Introduction to a Virtual Issue on Dutch Cities

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This 'virtual' issue of IJURR brings together thirteen articles on Dutch cities, published in print in the journal since 2001 or published online (in 'EarlyView') and awaiting publication in print. This set of articles explores some of the ways in which Dutch cities are distinctive, especially in terms of the design, struggles over, and effects of urban policy. The collection is intended to enable scholars who are not specialists on the Netherlands to use Dutch cases to contribute to theorizing the interconnections between state, public policy and public participation. Here, Dutch cities have a particularly strong tradition.

Dutch cities have well developed infrastructures for getting people involved. As Van Dijk, Aarts and De Wit show in their article on a very small town in the south and a polder between three minor towns in the east, when people want to raise their voice without being approached or expected, the institutionalized participation channels (or, in terms of the authors, political opportunity structure) hamper their chances to have an impact. Here, Van Dijk, Aarts and De Wit argue, the success of local opposition depends on the geography of the formal political environment, in that some municipal governments have much more room for manoeuvre. The strong infrastructure for formal engagement is also central to the exchange between Pruijt and Uitermark. Pruijt maintains that the squatters' movement in Amsterdam was co-opted into the mainstream political participation system and lost its radical character as a consequence. Uitermark disputes this. Acknowledging that the squatters' movement diversified and fragmented, he argues that subcultural political projects have persisted, pointing to the relevance of Rotterdam here.

In his article written together with Duyvendak, Uitermark shows how the forms of residents' engagement with governance shifted between the high point of social movement activism in the 1960s and the more recent 'mediated age'. Using the example of a privately funded community development organization, studied in most depth in Amsterdam with some empirical findings from The Hague and Rotterdam, the authors show the selectivity of the residents' engagement, framing this more or less within the national discourse on multiculturalism.

Kokx shows how urban transformation through regeneration, based on a study of six cases in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and smaller towns in the south and east, is a heavily state-led process, creating democratic deficits: an increasing market rationality on the one hand and policy fragmentation on the other result in a situation in which residents are supposedly involved but have very little say in practice. The consequence is that long-term coalitions are not built, and therefore longer term needs remain unaddressed. The city of Breda, a town in the south, produces quite different results, however, not fitting exactly the overall argument.

Looming over changing patterns of public participation is the combination of increased market-orientation, reflecting the Anglo-American organization of the economy, and the still relatively developed welfare state. This economic and political environment is the focus of Engelen and Musterd's study of the impact of the financial crisis and of Fainstein's study of mega-projects. Engelen and Musterd focus on Amsterdam, because it is both the national financial centre and also the city most internationally embedded in terms of export-orientation. They examine how the relationship between state and market shaped the effects of the financial crisis on Amsterdam, making them less harsh than

possibly elsewhere. Fainstein similarly shows that megaprojects in Amsterdam differ from ones in New York and London because of the city and national governments' continued commitment to public benefits — a commitment that was most pronounced in Amsterdam in the city's South Axis. (Fainstein does not discuss the fact that the largest fraud and embezzlement of public funds in the building sector in Dutch history also occurred in this urban development adventure.)

While not starting with policy as such, Logan's analysis of segregation in Amsterdam also leads him to emphasize urban policy. Logan finds uneven levels of segregation, with people of Caribbean origin living in less segregated neighbourhoods than people with origins in Turkey or Morocco. He traces this pattern to the ways in which the housing market and housing policy have worked. As Priemus shows, the provision of housing has changed dramatically, reflecting neoliberal tendencies over the last decade or so, but the state continues to play unusually important roles.

This, as Peck highlights in his analysis of creative city policies in Amsterdam, is less the case in the policy field of arts and culture. While Amsterdam in Peck's view was already a city of creativity, its policy approach, heavily influenced by the paradigm of Richard Florida, may be understood as an expression of an economization of cultural policies that has become possible within the context of an increasingly neoliberal city that aims to define for itself a competitive position vis-à-vis other cities; a commitment to public benefits for all would appear to be far outside the picture in this field of urban policy.

