A Glass Half Empty or Half Full?
On the Perceived Gap between Urban Geography Research and Dutch Urban Restructuring Policy

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ABSTRACT

The Dutch urban restructuring policy, initiated in 1997, has generated much urban geography research. As with so many other fields, the associated debate has witnessed the perception of a gap between policy and research among both researchers and policymakers. Using four examples, this paper argues that this perception of a gap fails to reflect properly what is happening in the interchange between research and policy. Drawing on a broader typology of the use of research in policy-making (Stevens, 2007), the paper shows that the relationship is more complex and critically highlights the role of researchers herein. Moreover, ignoring or 'cherry-picking' of research by policymakers does not necessarily reflect a lack of relevance, which is a fundamental discussion within current geography research. The four discussed examples are: ambivalent outcomes of relocation research, the selection of renewal target areas, potential negative spillover effects on other areas, and the stubbornness of the concept of social cohesion in policy.

KEY WORDS: urban restructuring, demolition, social housing, relocation, social cohesion, spillover effects

Introduction

In the autumn of 1997, the Dutch government issued a white paper called 'Urban Renewal' (*Nota Stedelijke Vernieuwing;* MVROM 1997). Herein, the government set out the problem analysis, goals and strategies underlying a physical renewal policy that was aimed primarily at early post-war neighbourhoods with a large share of social rented housing (Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002; Kleinhans, 2004; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008). The policy was called urban restructuring (*stedelijke herstructurering*) to create a clear distinction with previous policies of 'traditional' urban renewal (s*tadsvernieuwing*) which started in the 1970s and were supposed to end in 2005 (See MVROM, 1997, p. 35).

The main characteristic of urban restructuring is its predominantly physical approach towards the housing stock. Restructuring is an umbrella term for various measures: demolition, upgrading or sale of social rented housing and the construction of new, more expensive owner-occupied or private rented housing. These efforts result in more variation in housing sizes, types, quality, prices, and tenures in target areas. Public spaces and infrastructure are also improved. Another characteristic is the wide range of goals, ranging from a stronger housing market position of restructuring areas, providing housing career opportunities and de-concentration of high shares of deprived residents to improved liveability, social cohesion, reputation and safety (for overviews, see van Kempen & Priemus, 1999, 2002; Uitermark, 2003; Kleinhans, 2004; Ouwehand *et al.*, 2006; Bolt *et al.*, 2009). These goals apply to designated target areas only (see below), and not to wider areas within the city. Since 2006, a focus on upward social mobility of residents in renewal areas has been added to this range of goals (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008; Curley & Kleinhans, 2010). The restructuring policy has been extended over various national administrations, which have each emphasised specific goals, depending on the current debates in society and the political agenda of the ruling parties.

Consequently, scientists have studied aspects of the policy from various (theoretical) viewpoints. Studies have generally documented positive outcomes in terms of improved housing quality and maintenance and housing career opportunities. Outcomes in terms of improved liveability, social cohesion, social capital, perceived safety and reputation are much more ambivalent or even questionable (e.g. Kleinhans *et al.*, 2000; Beckhoven & Van Kempen, 2003; Kleinhans, 2004, 2005; Dekker & Bolt, 2005; Ouwehand *et al.*, 2006; Wittebrood & Van Dijk, 2007; Dekker & Varady, 2011; Wittebrood & Permentier, 2011).

The urban restructuring policy has now been in place for nearly 15 years. After its official conception, it took a while to pick up speed, for reasons explained elsewhere (Priemus, 2004). In 2003, the physical restructuring policy was incorporated within a somewhat broader area-based policy targeting 56 priority areas. In 2007, this approach was succeeded by a selection of 40 priority areas, of which more than half had also been part of the previous selection of 56 areas. Although this 40 Neighbourhoods Approach (*40 Wijkenaanpak*) has an even broader scope than its predecessor, restructuring is still a substantial part of the approach. Challenges were framed in broad terms of education, employment, housing, integration, and safety (Priemus, 2008; Van Gent *et al.*, 2009). The current Rutte Administration has maintained the 40 Neighbourhoods Approach, but has cut all government funding for it. More as a result of the economic crisis, restructuring progress is severely impeded. Consequently, numbers of demolition, new construction and sale of housing are expected to decrease sharply. Combined with the original time schedule (1997-2015), is it likely that urban restructuring as a 'separate' policy will come to a close within a few years.

