Overcome Gentrification: New Dutch Urban Paradigms

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Abstract: The study is related to the city of Rotterdam, investigated in relation to the spatial changes caused by the massive immigration that took place since the 1940s and of which contemporary spatial planning is taking place. The urban regeneration program, promoted by the Municipality of Rotterdam, provided for the reconnection of the district to the urban dynamics of the city and the improvement of public spaces and private accommodation to encourage a process of social gentrification. The social challenges that characterize contemporary cities, especially caused by the violent immigration, have defined a new urban paradigm and new forms of collaboration; as urban planners, we must continue to promote the formation of inclusive, multi-faceted and multitasking cities that are able to capture the diversity of sociality that inhabits the strategic character that makes them different and unique and to experiment welfare and social governance models that allow the shared experience within the urban analyzed contexts; only by making the immigrants protagonists of sociality and of urban civilization can we build stainless cities that resist to climate change and above all to social changes.

Key words: Urban planning, gentrification, immigration, spatial changes, inclusive city.

1. Introduction

The contemporary city is unmistakably marked by migratory phenomena which are now considered a structural and dynamic phenomenon, destined to affect the urban fabric and the shape of the city. The city is a multicultural environment; its nature is always more differentiated and this is reflected in its material organization, characterized by dispersion, discontinuity, fragmentation, and in its social structure based on uncertainty, decomposition, conflicts; as a consequence of this, we are witnesses of a deep mutation of the urban spatial elements that are deeply modified and altered, following the needs of the new urban society.

The case study is related to the city of Rotterdam, investigated in relation to the spatial changes caused by the massive immigration that took place since the 1940s. The author, after introducing the theme, especially in relation to the proposed research innovations, describes the reason for which Rotterdam was chosen as the best practice and, in the last part, underlines which principal results have been achieved in relation to the main research topic.

Immigration to the Netherlands has reached such high levels that at this moment the nation is reviewing the laws that regulate it to prevent those social problems that are happening; foreign citizens are divided into different social groups in relation to important factors such as their nationality and if they are foreign citizens of first, second or third generation. The Netherlands has an ancient history of immigration dictated by its colonial past; in contemporary Dutch society, immigrants are mainly Indonesian, Turkish, Moroccan, Suriname, belonging to Dutch Antilles and Aruba.

The 20th century immigration can be divided into some periods; between 1945 and 1973, there was the phase of decolonization with arrivals of immigrants from India, from Suriname and from the Antilles; this type of immigration, although massive, has been characterized by a high tolerance on the part of Dutch citizens precisely because it has respected the local traditions of the country and the immigrants dating...
back to this historical period have thus conformed to
the local lifestyles that today they are and recognize
themselves as Dutch citizens.

From the mid-sixties to the end of the eighties in the
country, there is a phase of reception of skilled labor
force with immigration from southern Europe, mainly
from Turkey and Morocco; In the 1960s, with
economic growth, the Netherlands imported workers,
driven by businesses. No real effort was made to
integrate foreigners, since they were temporary
residents and immigrants were encouraged to maintain
their cultural identity.

Since the 1950s welfare has developed through an
increasingly generous policy towards immigrant
workers, guaranteeing them the same Dutch rights; this
phase ended in 1974, when migration policies became
more restrictive.

From the end of the seventies, Holland began to
reflect seriously and deeply about the problem of
immigration and tried to implement some policies that
could promote integration through the study of the
Dutch culture and language; the Ministry of Justice was
the most involved Body in the process of government
of immigration; in the 1990s Labourist governments
shifted their focus from respecting cultural diversity to
integration and participation in education and in the
labor market; the new law on integration introduced
compulsory courses of Dutch language and culture.

Since the end of the eighties, there has been a
diversified immigration, especially from countries like
Iraq, Afghanistan, former Yugoslavia, former Soviet
Union, for political asylum applications; this
immigration has been more invasive and provoked
social tensions and a depletion of the public space that
has lost its characteristics of social space as it has lost
the security of its civil cohabitation. Currently, the
immigration provisions in the Netherlands are
particularly strict: since 2006, a law has been in force;
this law severely limits access to the country through a
language test and a “tax” of 350 euro to which must be
added an “integration test” that provides an
examination of the culture and of values of the country.
The rules for family reunification and requests for
political asylum have also been tightened; in the last
year, 53,000 people tried to pass the test, but they
succeeded in 6,000.

As a consequence of this situation, every city is
experimenting and implementing appropriate policies
for the best management of the phenomenon; the
problems concerning immigration are more evident in
large cities and are related to the building sector and to
the public space in cities; the social housing offer is not
sufficient to meet the demands of immigrants and there
are often problems of overcrowding with over 50% of
immigrants who, especially in cities like Amsterdam
and Rotterdam, live in excessively small housing.
However, since 2001, the line of intervention became
much harder and condemned the ethnic social
segregation and the phenomena of radicalization;
programs for social cohesion, inclusion and for urban
security have been promoted; the social mix is a
secondary element, while the centrality of the projects
has been shifted to the promotion of conditions of
social integration.