Some of these articles on Dutch cities suggest that urban policy reforms have been driven by economic concerns and especially a neoliberal agenda. Van Eijk counters this view. Based on a study of Rotterdam's policy to increase control in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, Van Eijk argues that understanding these policy measures requires a complex notion of safety, rooted in national concerns about unity and social order. This, then, hints at the political change on the national and local scales in many towns and cities. While Duyvendak and Uitermark also hint at this, Uitermark, Rossi and Van Houtum point to this most explicitly, in emphasizing the importance of the departure from multiculturalism in urban policy in Amsterdam, the attempts by the state (at various levels) to reinvent a notion of ethnic diversity, and the possible consequences this may have for access to the polity by marginalized ethnic groups.

These articles provide important insights into major Dutch urban policy programs, the democratic problems that implementing them have created, and the risks of either the cooptation of Critical politics or engagement 'without listening', as a strong welfare state has become infused with more market-driven motives. While the state retains extensive roles, we can conclude from the articles, the *political* sphere seems to have shrunk. From housing provisions to participation in decision making and organizing diversity in a multi-ethnic city, none of the policies seem ideologically driven. Even the commitment to public benefits is not seen as political: Dutch political parties argue for a state that spends its money efficiently, not for one that does not spend. And efficiency, in turn, is neutral. In a national context where the belief in social engineering has always been strong, the instrumental rationality of *how* to do policy (*how do we solve this inconvenience?*) has gained so much over the substantial rationality of the overall *aims* (*where should we go?*) that — apart from a few exceptions in some corners of Amsterdam — politics seems hollow, and the Critical has disappeared.[1] In a recent master class at Humboldt University, Dutch policymakers were utterly surprised to hear that, for example, gentrification could have normatively negative effects, or that it could, as a social phenomenon, raise normative questions to begin with (in Berlin, in contrast, the opposite is the case).

1 See Blokland (2011) for an extensive discussion of rationalization of this type and, not limited to the Netherlands, of the disappearance of politics.

These articles thus cover well current urban policy — and teach us a lot about the absence of politics. They cover less well another very important current in Dutch cities and towns: the rise of right-wing populism and the strong everyday fear of difference that can be witnessed when one researches not the policies or those involved in them, but the people instead. Dutch 'urbanism' or 'urbanity' that is, to quote Lees (2010: 2302), 'the unexpected that is produced by, or comes out of, the urban' has not been covered in IJURR.[2] Studying urbanism understood in this way is increasingly difficult in universities which are run as 'modern businesses' but also state-controlled.[3] Most research funding for Dutch scholars is output-based, and there is almost no funding from research foundations that are independent of the state (as there are in the UK, USA or Germany, for example). While such foundations may not be neutral, at least they are not run by the state, and if they are political, can be traced to be so *explicitly*. That so much is written about Dutch urban policy and so little about Dutch urbanism is surely due, in part at least, to this rather unhealthy and depressing situation. There is a serious risk of academic co-optation, especially with the establishment of the Netherlands Institute for City Innovation Studies (NICIS), a partnership of government research funding, university consortia and local governments and housing associations, in which research agendas are determined and money is distributed. Increasingly, urban research is funded *only* if it has *immediate* relevance for public policy.

The articles in this virtual issue focus primarily, though not exclusively, on Amsterdam, and demonstrate the value of examining this city in particular. The comparative study of urbanism challenges parochial accounts of Global North cities as a model for understanding of a universal urban experience and acts as a corrective by displacing the usual suspects (see Robinson, 2006). From a perspective of comparative urbanism that argues for scholarship that does not create a core and periphery, let me conclude with a plea for *displacing* Amsterdam. The focus on Amsterdam in Dutch urban scholarship as the major 'case study' reflects, again, university and funding politics, as well as the tight network of eminent scholars who have written (sometimes together) in IJURR and elsewhere. Looked at from the outside, we must ask what is Amsterdam a case of?