Therefore, the timing seems appropriate to reflect on the legacy of Dutch restructuring policy and research since 1997. As in other countries (see Flint's introductory paper to this special issue), this legacy has been characterised not only by academic controversy about the rationales, processes and impacts of urban restructuring programmes, but also the role of academic knowledge and its exchange with policy. Both policy and academic discourses refer to a widely perceived gap between urban policy and urban research. Thus, the aim of this paper is to critically reconsider the perceived gap between academy and policy against the Dutch background of some continuing debates in the field of urban restructuring and neighbourhood renewal. Two questions are central to this paper. First, how can the use of research in the policy-making process of urban restructuring be characterised? Second, how have researchers contributed to the uneasy research-policy interchange?

For this purpose, I will draw on literature conceptualising the research-policy interchange and describe four examples of urban geography[1] research which have raised considerable discussion among and between policymakers and scholars. The paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a brief theoretical background to the interchange between research and policy, especially in the field of urban geography. I will then present four examples, starting with the longstanding debate on forced relocation due to demolition. This is followed by two examples of a research-policy controversy connected to debates on the area-based

approach: the selection criteria for the 40 priority areas and the issue of negative spillover effects from target neighbourhood to other areas. Subsequently, I try to explain why the concept of social cohesion still features in restructuring policy discourses, despite fundamental criticism. The final section presents some conclusions.

Background

Like so many other fields and countries, Dutch urban renewal policy has witnessed a strive for evidence-based policy-making and stronger cross-fertilization of policy and research. This pursuit has not been without difficulties. There is a widely perceived 'gap' (in Dutch: *kloof*) between urban policy and urban research (for an overview, see Halffman & Hoppe, 2005). The metaphor of a gap has been commonly used by both researchers and policymakers who have been disappointed in the interchange between the two 'worlds'. The Netherlands are not unique in this respect. In the UK, part of the disengagement between human geography and public policy is due to "blame-calling and fence pitching" (Woods & Gardner, 2011, p. 200). In a gripping paper, Pain (2006) has described and debunked 'seven deadly myths about policy research'. She formulated these myths in the form of dualisms that have been used to frame the debate, such as 'exciting theory versus dull policy research' and 'power policymakers versus benign geographers'. Pain argues that the persistence of these false dichotomies has disenabled the contributions which geography can make to policy and the reverse, as these dichotomous "representations of geographers' work have not always matched the diverse meanings and materialities of geographical practice" (ibid. p. 251). Likewise, I will show the metaphor of a gap fails to properly reflect what is happening in policy-oriented urban geography research.

Building on the work of Weiss (1986), Stevens (2007) has developed a typology of the use of research in the policy-making process. This typology, which will be briefly explained[2], is useful for the purposes of this paper. The first type of research use is the *linear model* which embodies a direct connection between research evidence production and policy-making. Unsurprisingly, this model has been criticised for its inflexible view and overestimated rationality in the policy-making process (e.g. Young *et al*., 2002), and the ill fit between typical research products (lengthy reports) and policy-makers' needs in terms of clarity and concision (e.g. Monaghan, 2009). The second type is the *enlightenment model*, which acknowledges that research evidence affects policy in arbitrary ways. It describes how "social science evidence

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'percolates' into the 'informed publics' consciousness and comes to shape the way they see the world. In effect, this is premised on a dynamic view of the policy process" (Monaghan, 2009, p. 7). This model falls short on explaining why some evidence is used and other evidence is not.

The third type is the *political/tactical* model, which is mostly characterised by selective use of research evidence by policymakers. This is more popularly referred to as 'cherry-picking'. New evidence can legitimise a pre-determined position of policymakers. Research can also be used to delay or frustrate policy change, as important on-going research must be finished before deciding on next steps (tactical model). And last but not least, research evidence can be so unpalatable that policymakers go a long way to contradict or discredit the underlying research.

