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Beyond the urban–suburban dichotomy

Shifting mobilities and the transformation of suburbia

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Suburbanisation has been a prevalent process of post-war, capitalist urban growth, leading to the majority of citizens in many advanced capitalist economies currently living in the suburbs. We are also witnessing, however, the reverse movement of the increasing return to the inner-city. This contradiction raises questions regarding contemporary urban growth and the socio-spatial production of the suburbs. This paper draws on the case of new town Almere in the metropolitan region of Amsterdam to cast light upon the changing suburban–urban relationship, by investigating the mobility to and from Almere for two decades through socio-economic, demographic data between 1990 and 2013. We demonstrate that Almere has developed from a typically suburban family community to a receiver of both international unmarried newcomers and families; its population has also become relatively poorer, yet the levels of upwards income mobility have remained stable. These trends emphasise alternative types of mobilities emerging in concert to the more typical suburban migration. The town's transformation challenges the urban–suburban dichotomy, pointing to alternative explanations of contemporary urban growth and metropolitan integration.

Key words: spatial mobility, suburbanisation, postsuburbia, social mobility, gentrification, urbanisation, demographics, urban transformation

Introduction—the Apollonian and the Dionysian

On 30 November 1976, Lia and Henk de Clerk, the first inhabitants of the Dutch New Town of *Almere*, received the keys for their new home in Almere Haven ('Port') from the minister of Transport and Water, Tjerk Westerterp. Soon after, they took the bus from Amsterdam to Almere, walked for a few minutes in the rain on paths surrounded by wet sand, and entered their house. The de Clerks were joined by 24 other households, together the 'pioneers' of Almere Haven. During an interview decades later, Sylvia de Boer, one of the four children who followed their parents to the New Town, recounts her first days in their big, new home and the strangeness of being the sole household in a whole block.[1] She remembers the excitement of having a whole elementary school for only four children. Filmed at the same

time, the then recently built large supermarket appears eerie while the few newly local families are shopping for the first ever Christmas dinner in Almere.[2] These early settlers are surrounded by large expanses, empty at the time and fully planned for future development; plans to be realised as Almere's population would supposedly reach 250,000 residents by the year 2000.

Thirty-six years later, on Friday 20 July 2012, around 11 in the evening, a couple of dozen Caribbean-Dutch youngsters with percussion and drumming equipment were playing music at the post-modern centre of Almere Stad ('City'), an array of large, broad buildings around a wide pavement. The music of the Caribbean rhythms reverberated loudly throughout the thoroughfare, bouncing from building to building, easily heard from hundreds of meters away; only there was hardly anyone around to hear them. Apart from a group of drunken teenagers, and one of the authors of this paper, there were just a few people walking around at that time. The city centre designed by renowned Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, with considerable attention to its social life, was almost empty except for this group of enthusiastic youngsters parading and playing Afro-Caribbean music: Almere's population had yet to reach 200,000 residents.

It is not a coincidence that planning a suburban 'utopia' has revolved around demographic engineering based on the spatial and social mobility of individuals. Increasing Almere's population has depended on increasing the mobility possibilities for urbanites, be it through incentives for better housing, homeownership, living environments or work opportunities. In this respect, Almere's space is produced relationally to other places, and notably to Amsterdam (see Figure 1). Yet, how the mobility trajectories of Almere's residents have developed has not been straightforward or according to the initial planning, nor has Amsterdam developed in ways anticipated by urban planners. These contradictions and tensions between modernist (sub)urban planning and emerging demographics and mobilities raise questions about the future of highly planned New Towns, and about the evolving relation between city and suburb more generally. Projects like Almere have been the epitome of an *Apollonian* approach to (sub)urbanisation. Apollo, son of Zeus and god of reason in ancient Greek mythology, represents the political attempts to regulate the production of space through intensive planning and an emphasis on rationality and order. On the other side of the space-production dialectic lies Apollo's mythological brother and counterpart *Dionysus*, the ancient Greek god of revelry, emotions and unpredictability. Scott (1998) shows the opposition of the two 'divinities' by demonstrating how several 'utopian-city' experiments developed into anything but what their visionaries intended, reminding us of the possible hubris committed by planners who attempt to fully organise everyday life, and their potential failure thereafter due to the messiness of social life. In Harvey's words (2000, 179): 'materializations of spatial utopias run afoul of the particularities of the temporal process mobilized to produce them'. As we show in this paper, the emerging tensions between the Apollonian and Dionysian elements in contemporary suburban spaces may materialise into unexpected transformations, challenging urban–suburban dichotomies. For the analysis of these tensions, we focus on the nexus of social and spatial mobility and on the transformation process of a suburban space like Almere into a post-suburban state (ostensibly quasi-urban) through changing mobilities and demographics. Drawing on the case of Almere in relation to Amsterdam, we demonstrate that the urban–suburban dichotomy should be critically reevaluated, if not discarded altogether.

