectiveness of the policies that were applied. In other words, the new European paradigm of area-based approaches for solving problems of social inequality needs reconsideration.

Note

1. See <http://www.grotestedenbeleid.nl/> [Accessed 16 January 2008].
2. Urban 2 is a European Commission programme supporting urban renewal projects; EQUAL is a European Social Fund initiative aimed at supporting employment opportunities.

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