Fourth, Stevens (2007) has put forward the *evolutionary model*. This goes beyond the previous models by explaining *how* research evidence is selectively picked out and used, through the use of power. "Ideas that do fit will find powerful supporters. Others will not. Those ideas that fit will therefore have groups and individuals that can carry them into policy […]. The ideas that do not fit will tend not to be picked up by people who have the power to translate them into policy. This evolutionary advantage leads to the survival of the ideas that fit" (Stevens, 2007, p. 28). This model has also been criticised for assuming a too direct relationship between research and policy (see Monaghan, 2009), but its attention to power issues is a merit.

Below, I will show how various examples of the uneasy research-policy interchange broadly fit in the typology of Stevens (2007). Before moving on, two Dutch context issues must be explained. First, the engagement of urban geographers in policy(-oriented) research not only stems from true academic, theoretical interests but also from a more mundane cause. Structurally decreasing funds force virtually all university departments to secure more contract research funding. This inevitably leads to meeting the challenges of policy and/or applied research, especially in the use of research by policymakers and politicians (for a thorough discussion of these challenges, see Atkinson & Jacobs, 2009; Imrie, 2004; Monaghan, 2009; Woods & Gardner, 2011). Also, the Netherlands has witnessed the rise of various knowledge centres, such as the KEI Expert Centre Urban Regeneration and the Nicis Institute, which try to mediate between research and policy. The Nicis Institute has funded substantial scientific research programs with a heavy involvement of policymakers in the formulation and execution of the research. Although in some cases researchers and policymakers have found ways to cooperate in a fruitful way, the result is not a widely perceived closing of the 'gap'.

Secondly, I will refer sometimes to Dutch reports, but mostly to international journal papers, partly to accommodate further reading. The Dutch academic community prioritizes peer reviewed-articles in renowned scientific journals. However, in order to be 'relevant' (see Imrie, 2004), presenting research in Dutch media, newspapers, practitioner journals and other media is *a sine qua non* for academics wanting to contribute to public debates and policy (see also Atkinson & Jacobs, 2009, p. 236). This is exactly what the authors of the below cited journal papers have done. Consequently, Dutch academics face the continuous challenge of properly translating the scientific international debate into Dutch journals and media which are not always interested in the scientific debate itself.

The Two Sides of Demolition and Forced Relocation

Soon after the conception of urban restructuring policy, the large number of dwellings slated for demolition raised strong concerns about the fate and perspectives of households living there. A few years later, the first relocation studies appeared (e.g. City of The Hague, 2001; Heins, 2001; Kleinhans 2003). The findings were highly mixed. The majority of forced relocatees were (initially) very negative about the impending move, fearing the stress, costs and questionable housing perspectives. By and large, however, many relocatees appeared to end up in a social rented house which was at least equal to or better than their previous residence. Several studies showed how residents' subjective post-relocation evaluations matched changes in objective features of their new house compared to the old one, e.g. in terms of size, number of rooms, type, isolation, heating systems and facilities (e.g. City of The Hague, 2001, 2005). To a lesser extent, neighbourhood improvement was also reported.

On the other hand, research has identified various shortcomings in the relocation process, and counselling procedures (e.g. Kleinhans, 2003). Housing associations have often underestimated the impact on residents' lives, especially of elderly people or single-parent households. Moreover, substantial numbers of relocatees would have preferred the status quo, even if they benefited from the move (City of The Hague, 2001, 2005). Other studies reported the loss of meaningful social ties with former neighbours and fellow residents, although this has not been a universal finding (e.g. Van der Zwaard & De Wilde, 2008). Finally, relocation may result in significantly higher housing costs. Urban restructuring targets the cheapest social rented dwellings. A move to another social rented unit often means a higher rent price.