Urbs—the blurring of urban and suburban

With the post-WWII boom of Western capitalism and the increasing emphasis on

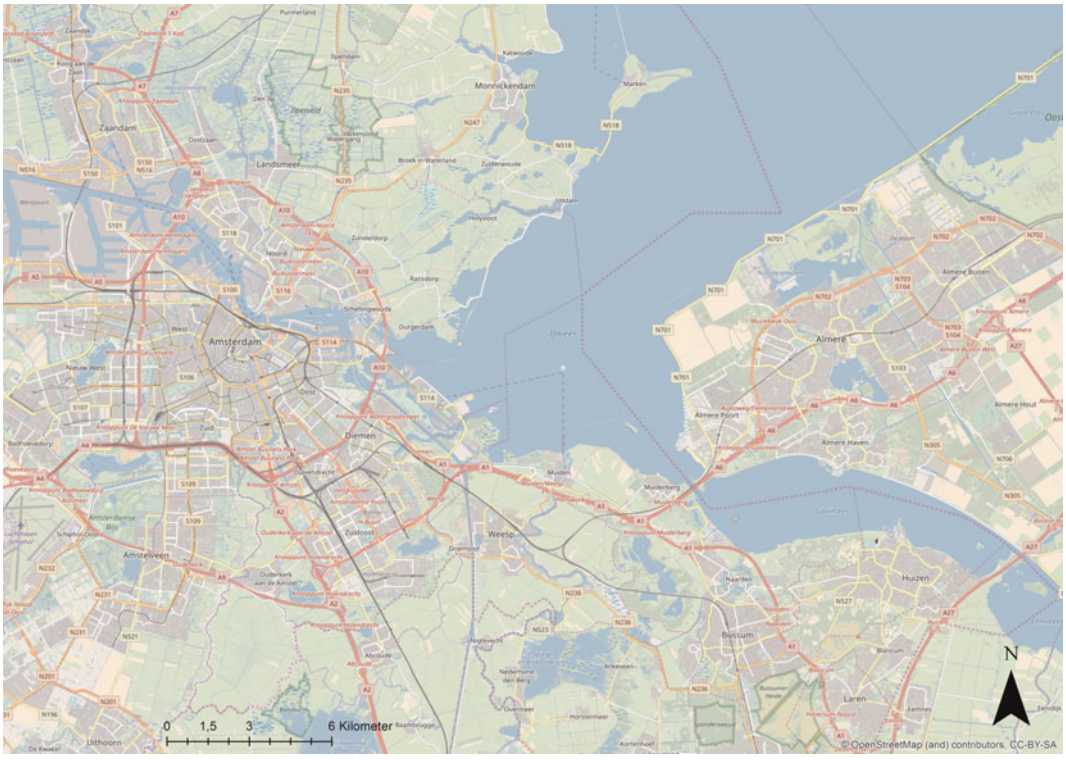

Figure 1 Amsterdam metropolitan area map, © OpenStreetMap contributors, 11/2017. Retrieved from http://www.openstreetmap.org/.

consumption by the newly formed, socially mobile classes, consumption paradises were embodied in suburban settlements. In the decades that followed WWII, population growth manifested mainly in suburbanisation, with the contemporary middle class itself emerging with the development of the suburbs. Moving away from the mounting inequality and class violence concentrated in often run-down, unsafe inner-city neighbourhoods, the continuously forming middle class flocked to the suburbs (Champion 2001). Leaving the city and moving to the suburb soon grew from a middle-class dream to a general trajectory for many, leading to the emergence of metropolitan, sprawling places like the archetypically suburban Los Angeles. Despite the 'collective effort to live a private life' becoming widespread ideology primarily in the US (Mumford 1938, cited in Fishman 1987, 10), and despite the diversity of suburban communities for the socially mobile, from the mass-produced housing in Long-Island's Levittown and the utopia-driven New Towns such as Milton Keynes in the UK, and Almere in the Netherlands, these settlements represented a concerted attempt to escape from post-WWII cities. Suburbanisation has thus gradually replaced older, traditional urbanisation processes as the dominant form of habitation; people living in suburbs are now a majority in the advanced capitalist world.[3]

The city–suburb migration, however, is not as straightforward anymore and is showing signs of diversification. US census reports from the early 2010s showed North-American cities growing rather fast, primarily due to wealthier classes 'retaking' the city, although the most recent indicators show that suburbanisation continues

unabated.[4] Similarly, in North-Western Europe, inner-city gentrification and successful city branding have rendered the urban environment popular again, especially for the highly educated middle class (Buzar et al. 2007; Uitermark et al. 2007; Boterman, Karsten, and Musterd, 2010; Smith 2012). In their broad empirical study of 158 European agglomerations between 1991 and 2004, for instance, Kabisch and Haase (2011) found similar evidence of population mobilities having diversified. Perhaps even more graphically, suburbs are increasingly entry points for international migrants, pointing towards the consistent manifestation of suburban multicultural spaces (Frey 2001; Waters and Jiménez 2005; Dawkins 2009; Liu and Painter 2012; Phelps, Vento, and Roitman, 2015).

The blurring of the urban and the suburban has been widely problematised and it has, as a result, acquired a myriad of definitions and descriptions, especially in North-American academic literature: technoburb (Fishman 1987), edge city (Garreau 1991), exopolis (Soja 1996) and metroburbia (Knox 2008). Considering that 'in-between' places are increasingly emerging (Young and Keil 2010; Dembski 2014), we can safely argue that rigid understandings of the past between rural–urban–suburban seem obsolete. Such transitory processes are currently predominantly termed by several scholars as 'post-suburban' (Kling, Olin, and Poster 1995; Phelps, Wood, and Valler 2010; Phelps and Wood 2011; Charmes and Keil 2015), an open and topical concept regarding the unpredictability of contemporary suburbia. The term has come to signify the era after the archetypical suburbia, a state of social arrangements and a built environment that are naturally and notoriously elusive. While it is used in empirical studies as well (Helbich and Leitner 2009; Hudalah and Firman 2012), post-suburbia points to transitions from the binary urban/non-urban to perpetually forming spaces and to relationality between cities and regions. It is still an unclear concept, calling for novel approaches beyond the common dichotomies of city and suburb:

> 'We can conclude that post-suburbia has well and truly arrived, and we may propose that we need to accept that post-suburbia is now ubiquitous. No new frontiers are part of this particular set of case studies; their view is directed towards the inside. In all of this, there is some clear transatlantic convergence but also lots of diversity [...]' (Charmes and Keil 2015, 600)

The processes of the suburban penetrating the urban and vice versa are discussed by De Jong (2013), who provides robust evidence of the transformation of suburbia towards a hybridised nature through demographic and cultural change. Similarly, Phelps (2015) postulates that the existence of the post-suburb calls for reevaluating our understandings of city boundaries and edges, although he tends to adopt a rather homogenising perspective on (post) suburban spaces. Cochrane (2011) stresses such heterogeneity and emphasises the importance of looking at 'planned' suburbs (or New Towns): he focuses on Milton Keynes, the British 'sister' city of Almere, a similarly planned autonomous city that remains in the 'shadow' of the regional capital (170). We likewise emphasise the unpredictable and heterogeneous transformations of (post)-suburban settlements, especially when analysing contexts outside the US, while adopting relational perspectives regarding different settlements in a region. In Continental Europe, the question of New Towns is equally significant, obvious in Despond and Auclair's (2017) investigation of five 1960s New Towns around Paris, and the conclusion that despite their moderate success regarding economic stability, they have been less successful in demographic increase. Currently, these New Towns appear marginal in Parisian planning, joining the ranks of settlements that have unclear futures.

Hanlon, Short, and Vicino (2010) attempted to unpack this increasing complexity, by referring to a 'new metropolitan

reality', emphasising the growing heterogeneity of metropolitan regions. Although the authors criticised the urban–suburban dichotomy, they still deemed residential areas in city-peripheries as suburban types; each 'new' suburban assemblage was given a certain character, be it 'black', 'immigrant', 'manufacturing', 'gothic' or 'declining' (Hanlon et al. 2010). Especially, the pessimistic concept of the suburban 'gothic', representing the transition of once-booming suburbs into decaying places, is based on the problematic binary of success/failure (Short, Hanlon, and Vicino 2007). Schafran (2013) warns of the stigma that such 'suburban decline' rhetoric can bring on the communities themselves and points out the dangers of deeming poverty as a problem in itself. We similarly wonder if it is constructive to use such sensationalist rhetoric as the 'suburbanization of poverty' (Cooke and Denton 2015; Hochstenbach and Musterd 2017) and dystopian suburbs (versus idealised cities). Alternatively, the concept of 'polycentricity' has been commonly employed when discussing the blurring of city and suburb, especially in Europe (Kloosterman and Musterd 2001; Salet 2006; Vasanen 2012; Savini 2014). In this body of literature, settlements within a region are rather rigidly typified as places with different roles and functions (Musterd, Bontje, and Ostendorf 2006; Burger, Van Der Knaap, and Wall 2014), and deemed as centres of culture, finance, politics and so on (Kloosterman and Lambregts 2007).