Amsterdam lies far from the daily experiences of residents of the rest of the country, to whom the disneyfied city is a tourist attraction with more people visiting it on Queens Day and during the Gay Pride Parade than residents living there.[4] Amsterdam can hardly claim to have the most severe urban 'problems' (Rotterdam and The Hague have a better claim to this[5]). Can Amsterdam be a case of a family (Walton, 2005) of Dutch cities?

2 I hesitate to say, not wanting to seem pretentious, that my own article (published in 2001, the oldest in this selection) on the relevance of the built environment of a disadvantaged neighborhood for collective memory and collective identity, is the exception here. Moreover, my observations in this introduction are observations regarding the work published in IJURR, in which I have been involved for the last 7 years or so, and hence I am just as much part of this selective knowledge production as anyone else. Of course, it says nothing about what the scholars involved may have been doing elsewhere. That said, Dutch urban research in general suffers from the limitations sketched here. A quick scan of titles in *Urban Studies* reveals that 408 articles on Dutch urban phenomena have 'policy' as a key word 382 times, and 208 articles, at least, also refer to Amsterdam. This is not the proof of a hypothesis, but suggestive of a slightly more general problem than an 'IJURR-problem'.

3 This description of the university of Rotterdam was used by the provost a few years ago when they let go of the last political theorist in the university, whose 'expertise and skills were no longer needed in the modern business' so that political science was transformed into policy analyses and public management.

4 For various statistical sources on the Dutch and Amsterdam as a tourist destination see http://www.atcb.nl/kenniscentrum/rapporten-en-publicaties. In 2008, over 60% of the visitors were Dutch, 54% of the visitors who stayed for more than one day were also Dutch.

5 Rotterdam, for example, has the highest youth unemployment, the lowest educational level and the highest percentage of ethnic minorities. See for example (p.41) http://www.sozawe.rotterdam.nl/Rotterdam/Openbaar/Diensten/SZW/SWA/jeugd/wjr.pdf (accessed 8 June 2011).

Anyone who leaves Amsterdam and goes further than its satellite towns like Almere — the 1970s new town east of Amsterdam — to places like Arnhem, Amersfoort, Alphen a/d Rijn, Assen or Almelo knows that urbanism is different there indeed. And one would also notice that the Netherlands is such a small country, and so urbanized, that starting from Lees' definition, there is urbanism everywhere.[6]

If we are to make sense of the turn to exclusion, racism and populism that seems at odds with everything 'The Netherlands' stood for, then we must look not only at urban policy in Amsterdam (and elsewhere) but also at Dutch urbanism, i.e. the urban experience, the *life world* of the residents of Dutch cities and other municipalities, and everyday politics. Insofar as Amsterdam is not typical of Dutch cities, the prevalent focus on it might obscure the ordinary urbanism in ordinary cities and towns in which racism is rooted. The Netherlands has become a country where it has become 'acceptable' to address Moroccan youth by the diminutive slur '*Kutmarokkanen*', where ethnic minority youth are openly subjected to 'VIP' (Very Irritating Policing), i.e. repeated, targeted stop-and-search police practices, where the major newspapers have fewer journalists in their team than columnists, where voting rates are at a historical low, and where a paranoid crazy man who proposes to tax Muslim women because their headscarves 'pollute' the views of the environment wins an election. At the same time, it is a country of almost free education, excellent primary schools, high quality housing in every sector; a country where there is little to complain about for the vast majority living urban lives, who meanwhile either silently accept or even support the current political direction, and whom we barely understand. It seems to me that here, then, are some very exciting areas for further research.

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6 The Dutch cities and towns rarely have hinterland, and if they do, such sites are temporarily urbanized in the tourist season. This position can easily be substantiated with data from tourist accommodations and their usage, as in http://www.cbs.nl/NR/rdonlyres/EA5EA648-7C44-47E8-B2BC-EF54153C153B/0/2009g77pub.pdf.