Households who are eligible for housing allowances (*huurtoeslag*) may not feel this strongly, as their allowance has a dampening effect on the net rent increase after relocation. However, residents with incomes slightly above the eligibility criterion for housing allowances are still entitled to social rented housing, but pay a full net rent increase after relocation (Kleinhans, 2003; Kleinhans & Van der Laan Bouma-Doff, 2008). Hence, the relocation options of relocatees with tight budgets are more limited than is usually assumed when considering their priority status (see also Bolt *et al.*, 2009).

These outcomes have generally been underrated or ignored. The political reaction to the described body of evidence has been a strong emphasis on positive relocation outcomes in policy letters, and solving remaining 'painful issues' exclusively by means of counselling. This example reflects the *evolutionary model*[3] of research use in the policy-making process, as the positive outcomes fitted well with policymakers' overall vision that was aimed at continuation of restructuring. These fitting ideas had powerful supporters, both at the national Ministry (Dekker, 2006) and among local administrators (e.g. Norder, 2008; Van Gils & Opstelten, 2008) who used the ideas to tackle resistance against restructuring policies and create support in the city council. The negative outcomes have been picked to a far lesser extent by those with the power to translate them into policy; power alone primarily accounted for the emphasis on positive outcomes, which resulted in "survival of the ideas that fit" (see Stevens, 2007, p. 28).

The observation that policymakers have been 'cherry-picking' from relocation research outcomes is not just the result of politics. Controversies on experiences of forced relocatees are partly connected to different research methodologies. Whereas the quantitative research mostly appears to show the positive side, qualitative research shows more clearly the hardships which are sometimes inflicted upon relocatees. Therefore, the messages sent to practice are complex, diverse and ambivalent, and therefore not meeting policymakers' needs. The ability to 'cherry-pick' is facilitated where quantitative and qualitative research are conducted separately (different researchers, in different research projects). Combined research approaches provide a 'fuller' picture, making it (slightly) more difficult to ignore different outcomes from one study.

The ambivalence in research outcomes is probably amplified by the on-going academic debate on the nature of forced relocation. In international journals and books, Dutch researchers have invariably drawn from the literature on gentrification and displacement. In doing so, they have implicitly or explicitly questioned the concept of displacement in the Dutch context. While scientifically interesting, this exercise has complicated efforts of policymakers

searching to understand how relocation can be valued, especially when the term displacement is imported in Dutch reports and articles. The added complexity saliently appears in the various, sometimes contradictory, interpretations of the term displacement. First, in claiming that physical restructuring can result in displacement of social problems to other neighbourhoods (see e.g. Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005). Here, displacement concerns both the forced moves and shifts of various social problems linked to these residents. Secondly, by identifying factors that affect whether relocatees ('displacees') perceive positive outcomes (Kleinhans, 2003). That is, relocatees who report substantial improvements in their housing and neighbourhood situation can hardly be classified as displacees. Thirdly and more strongly, researchers confirm the likelihood that "displacement can form an opportunity for residents to better their living conditions. As urban restructuring areas are usually among the worst, displacement is likely to move people up into more prosperous neighbourhoods" (Bolt *et al.*, 2009, p. 505). In this view, the relocation itself is by definition equated with displacement and the term displacement is mostly defined by it's the initial moving trigger, i.e. a top down notice to quit. Finally, some scholars have criticised the concept for other reasons, while pointing at the pitfalls of international comparison: "[T]he tendency to frame forced relocation issues in a gentrification discourse tends to ignore fundamental differences between these phenomena, especially in terms of the institutional context (Kleinhans & Van der Laan Bouma-Doff, 2008, p. 567-568). That is, the combination of compensatory mechanisms[4], a large social housing stock of good quality, and housing allowances for the low-income groups is unlikely to create the sometimes harsh displacement found in the United States and the United Kingdom.

In sum, the case of relocation research seems to fit in the *evolutionary model* of Stevens, but the displacement discussion shows that the scientific debate has not always been 'helpful' in providing clarity in relation to policy and practice. What is still thoroughly lacking is knowledge about the medium- and long term impacts of relocation, especially in terms of health, well-being, housing costs, and segregation tendencies (see also Bolt & Van Kempen, 2010, p. 178). Although quantitative longitudinal work based on national long-term databases[5] is now quite common, this does not apply to *qualitative* longitudinal designs which are more suitable for assessing (relocation) outcomes on 'soft' indicators such as health and well-being[6]. This lack partly stems from a political unwillingness to critically reassess what is considered as a success story; cross-section studies often report favourable housing outcomes (see earlier this section).