Models like the 'new metropolitan reality' and 'polycentricity' are empirically questioned when trying to capture the increasingly diversified nature of suburban settlements in the contemporary relation between the city and the suburb. The post-suburban concept does attempt to go beyond the dichotomies demonstrated in these models. However, since it is a broad description of mechanisms and processes in need of particularising, it would gain from empirical studies that look at transformations relationally, in depth and in process. Hence, in our paper, we take to heart the need to transform the urban–suburban dialectic into a wider understanding of urban growth through mobility instead of discussing the urban–suburban relationship as a process in and of itself.

Understanding post-suburbia through spatial and social mobility

In this paper, we link the physical and socio-economic aspects of mobility. There have already been for some time discussions connecting mobility in space with mobility in socio-economic terms (Savage 1988). Such analyses, however, have been conducted primarily by relating mobility to agency while concentrating on physical movement instead of the interaction 'between actors, structures and context' (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004, 749). Rérat and Lees (2011) implement an alternative approach by analysing the simultaneous hyper-mobility and hyper-fixity of gentrifiers in Switzerland; *mobile* because they have plenty of 'spatial capital' to activate and *fixed* because they are rooted in central city areas. More ambitiously, Cresswell (2011) emphasises the 'mobility turn', a multi-scalar, inter-disciplinary and relational perspective which situates 'moving' at the centre 'of constellations of power, the creation of identities and the micro-geographies of everyday life' (551). Keil and Young (2014) in fact discuss the growing importance of mobility, at least in terms of transport and transit, in order to address and go beyond the urban–suburban dichotomy. This allows for a processual analysis of the formation of new urban regions, be they 'new metropolitan realities' or 'polycentric', or any other for that matter.

In-depth analysis of the actual transformation of urban and suburban mobilities is generally absent, however, and research tends to focus only on the actual outcomes. Our paper focuses on the historical demographic changes that have taken place in Almere since its early years. Here, we draw

from Smith's (2008) emphasis on geographical scales, reflecting the differentiation and equalisation contradictions taking place in contemporary suburbs, which do not have only neat, integrated dimensions but also discontinuities and fragmentations. Tzaninis (2015), for instance, shows how a space like Almere developed into a 'place dependent on markets, state intervention, global migration trends and individualist aspirations' (563). Space is thus best perceived as full of interrelations, heterogeneity and processes (Massey 2005), instead of path-linearity by virtue of inevitability ('modernisation', 'urbanisation' and 'revitalisation'). Here, we link social and spatial mobility in order to show not only the evolution of Almere's demographics but also the historical composition of its population in terms of income and household types. The 'post' state of places like Almere is not only emblematically examined through mobility, *ergo* change, but concretely through the different sorts of people comprising its population.

The case—Almere

In our paper, the process of shifting urban dynamics is investigated longitudinally by focusing on people's resettlement to Almere from Amsterdam and from abroad. We discuss the changes of the social positioning of space itself as a result of the spatial and social mobility of thousands of persons in the form of longitudinal changes. We draw from Lefebvre's general theory of space as a product (Lefebvre 1991), a fitting starting point for a space like Almere, produced as it has been from scratch (physically). We also draw from the Lefebvrian understanding of space as a multi-layered process, capturing suburbia as one element of a metropolitan region, interdependent with processes on different levels. Lefebvre's philosophy of space is commonly discussed in theoretical terms (Merrifield 1993, 2011; Fraser 2009; Wapshott and Mallett 2012) but we attempt to refine it through an empirical study.

To do this, we analyse socio-economic, demographic data in Almere for the years between 1990 and 2013. We draw on detailed, individual register data from the system of statistical database (SSD) from Dutch statistics (CBS) that allow us to not just produce tailor-made tables based on data comparable to census data, but moreover allow for longitudinal tracking of individual, social and spatial mobility. We look at the migration trends of in-movers to Almere, their household types, their ethnic composition and their income classes. We also investigate mobility particularly between Almere and Amsterdam. The changes are analysed in relation to two main intersecting dynamics: Almere's historical transformation process, and the regional and global flows of human movement. The aim is to shed light on contemporary urban–suburban dynamics and to demonstrate how places like Almere, apart from being atypical regarding expectations, are constantly *becoming*. Such exploration may allow us to look beyond the urban–suburban dichotomies and beyond the essentialisation of places as categorical, absolute parts but instead to stress their contradicting, competitive and dynamic nature.

Almere itself is difficult to define considering that it cannot be called exactly a city or a suburb. For the sake of facilitating our argumentation, we choose the term New Town as it denotes a certain period of modernist city planning, as well as a kind of suburban settlement in terms of spatial and social mobility.

The miracle of birth—Amsterdam *metropole*[5]

In the late 1800s, Amsterdam's relative prosperity gave rise to an increasing, working-class net immigration to the Dutch capital. Modest industrialisation and especially increased international trade brought Amsterdam a so-called second golden age, and with that came intense population growth (Bontje and Sleutjes 2007): in the

interwar period, Amsterdam's population increased by almost 200,000. Although this increase was partly due to the annexation of outer municipalities, the increasing working-class migration to the city was evident. Simultaneously, there was also a 'migration of income' away from Amsterdam, an early phase of middle- and high-class suburbanisation (long before the New-Town suburbanisation of the post-war period). Despite the fact that Amsterdam's housing was then fashioned to accommodate a large working-class population in high density, land costs were still high compared to outlying settlements. Hence, the ones who could afford moving were not easily convinced by the city council to stay and instead chose to move the suburbs (Terhorst and Van de Ven 1997).[6]

Amsterdam's urbanisation persisted after World War II, during Western capitalism's own 'golden age'. Wage and rent control became important aspects of state intervention and economic growth was planned through the introduction of cheap products in the world markets. Subsequent industrialisation and the Dutch economy's integration into the world market in the 1960s led to the heydays of Fordism in the Netherlands. Wage control was no longer possible due to increased labour demand, and with it came almost full employment, the development of the welfare state and mass consumption, catching Amsterdam in a 'growth mania', its population reaching all-time high around 1960 (Terhorst and Van de Ven 1997). The city government started looking progressively outwards to a new land for development. And despite Amsterdam's egalitarian characteristics due to the Dutch welfare structure (Fainstein 1997), it was around those times when the city started being branded by modernist planners as a 'hopelessly dysfunctional, chaotic and ugly mess' (Uitermark 2009).