Criticising the Area-Based Approach

As in other European countries, urban restructuring has been part of broader area-based renewal policies in the Netherlands. Especially since 2003, this has taken on extra meaning by appointing 56 priority neighbourhoods, which were 'succeeded' by 40 priority neighbourhoods in 2007. Although the 40 Neighbourhoods Approach has a much broader scope than previous renewal programmes, it inherited a legacy that was focused on physical restructuring rather than socioeconomic deprivation and social exclusion (Musterd & Ostendorf 2008; Van Gent *et al.*, 2009). Restructuring was still a substantial part of the approach, although the challenges were framed in terms such as education, (paid) employment, housing, integration, and safety.

This area focus has logically spurred a broad range of studies targeting exclusively the priority areas. More importantly, the target area selection has been heavily criticized by Dutch scholars, who were also drawing on experiences from abroad (e.g. Andersson & Musterd, 2005). A fundamental challenge to the Dutch area-based approach was launched in 2007. Researchers from the University of Amsterdam criticised the selection of the 40 priority areas by the then Balkenende Administration. Policy discourse held it that the selection contained the 40 'worst' neighbourhoods, as a range of hard indicators (such as share of social rented housing, people on social benefits and employment rates) had been applied to create an 'objective' selection (Van Gent *et al.*, 2007, 2009). However, the draft list of areas gave rise to substantial political bargaining by local authorities who wanted to include or exclude certain areas for various reasons. Hence, "[t]his political component seems to contradict the former claim of 'objective' selection" (Van Gent *et al.*, 2009, p. 360). The feasibility of the main social objective, i.e. decreasing and preventing social deprivation[7] was also seriously challenged. Using national and neighbourhood-level data on income, social benefits and other deprivation indicators, Van Gent and colleagues illustrated that, in a best-case scenario, the 40 Neighbourhoods Approach would reach 8 per cent of all Dutch people who run the risk of being excluded (i.e. having a very low income and/or claiming social benefits). They claim that the priority neighbourhoods do not differ substantially from many other 'not so good' neighbourhoods; contrary to the policy objectives (see also Wittebrood & Permentier, 2011, p. 105).

These findings have triggered a significant national debate, also in the Dutch Parliament. Nevertheless, significant changes in the policy discourse or area selection have not occurred to the present day. Policymakers had put much effort in the neighbourhood selection process and

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the associated political bargaining. When the criticism arrived, this process was nearing completion and it was a political taboo to change tack fundamentally. "Especially in times of difficult political bargaining, 'critical reflection' is the last thing politicians want, especially from the experts" (Halffman & Hoppe, 2005, p. 135). In sum, this example seems to fit in the *political model* of research use in the policy-making process. The outcomes were so unpalatable that policymakers went a long way to ignore the research. The example also resonates with the observation of Musterd and Ostendorf (2008) that "the discourse on urban problems and on the healing power of urban policies has become detached from research and empirical findings" (ibid., p. 89; see also Woods & Gardner, 2011, p. 200).

I will now discuss another controversial study which made a lasting political impact, unlike the preceding example. There is a widespread concern in the United States, the Netherlands and other European countries that multi-problem tenants from restructuring areas may recluster in fragile (nearby) neighbourhoods where they cause incivilities, conflict and crime (Kleinhans & Varady, 2011, p. 156). In the Netherlands, this is popularly referred to as 'waterbed effects'; the more appropriate scientific term is spillover effects.