When the capitalist economies went into recession in the late 1970s, it was particularly experienced in the Dutch capital. Between 1960 and 1985 half the jobs within Amsterdam's historical centre disappeared (Terhorst and Van de Ven 2003). During those decades, massive emigration from the Randstad's major cities took place, people moving to other smaller municipalities or the surrounding suburbs. The suburban migration continued also during the 1980s, especially in the case of Amsterdam (Musterd, Jobse, and Kruythoff 1991). The capital's population decreased by 200,000 residents those decades, while suburbanisation was booming; most of the former residents from Amsterdam were moving to settlements in the inner suburban ring, and especially to New Towns in the Flevoland province (Musterd, Bontje, and Ostendorf 2006). Concurrent to the economic boom of the 1960s in the advanced capitalist world, several New Towns like Almere were planned with egalitarian, utopianist, consumerist and functionalist visions. What actually happened in socio-demographic terms, however, is a rather different story; emerging income inequality and unemployment, manifesting particularly in southeast Amsterdam, in the Bijlmermeer quarter, showed that 'Fordism was over before the Fordist city was completed' (Terhorst and Van de Ven 1997, 299).[7]

The plan—New Town Almere

In the post-WWII Netherlands, ideas of social engineering were popular, and Social Democrats and the New Left alike were articulating visions of 'creating' a better society (Duyvendak 1999). Such an aspiration was envisioned through selecting people who would live on new land such as the *Flevopolder*, the reclaimed island where Almere is located. The Flevopolder is not as celebrated as the artificial Palm Islands in Dubai, but is in fact the largest artificial island in the world. The 'Flevoland-feeling', based on the idea of new land being instrumental for social change, continued in the 1960s when cities like Almere where being planned, and where a new world could be literally created from

the ground up (Duyvendak 1999, 75). Almere in particular was initially planned as a suburban alternative to accommodate former residents of Amsterdam, with focus on uniformity, beyond political or cultural differences (Reijndorp, Bijlsma, and Nio 2012). It also provided a milieu for 'participation' (*inspraak*) in any attempt to find the efficient solutions to emergent social issues, aiming at producing the least disappointment and most satisfaction among residents (Reijndorp, Bijlsma, and Nio 2012, 84).

The essence of Almere's planning has been based on developing residential neighbourhoods first and a city centre thereafter. Nonetheless, the nuances of Almere's different cores have changed several times since the humble beginnings of the eerie, empty supermarkets and nigh-empty elementary schools. Even though the wet sand is still present in all the newly built places (i.e. Almere Poort), Almere's character is unclear. Every district has its own features, reflecting particular socio-cultural production of spaces (Figure 2). Almere Haven was the first area to be developed, an Ebenezer Howardesque planned 'utopia' with curved roads and access to green for every housing block. Not long after, the idealistic designs were suspended and Almere Stad became a second core, planned as a more typically suburban borough, with straight streets, garages and a limited number of apartments, but often with experimentation in the architecture. Similarly, Almere Buiten, literally the 'outside' of the town, became the third nucleus, retaining some of the post-modern design of Stad but overall resembling mostly typical Western suburbs, and accommodating VINEX areas (housing complexes commonly built for affluent residents). Two more areas are being currently developed, Poort and Hout. What we can already see, at least in Poort, is the gradual construction of standard low-rise housing alongside personally designed homes by residents.

The latest municipal government's ambitions have been incorporated into 'Almere 2.0', a recently conceived catchphrase for the New Town's future. Almere's urbanisation process, at least according to the local authorities, is well underway: [Almere will] 'transform itself as it evolves from a young city into a mature one',[8] while connectivity and accessibility to Amsterdam are explicitly promoted. Aspects of these transformations can be understood as the hybrid 'suburban urbanity' as Reijndorp et al. (2012) described it, the suburban especially manifesting in terms of ways of life.

Almere until recently

Almere has been euphemised as the 'growth-motor' of the Amsterdam regional economy (Economische Zaken Amsterdam, KvKA 2011). Since the mid-1990s, and until recently, its gross regional product had been constantly increasing, and even in times of general negative growth it still remained positive (e.g. in 2009 the Dutch economy declined by 3.9%, whereas in Almere and sister New Town Lelystad it increased by 0.2% together). Similarly, its working population was increasing above the country's average—by three or four times—over the past two decades. The average household income in Almere has been consistently higher than in Amsterdam and quite similar to the country-wide average, while in terms of education levels, the number of residents with tertiary education has been considerably lower in Almere than Amsterdam (CBS 2015). Yet, unemployment levels in the town have been close to the country's average (especially among young people), and have been recently increasing, while its economic growth has decelerated (Economische Zaken Amsterdam, KvKA 2012).

In the 1980s, Almere was a fast-growing settlement of commuters and by the 2000s around 50% of the town's labour force was commuting out of the town to work, of which more than a third to Amsterdam, making commuting from Almere the largest daily move-to-work to the Dutch capital (Gemeente Amsterdam 2008). By 2007 and

Figure 2 Almere map, © OpenStreetMap contributors, 11/2017. Retrieved from http://www.openstreetmap.org/.

later, however, more people have been gradually working and living in Almere making the town, in relation to the percentage of its residents, the least 'out-commuting' town in the Amsterdam region (Gemeente Amsterdam 2008).

Almere had been one of the fastest growing new settlements in North-Western Europe, its population having constantly grown until recently (in 2013 there was negative net migration for the first time; O&S Almere 2014). It was planned to become the fifth largest Dutch city by 2030 but currently this seems unrealistic. Slower population growth in the New Town has been partly caused by economic downturn nationally and, although it could be argued that this is a life-course effect of the youngest generation of Almere growing up and moving out in order to study and work, the demographic profile of the town's out-migrants points to more fundamental changes. The next sections describe the most striking changes of Almere's demographics in terms of domestic and international migration, household structure and income classes.

From Amsterdam to Almere and back again

Amsterdam's population declined sharply between 1960 and 1985, mainly due to suburbanisation away from the capital, peaking in 1973 when the city had a net loss of 25,000 inhabitants in just one year. For the first two decades of Almere's existence, thousands arrived every year from the capital, comprising more than half of all the newcomers. Suburbanisation also meant a loss of relatively affluent households, often with young children. Whereas by the end of the 1950s,

Amsterdam was the richest city per capita in the region, in 1994 it had an average income per earner that was almost 20% lower than that of the surrounding wider metropolitan area (Musterd and Ostendorf 2005).