In 2008, researchers from Utrecht University released a report on 'waterbed effects' in which the 40 neighbourhoods approach was critically evaluated (Slob *et al*., 2008). They found that many relocatees ended up in nearby neighbourhoods, often low-income areas with high shares of social rented housing and non-western immigrants. Slob and colleagues concluded that these patterns hold a significant chance of generating new or further strengthening existing concentrations of low-income and/or poor non-western immigrants outside restructuring areas, which is at odds with the de-concentration goals of policy (ibid., p. 65). Moreover, they found "indications that the destination areas may be the problem neighbourhoods of the future" (ibid. p. 66, *translation mine*). Finally, they claimed that "especially in a policy in which only a small number of problematic neighbourhoods are designated as priority areas, the chances of waterbed effects are enormous" (ibid., p. 67, *translation mine*).

These conclusions gave rise to a heated debate, also in the Dutch Parliament. The then Minister of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration tried to disqualify these conclusions by emphasising the indicative nature of the evidence and the methodological limitations of the study (see Vogelaar, 2008a). Moreover, in the heat of the debate, the researchers' conclusion about the enormous chances of waterbed effects was quickly interpreted as a fundamental

critique on the effectiveness of the 40 Neighbourhoods Approach. The minister reacted by stating in a national newspaper that the 40 Neighbourhoods Approach implied a much wider palette of measures than only restructuring, so that effectiveness depends on far more than the physical renewal (see Vogelaar 2008b). However, she acknowledged the researchers' plea to monitor general neighbourhood development beyond the priority neighbourhoods. The study also contributed to political concerns that were needed to commission a baseline measurement for a separate, periodical 'waterbed effect monitor' (see Leidelmeijer *et al*. 2009). This baseline study found some evidence for negative spillovers in neighbourhoods that had experienced an influx of many relocatees or where relatively many low-income households settle. Ironically, these findings are not much different from the contested report of Slob and colleagues (2008).

This example appears to fit the *evolutionary model* of research use in the policy-making process slightly more than the *political model*. On the one hand, politicians rejected the conclusion about 'enormous chances of waterbed effects'. On the other hand, politicians were susceptible to the potential existence of waterbed effects and the researchers' plea to monitor developments beyond priority neighbourhoods. These ideas fitted political positions and have therefore been translated into actual policy, including the 'waterbed effect monitor'.

Some critical notes on the position of researchers in the 'waterbed controversy' are justified. Since 1997, many researchers have warned very strongly against 'waterbed effects' (e.g. Duyvendak & Veldboer, 2001, p. 193; Priemus, 2004, p. 205; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005; Wittebrood & Van Dijk, 2007, p. 68, Priemus, 2008, p. 375; Slob *et al*., 2008, p. 67). In their exact wording, most of them frame negative spillovers of urban restructuring as an unavoidable side effect. However, a systematic review has pointed out that virtually all studies merely provide indications of negative spillovers and do not provide stronger evidence (Kleinhans & Varady, 2011, p. 168). Notwithstanding methodological difficulties of spillover research (ibid., p. 171), it seems that warnings of Dutch researchers have arisen more from conviction than from empirical insights, considering the very thin evidence to date. From the politicians' point of view, this may have eroded the credibility of researchers, which is certainly not conducive to bridging the 'gap'.

The Stubbornness of Social Cohesion

Since 1997, much attention in the restructuring debate has been devoted to social cohesion, often in connection to social mix. The Netherlands has been far from unique in this sense; a very

similar discussion has featured in the British policy discourse since 1995 (Tunstall, 2003; Bond *et al*., 2011). The concept has featured both explicitly and implicitly in the national policy discourse. "Increasing social cohesion" has even been legally established as a statutory goal in the Urban Renewal Act (*Wet Stedelijke Vernieuwing*) (MVROM 2000). Social mix is considered as a primary means to reach that goal.

Not surprisingly, many researchers made it a centre point of their research into the social consequences of restructuring measures. The results were often highly disappointing from the perspective of policymakers. The common result in target neighbourhoods is not a cohesive living environment, but rather a neighbourhood where various people live their own lives and avoid confrontations with members of other groups. Peaceful coexistence and indifference are generally the most favourable outcomes, but cases of tensions and conflicting lifestyles have also been documented (Kleinhans *et al.*, 2000; Beckhoven & Van Kempen, 2003; Dekker & Bolt, 2005; Ouwehand *et al*., 2006; Van Marissing *et al*., 2006; Uitermark *et al*., 2007; Wittebrood & Van Dijk, 2007; Van Bergeijk *et al*., 2008).