In the early 1990s, however, when Western capitalism was showing signs of recovery, Amsterdam's population gradually grew again. Initially, this growth was primarily caused by international migration from former Dutch colonies and Mediterranean countries. However, some inner-city neighbourhoods showed first signs of gentrification (Musterd and Van Weesep 1991). These signs sparked debates about re-urbanisation in the Amsterdam region but most scholars of early gentrification have claimed that no actual re-migration of suburbanites could be identified (Van Weesep 1994; Van Criekingen 2010).

Migration to Almere started declining throughout the 1990s, and the total number of in-movers has continued abating in the 2000s, both from Amsterdam and beyond. In fact in 2013 migration between Almere and Amsterdam was in balance (O&S Almere 2014). What should not be missed here are not only the cyclical migration patterns, observed in Amsterdam and the areas around it but also the increasingly complex characteristics of such migration. From the second industrial revolution onwards (1870–1940), working classes moved into the Dutch capital, while most affluent families started moving out towards the suburbs (Schmal 2003). Ever larger groups of middle-class families followed the same suburbanisation pattern during the post-war period moving into homeownership in the expanding suburban milieus. Although the suburbanisation of middle-class families in search of affordable spacious (owner-occupied) housing is still the dominant pattern, Amsterdam is experiencing a quite rapid re-urbanisation and even a considerable growth of middle-class families (Boterman et al. 2010). To a large extent, the population growth is not only a literal return of individuals to the central city from the suburbs but is primarily caused by swelling numbers of young households looking for work or studies in the city and the strategic managing of time-space budgets of dual income families (Karsten 2007; Boterman 2012a). Furthermore, international migration of highly educated workers is also a significant factor in Amsterdam's growth.

Notwithstanding the fact that most of the re-urbanisation is an endogenous process, an actual 'return' to Amsterdam seems increasingly more of a reality now as well. Although still more people settle in Almere from Amsterdam than the other way around, the share of Amsterdammers has decreased to around 30% of the total domestic influx (from 45% in the early 1990s). Of those people leaving Almere, about 25% of total domestic out-migration goes to the capital, making it an increasingly popular destination for many former residents of the New Town. This is to some extent the result of the maturing of Almere's population: for the first time cohorts of young Almere-born and bred leave their parental home to settle in the capital. Nonetheless, migration from Almere is not only constituted by young fledglings, as significant numbers of families move from Almere to Amsterdam. To some extent, this is facilitated by the capital's suburban expansion *within* its borders. When we consider for instance IJburg, the latest expansion of Amsterdam, built on reclaimed land at the city's outskirts, it is unclear whether it is a suburb or a part of urban Amsterdam. Large volumes of owner-occupied single-family housing at manageable distance from the urban core have attracted a large number of middle-class families (Boterman et al. 2010). Butler (2007) demonstrates a similar phenomenon in London Docklands, a blurred relationship of gentrification and suburbanising, which seem to emerge in a synthetic way instead of in contrast to each other. In a similar vein, Almere's suburban status is similarly unclear and it is important to ask ourselves what it is that Almere is changing *into*.

The new melting pot?

Moving from Amsterdam to Almere during the town's early years was common not only due to its popularity among Amsterdammers, but facilitated by Amsterdam's council which prescribed tenure types and price ranges (Terhorst and Van de Ven 1997). In fact, 64% of all houses were officially allocated to people moving from Amsterdam (Constandse 1989). Whereas in the early decades of expansive growth, mainly middle- and low-middle-class, native-Dutch families settled in Almere, the 2000s especially was a period in which the flow of newcomers to Almere diversified, particularly among Caribbean-Dutch families. This suburbanisation of non-native groups has been associated with the emergence of a 'black' middle class who entered homeownership in Almere and hence epitomises a 'classic' association of residential and social mobility (De Groot 2004). In the mid-2000s, the largest share of all suburbanising Amsterdammers actually consisted of Caribbean Dutch. Furthermore, while Surinamese-Dutch and Antillean-Dutch are most evident examples of new groups of suburbanites, other non-native groups are also increasingly moving to Almere. Of all new Almeerders during the last decade, about 50% had a native-Dutch background and the other half had parents that were born abroad in a very broad range of countries (Figure 3).

In addition to domestic migration to Almere, direct international migration towards Almere emerged already in the early 1990s, constantly increasing throughout the 2000s. Amsterdam's ratio of international newcomers remains larger than that of Almere, but the recent change in Almere has been more acute: one out of four newcomers moved to Almere directly from another country in 2013, a ratio which was only one out of ten in 2001.

These international settlers moved to Almere from a very diverse pool of countries. Suriname, Poland, Spain, the UK, Somalia, Germany, Belgium and China are just a few, and none of them is the main source of international migrants. In 2011, a couple thousand persons moved from as many as 114 countries, creating an elaborate mosaic of international mobility, pointing away from simple understandings of (chain) migration waves. The diversity of countries of origin suggests complicated explanations, calling for investigation regarding the drives and mechanisms behind such migration as well as how the interactions between immigrants and natives unfold (see Pratsinakis 2014) regarding how culture and power differences play out between the 'immigrant' and 'native' categories). International migration, as well as the changing ethnic character of suburbanisation from Amsterdam, has diversified the population of Almere. In 2011, 20% of Almere's population was born abroad, while the 1991 ratio was around 10%; and in 2015, 40% of Almere's population had at least one foreign-born parent. With these numbers still rising fast, Almere has already joined the ranks of the most ethnically diverse municipalities in the Netherlands.

A place of singles

Alongside ethnic change, Almere is also getting more diverse in terms of household composition. While gradually the share of family households is decreasing, in 2013 one out of four new households in Almere consisted of just one person (Figure 4). To some extent, this is also facilitated by smaller apartments being constructed in some parts of Almere. Regardless, these trends challenge the traditional suburban ideas of 'family' or 'bedroom' communities and the scope of the whole modernist project which culminated in Almere (although the vast majority of housing in Almere is still owner-occupied terraced or (semi-)detached family homes). This changing demographic composition of the domestic migration to and from Almere is also reflected in the relationship with Amsterdam. In 2013, there were almost as many families moving to, as

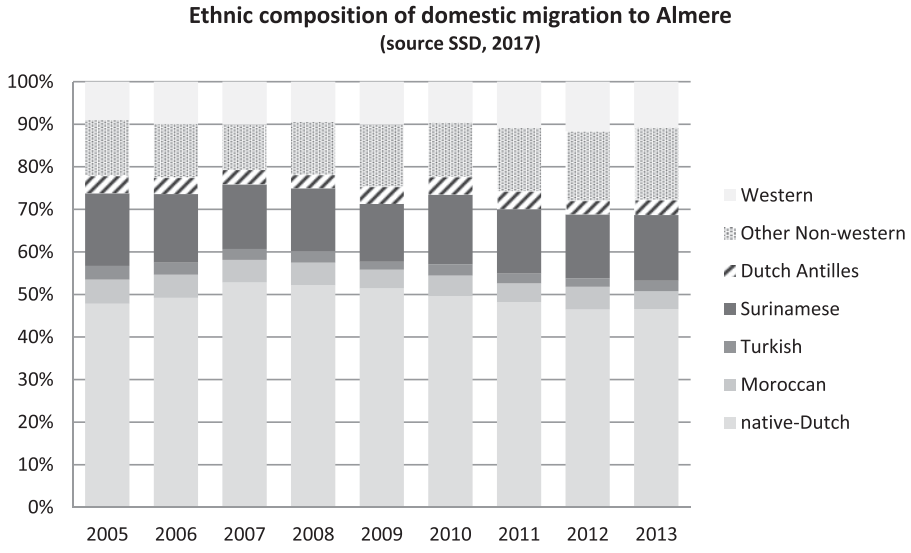

Figure 3 Ethnic composition of domestic migration to Almere (Source SSD 2017).

coming from, Amsterdam (Figure 5). Also in terms of the in and out mobility of singles, the two municipalities are in balance. Returning to the earlier question of whether moving out of Almere is linked to a life-course effect, we can now argue that the answer is definitely not that simple. Although the data imply a 'desuburbanisation' of Almere in the form of diversity, the complexities of the town's mobilities and demographics run deep and are intensifying, rendering straightforward life-course explanations questionable. Simultaneously, they raise the question of 'who is moving where and why', considering that, as we show, Amsterdam's new residents are not just from the young 'creative class', and cities

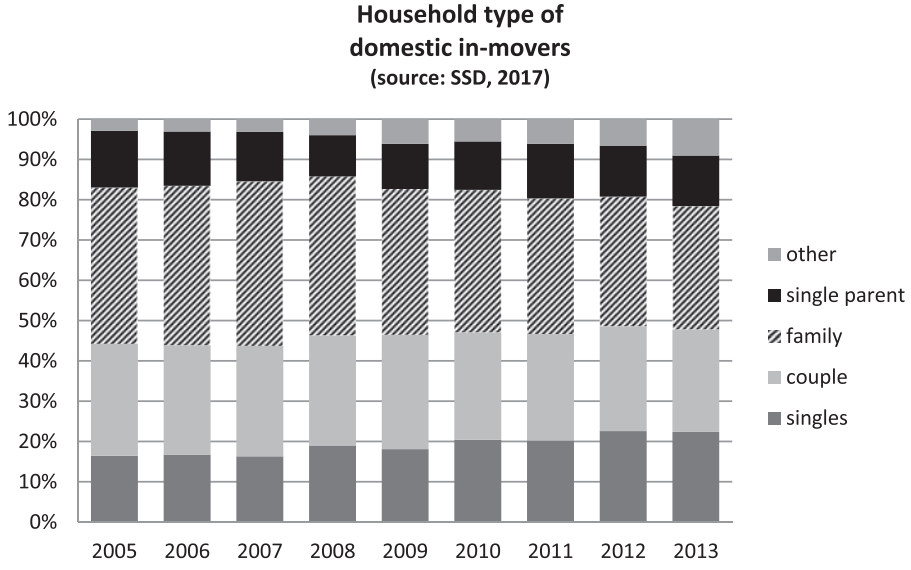

Figure 4 Household type of domestic in-movers (Source: SSD 2017).

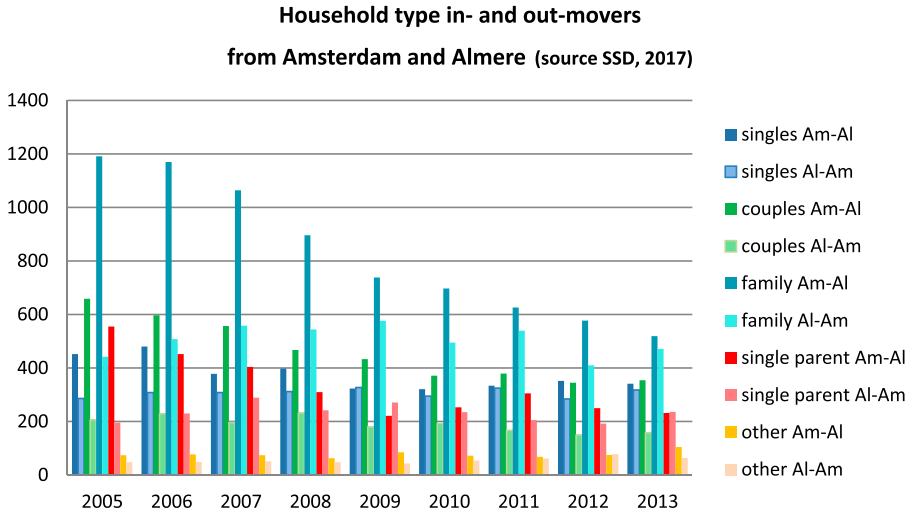

Figure 5 Household type in- and out-movers from Amsterdam and Almere (Source SSD 2017).

are increasingly having a blurred relation with what is *not* a city. An example comes from a 2014 report about US 'millennials', demonstrating their highly suburban aspirations and desire to own homes (Burbank and Keely 2014).

Almere and social mobility

The gentrification of the urban core and the diversification of suburbs point to a changing relationship between social and spatial mobility. The ways in which residential mobility represents and signifies social mobility have never been absolute and have always been difficult to interpret. While suburbanisation used to be almost synonymous with social mobility of middle classes moving into homeownership and 'urban' stood for 'poor' and (social) rent, this kind of social ecology is becoming ever more problematic. The housing stock of cities has transformed rapidly and gentrification has become a central alternative time-space trajectory of the middle classes (Bridge 2001; Boterman 2012b), while *some* suburbanisation may now be explicitly associated with downward mobility and even social marginality (Hochstenbach and Musterd 2017).

Although Amsterdam still has a very mixed population in terms of class, the share of higher incomes is considerably increasing (Buitelaar et al. 2016; Hochstenbach and Van Gent 2015). There is growing evidence that many households that cannot find suitable housing in Amsterdam are moving to the periphery of the region, including some parts of Almere (PBL 2015; Hochstenbach and Musterd 2017).