The concept of social cohesion is notoriously slippery. First, there is a sheer difficulty of operationalizing such a multi-layered concept in the daily practice in urban neighbourhoods (see e.g. Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Dekker & Bolt, 2005; Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009). In all white papers on urban restructuring, social cohesion never received much explanation. And when it was explained, each time a different aspect was put to the foreground. The same applies to many local district and neighbourhood plans. This is "problematic for policy, because if nobody knows exactly what should be improved, policy failure seems almost inevitable" (Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009, p. 471). Second, there has been a discussion on whether social cohesion has been a goal or a means to something else. Earlier Dutch research has shown that this distinction is not clear-cut (Kleinhans, 2004; Dekker & Bolt, 2005; Van Marissing *et al*., 2006). It can be a goal, denoted by terms like 'social balance' and 'social cement'. The concept has also been portrayed as a means to a goal, for example attempts to facilitate social management of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Uitermark, 2003; Uitermark *et al*., 2007) or as a means to improve a neighbourhood through its stabilising effect on feelings of insecurity (Van Bergeijk *et al*., 2008).

In light of disappointing research findings (2000-2007) and the observations above, it is somewhat surprising that the policy concept of social cohesion is still around. In the white paper 'Action Plan Power Neighbourhoods' (*Actieplan Krachtwijken*, MVROM 2007), the concept featured again, albeit in a less prominent manner. A first explanation of this 'stubbornness' is

that national policymakers may not have taken earlier criticism on board, because it did not fit their pre-determined position on the subject, i.e. that restructuring can improve social cohesion in target neighbourhoods.

Secondly, they may have acknowledged critical comments without deeming a policy revision necessary. For example, they may hope that social cohesion may still be improved by other renewal measures than the physical restructuring itself. Such an effect would go beyond the national policy documents. Local governments have shown a strong tendency to formulate local restructuring plans in line with the discourse in white papers, fearing the Ministers' disapproval if they divert too much from the national framework (see Van Bergeijk *et al.*, 2008, p. 249). Both explanations connect to the *political model* of the use of research in the policy-making process (Stevens, 2007). The preservation of the term social cohesion in urban policy not only reflects the hope that some renewal measures (whether or not physical restructuring) may still positively affect social cohesion. Policymakers have also 'cherry-picked' evidence that restructuring maintains some aspects of social cohesion through providing intra-area housing career opportunities (e.g. Dekker & Bolt, 2005; Kleinhans, 2005).

A third explanation is that the concept still has a strong positive connotation, as it is associated with a range of desirable societal outcomes (e.g. Forrest & Kearns, 2001). Moreover, it connects well to various broader societal debates on feeling at home, multiculturalism and integration into Dutch society (Duyvendak, 2011). These 'strengths' have remained despite, or maybe even as a result of, all the criticism. Precisely the vagueness of the concept (a common issue in policy-making, see e.g. Sanderson, 2002) provides a strength as policymakers can 'bend' the meaning and operationalization to their liking, in reaction to any form of criticism. This explanation may reflect both the *political* and *enlightenment models*; the first because 'bending' the concept has facilitated selective use of evidence from available research, while retaining the semantic power and positive connotation of the term social cohesion; the latter because social cohesion connects well to dominant political debates on home, multiculturalism and integration. These debates strongly shape the way policymakers see the world. Especially multiculturalism and lack of integration (especially of ethnic minorities) are assumed to threaten social cohesion on various spatial scales, thus calling for a policy reaction.

A final explanation offered here is not related to policymakers, but to researchers. Clearly, a growing literature has critically evaluated the effects of urban restructuring on social cohesion since 1997. This also reflects researchers' tendency to build on earlier work, the

theoretical and conceptual challenges of the concept of social cohesion, and maybe that it has provided an easy rod to beat policymakers with. In other words, the presence of social cohesion in the recent literature may be more a reflection of researchers' interests than of an actual emphasis in national or local policies. On some occasions, this has resulted in local authorities or other policy stakeholders refuting research conclusions and criticism, claiming that their goals are actually different from the one(s) criticised by researchers (see e.g. Norder, 2009).

Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have reflected on the legacy of Dutch restructuring policy and research since 1997. This legacy has been characterised not only by academic controversy about the rationales, processes and impacts of restructuring policy, but also by the role of academic knowledge and its exchange with policy. I have shown that Dutch urban geography research has proved itself relevant, contrary to the disquiet about urban geography's alleged lack of policy substance and practical relevance (for an overview, see Imrie, 2004). Instead, the Dutch discussion focuses on a widely perceived gap between policy and research. But is this gap a telling metaphor for what is actually happening? How can the use of research in the restructuring policy process be characterised? How have researchers contributed to the uneasy research-policy interchange?

Drawing on a typology of the use of research in the policy-making process (Stevens, 2007), I have discussed four examples: (1) the ambivalent findings of forced relocation research; (2) a study criticising the selection of target neighbourhoods; (3) a study pointing at negative spillover effects from restructuring and (4) the stubbornness of social cohesion. If the research-policy gap is indeed in full swing, one would expect the examples to correspond predominantly to the linear and political/tactical model of Stevens. However, the examples appear to fit not only with the political model, but also the enlightenment model and evolutionary model in the Stevens typology. Hence, research comes to influence policy when it is consistent with the ideas of those in positions of power and thus aids decision-making (Stevens, 2007; Monaghan, 2009). This *evolutionary* model corresponds to the relocation and spillover research (examples 1, 3).

Policymakers have ignored, downplayed or 'cherry-picked' research findings. The two cases of research on the area-based approach (examples 2 and 3) reflect the *political* model. But this is insufficient reason to support the gap metaphor. I have shown that, even in their rejection

or downplaying efforts, policymakers and politicians have taken notice of research very well and have, on various occasions, explicitly reacted to it (Dekker, 2006, Vogelaar, 2008, Norder, 2009).

Researchers have contributed to the uneasiness in the research-policy exchange by adding conceptual complexity which has thwarted policymakers' need for clarity (example 1), issuing warnings (against spillover) effects that seem to have risen more from conviction than from empirical insights (see example 3), and criticising the use of a concept (social cohesion) which has already lost most of its urgency in local policy goals (example 4).

Nevertheless, we have seen that the perceived gap between research and policy has been 'bridged' in various ways. Moreover, uneasy encounters between research and policy may, in the longer term, shape the ways in which all actors involved see 'the world'. As mentioned earlier this option reflects Stevens' *enlightenment model* (2007; see also the discussion on social cohesion, example 3). This is much more than the fate of research that has disappeared in the proverbial desk drawer. Thus, unlike proponents of the gap thesis who argue that the glass is half empty, I would argue that the glass is half full.

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Notes

[1] Although the researchers responsible for the described examples are predominantly urban geographers, (as is the author of this paper), the confinement to this field is, to a certain extent, arbitrary. It is highly likely that other fields, such as housing, economics and sociological research have comparable examples.

[2] For a more extensive discussion, see Weiss (1986), Stevens (2007) and Monaghan (2009).

[3] Although the practice of cherry-picking also appears here: a main feature of Stevens' *political* model.

[4] These include: a priority status, a right to a comparable dwelling in the social rented sector, a relocation costs allowance and extra counselling in finding a dwelling (see e.g. Kleinhans, 2003; Bolt *et al*., 2009).

[5] A very important data source of current longitudinal research is the Social Statistics Database (*Sociaal Statistisch Bestand*) of Statistics Netherlands. This database a range of socioeconomic, demographic and housing data on a four-digit post code level of all registered Dutchmen (Wittebrood & Permentier, 2011).

[6] A important example in this respect is the *Moving To Opportunity* demonstration in the US.

[7] Several authors have shown that the Dutch policy discourse mirrors a broad concern to decrease the socioeconomic disadvantages of people in the least attractive social housing (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008, p. 89; Curley & Kleinhans, 2010, p. 376; Dekker & Varady, 2011).