The number of higher and middle-income[9] people who move to Almere has decreased (as all in-migration has), while the number of low-income people has remained relatively stable and now constitutes the largest share of domestic newcomers (Figure 6). Suburbanites from Amsterdam have more or less the same income position as the newcomers form the rest of the country. Notwithstanding the growing relative importance of lower income groups, most people who move to Almere belong to the middle and higher incomes. Also, the majority of people moving to Almere from Amsterdam still move into homeownership (Figure 7). Moreover, many people may experience social mobility *after* they have moved. In this case, their spatial mobility may anticipate future social mobility. Obviously, this sequence of events is more common among

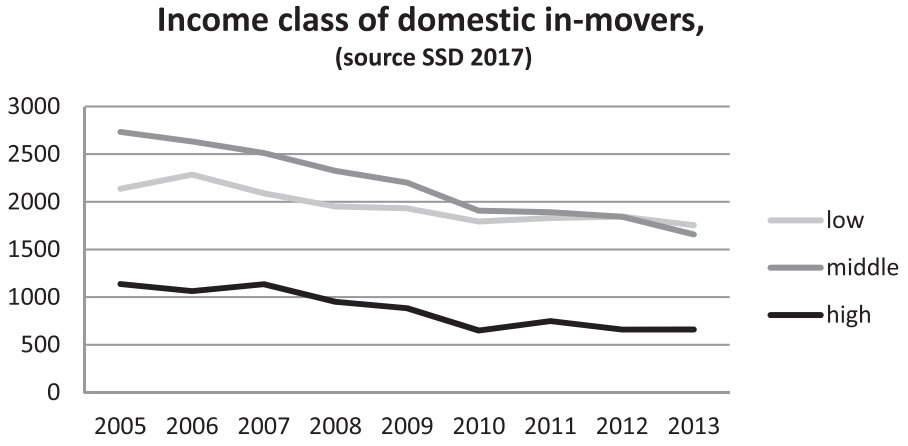

Figure 6 Income class of domestic in-movers (Source SSD 2017).

young people and newly formed families as they may still experience upward social mobility. Considering the composition of Almere's in-movers, social mobility in the period thereafter should be expected to be quite common.

Figure 8 demonstrates the income change of movers from Amsterdam to Almere in the five years after they had settled in Almere for two years (2004/05 and 2006/07). It is clear that most in-movers stay in the same income class as they were in before they moved. Nonetheless, many experience income mobility; of the low-income movers about 40% experiences upward income change, while the share of middle-income movers that witnesses decline in income class is lower than those that see their income position improve. Finally, of the high incomes about 20% falls back into a lower income category. So, while the share of people with a low income from Amsterdam to Almere has increased in recent years, this is not compounded by an

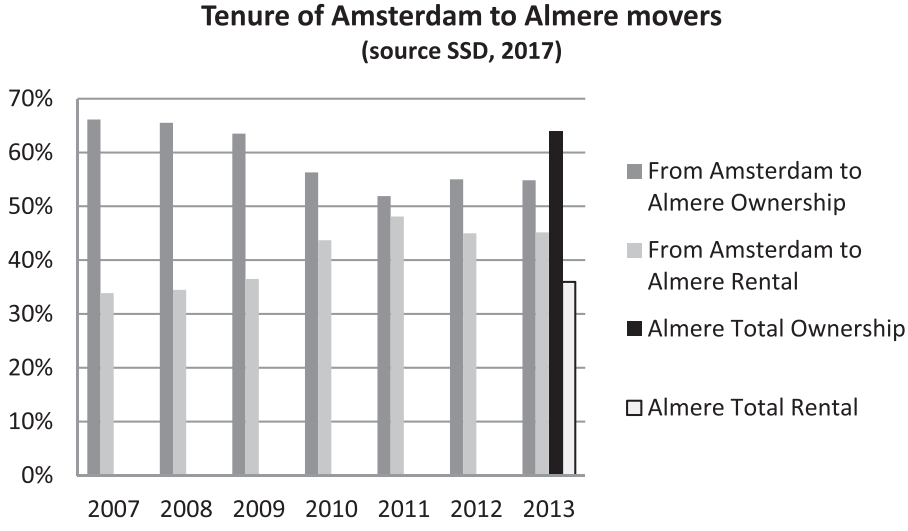

Figure 7 Tenure of Amsterdam to Almere movers (Source SSD 2017).

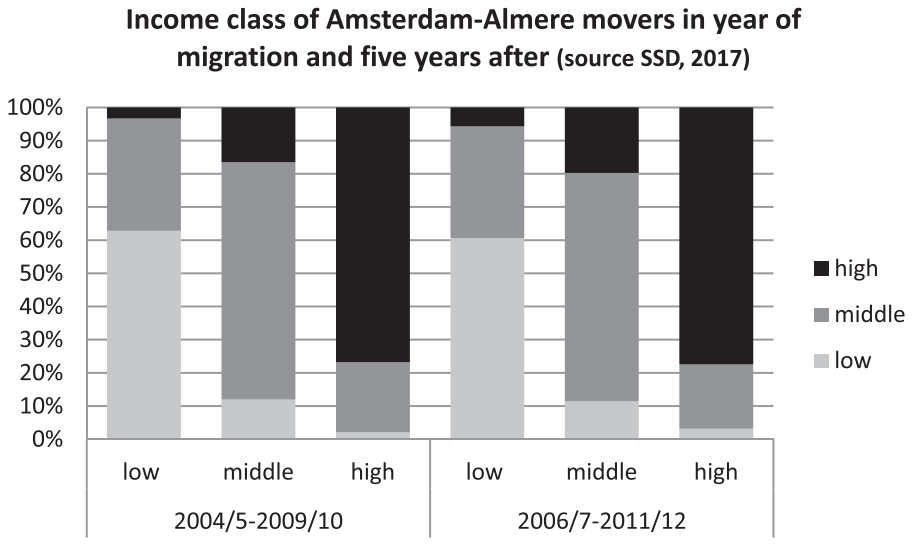

Figure 8 Income class of Amsterdam-Almere movers in year of migration and five years after (Source SSD 2017).

increase of social *downward* mobility. The share of upwardly mobile people has remained stable. Also, additional regression analyses (not shown here) demonstrate that in-movers are much more likely to experience an improvement of their income position in the years that follow their relocation. What can be concluded here is that Almere is still a place for social mobility for many. However, the timing and sequence of residential mobility and social mobility may be changing.

Discussion—one Almere, many Almeres

In this article, we argued that changing mobilities to and from Almere are gradually reshaping the formerly suburban New Town's space. These mobilities have both a physical and social dimension and are inherently relational and should be seen in relationship to other places, notably Amsterdam with which Almere's development is closely intertwined. We have described key crucial demographic and socio-economic trends transforming the character of Almere. While population growth had been central to Almere's development and even its identity, now its growth is sluggish, currently as many people moving from Almere to Amsterdam's urban core as there are moving the other way. While for decades the main origin of settlers used to be the Dutch capital, international immigration has become a major driving force behind the New Town's current—modest—growth. Many of these settlers come from unstable countries and rising capitalist economies, and others from new EU states as well as advanced capitalist economies. Moreover, Almere's new inhabitants are mainly single, while families are not just moving in but are also increasingly moving out, some of which towards Amsterdam. Lastly, the middle classes are not as dominant as they used to be in the groups of in-movers, and there is an increase in incoming households with low income, some of whom cannot afford housing in Amsterdam proper. Yet, social mobility does not stop occurring after moving to Almere, at least in terms of income, as the town is also still the manifestation of aspirations for homeownership, suburbanisation and social mobility (Tzaninis 2015).

Notwithstanding the continued predominance of middle-class family households,

the suburban character of Almere is challenged by these major demographic changes. These shifts demonstrate the gradual emergence of a diverse and heterogeneous population, in contrast with existing stereotypes of the classic middle-class family suburb. And even though one may think that there is homogeneity within Almere's different neighbourhoods, its diverse elements actually exist 'cheek-to-jowl': families live next door to singles, natives to immigrants, freelance professionals to manual workers, asylum seekers to the privileged middle class, while flats are raised next to family houses and a Manhattanesque centre exists close to the suburban homes.

Discussing the emerging hybridity of the suburban way of life while drawing largely on Lefebvre, Walks (2013) defines suburbanism as 'an inherent aspect of urbanism … constantly fluctuating and pulsating as the flows producing its relational forms shift and overlap in space' (Walks 2013, 1472). He argues that metropolitanisation is 'the synthetic product of the tension between the forces of urbanism and suburbanism, one that varies in character depending on the local strength and mix of their different forms and flows' (1478). In this paper, we provide similar (empirical) evidence of the porosity between the 'urban' and the 'suburban', while focusing on the process of their fusion. Our attention here, however, is not on ways of life described as suburbanism, but the processes of transformation that have been traditionally described as suburbanisation and urbanisation. Accordingly, we find Almere gradually 'sliding' away from a typical suburban state. This we observe through residential mobility that reflects the New Town's geographical–historical evolution.

The erosion of the suburban character of Almere we identify in this paper fits into broader and longstanding debates about the future of suburbia (Masotti and Hadden 1973; Baldassare 1992; Harris and Larkham 1999). Peck, Siemiatycki, and Wyly (2014) address these debates by showing how Vancouver's 'successive urban and suburban moments in this transformative process have been folded into one another, a kneading process that has yielded new hybrids', a 'faux' urbanism as they argue, and Almere is a paradigmatic case thereof. In light of ideas about a planetary urbanisation taking place (Brenner and Schmid 2011), Keil and colleagues argue in their 'Suburban Constellations' (2013) that 'much if not most of what counts as urbanisation today is actually peripheral' (9). The character of what we may thus call 'planetary suburbanisation' is considered fluid and difficult to identify, represented in the multifaceted developments throughout the world's city-peripheries such as the apartment complexes of Istanbul, the slums of Cape Town or the sprawl of Los Angeles. 'Post-suburban' understandings of the growth of cities and periphery point beyond the dichotomous thinking about suburbs and city, towards more hybridised qualities of settlements.

Almere certainly shares this fluidity, as has been demonstrated in our paper. The data suggest that the town is not simply another 'centre' in a polycentric region and, instead, its many characters are coexisting, often in competition with other places (while Almere had a negative net migration in 2013, Amsterdam's population has recently had its strongest growth since WWII). We argue that processes deemed as 'urbanisation of the suburb' and 'suburbanisation of the city' (Hammett and Hammett 2007) are not separate, not even two sides of the same coin. Rather, they constitute a cyclical, non-dichotomous spatio-temporal process which has recently materialised in the diversification of regional mobilities.

Our discussion of the relationship between Almere and Amsterdam demonstrates the increasing complexity of dynamics in and of urban space. The emerging multi-faceted and complex position of settlements within metropoles demonstrates the need to look deeper into each part of a region (i.e. the 'centres' in the polycentricity discourse) and understand it in relation to the other parts. Our study of regional demographics also shows how the importance of scales shifts

according to temporal processes, and that the interplay between scales is critical in the regional metropolitanisation processes.

Most importantly, in this paper we show that the Lefebvrian conception of space is suitable as a starting point to approach contemporary processes of urban growth and that Lefebvre's theories can be refined with empirical studies. Especially in order to address the dissonance between the Apollonian and Dionysian elements of planning and urban growth, we propose to look at mobility, both social and spatial. Understanding the way the former develops enriches our understanding of the processes of the latter. Typical examples would be the re-settlement of certain Western cities by the privileged (mainly through gentrification) or the settlement of international migrants and the under-privileged in suburbia. Social life's Dionysian unpredictability has led to (sub)urban landscapes that are complex and resemble an elaborate mosaic rather than any neat dichotomy. These indications of planetary suburbanisation, while anything but straightforward, call for revisiting our analysis of urbanisation processes, and for looking in depth at how settlements, mobility and place are planned, constructed and experienced, always in a longitudinal fashion. Moreover, considering the rise of the far right in suburban spaces, including Almere, and the role that place has in this phenomenon (Van Gent and Musterd 2016), more research is crucial regarding the political impact and implications of the transformations analysed in our paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1 Interview (2005) in http://www.geheugenvanalmere.nl/page/432/nl
2 http://eeuwvandestad.nl/archives/169
3 For a historical analysis of US suburbs, see Jackson (1985) and Hayden (2003), or for the suburbanisation of China, see Dreyer (2016).
4 2016 US Census Bureau in Jed Kolko, 23 March 2017, 'Americans' Shift to the Suburbs Sped Up Last Year', *FiveThirtyEight*.
5 Etymology: *Μήτηρ* or *mētēr* means literally 'mother' in Ancient Greek and of course *πόλις* or *polis* means city.
6 The densely built and poorly zoned new construction caused the city to consider even 'exporting' the poor (Terhorst and van de Ven 1997).
7 Aalbers (2011) demonstrates how revitalisation has improved living standards for many inhabitants in the Bijlmermeer but often for the cost of revanchist urbanism against the less privileged (e.g. exclusion from public space uses).
8 http://english.almere.nl/the-city-of-almere/almere-principles/
9 Low, middle and high income are defined as belonging to, respectively, the lowest 40%, the middle 40% and the highest 20% income percentile based on gross personal income at the national level (Source SSB/CBS 2016).

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