Rotterdam is the city that is suffering most for urban
security problems related to the multicultural city; its
population, for 38%, is made up of immigrants, mainly
muslims; the city is experimenting various and
different visions that are trying to develop urban
gentrification promoting a safer and inclusive city. The
main goal of this paper is to underline the main
innovation that characterizes the Dutch urban policy, to
underline the progress towards the state of art and to
define as the urban design could realize a more
inclusive city through the inclusion of multicultural
population.

1.1 Gentrification and New Urban Paradigms

Urbanity seems to become a dominant megatrend all
over the world; this urbanization movement appears to
manifest itself even more prominently in the
developing world, and is sometimes called the “law of
population concentration” [1]. Florida [2-4] paints gentrification as the only way forward for cities; it is considered a very important driver of urban policies worldwide [5-7]. This urbanization movement appears to manifest itself even more prominently in the developing world, and is sometimes called the “law of population concentration” [1]; nowadays in various policy-making institutions, the 21st century is even called “the urban century” [6]. This megatrend offers various great opportunities for urban development, but at the same time, it puts enormous pressure on our urban areas (giving way to negative externalities such as pollution, congestion, security issues and social degradation) [8-10].

Cities will certainly play a pivotal role in the future of our space-economy, but they are also confronted with grand challenges. They are subjected to a very complex and diverse set of socio-economic forces that are closely interwoven with far-reaching demographic transformations, socio-cultural, political, economic and technological drivers and challenges at all geographic scales that may influence the vitality and attractiveness of urban areas [10]. Clearly, such areas do not only show a quantitative size increase, but also a qualitative composition change; as is happening in the Netherlands; as a result of international migration, some cities are becoming melting pots of ethnic diversity, language differences, religious denominations, cultural expressions and socio-economic disparities. Large cities tend to become “homes of migrants” and therefore exhibit a wealth of cultural heterogeneity [11]. Clearly, with the rise of second- and third-generation migrants, the share of socio-cultural differences tends to decline; nevertheless, a qualitative shift in the cultural face of cities is manifest [12]. The traditional roles of cities are constantly being redefined in a global competitive system, as demands for high-quality amenities and public services are subject to permanent change [9-10].

Rotterdam is increasingly divided on plans to replace affordable homes with more expensive properties: while many neighbourhoods around the centre are gentrifying and the city is a rising star on the international tourist map, it is also home to some of the country’s poorest neighbourhoods. The topic of gentrification has been well addressed in the geographic literature [13-14]; surprisingly, the geography of the phenomenon has been largely left unstudied so far [15]. This lack of research is both on the macro level, regarding how the gentrification process plays out differently in cities in different countries, and on the micro level, regarding the process inside a single neighborhood. Concerning the macro level, prominent attempts have been made by Clark [16] and Lees [15] and in the Netherlands among others by Uitermark [17] and Van Gent [18]. Another branch of the literature attempts to refine different typologies of gentrification and to dissect different groups of gentrifiers. Notable contributions include work on the gender aspects of gentrification [19-21] and issues of racial differentiation in the gentrifying population of certain American neighborhoods [22-24]. Other discussions within this strand concern the social composition of the category of “marginal gentrifiers”, the first movers into not yet gentrifying neighborhoods [25-26]. When a neighborhood gentrifies, many different aspects of the area change, often simultaneously, sometimes subsequently. The built environment is upgraded, prices rise, the population changes, sometimes the demographics change too, the range of commercial facilities changes, and so on and so forth. These indicators sometimes lead and sometimes lag each other; there is no fixed order [23-27].

2. Method and Materials

In this section, the methodology is explained, and relating to the materials, there is a detailed description of the case study, and the author’s point of view is expressed.

Methodology is based on the description of the Dutch urban policy linked to the characters of the
Dutch city trying to link the urban form to the social transformations and trying to explain as urban planning and a strong governance could produce tangible effects on urban form. This is explained through some case studies that are some Rotterdam’s districts interested by massive immigration and now interested by a strategical urban planning that, through strategic vision and regulative tools is implementing an urban regeneration based on social and economical values with the aim to develop a safe and inclusive city; participatory and inclusive approach follows every step of urban transformations.

Rotterdam presents itself as a city strongly characterized by immigration; more than 60% of foreigners arriving in the Netherlands, reside in Rotterdam; many districts constantly testify the presence of immigration that has kept its characters and is easily recognizable; in some neighborhoods, the “characters” are even more evident; for example, in Feyenoord, one of the most intercultural neighborhoods, it is easier to see the signs of the presence of immigrants than that of the Dutch: the streets are frequented by typical muslim customs, shops are mainly at the service of immigrants and are often managed by non-Dutch citizens. Even the advertisements of the neighborhood suggest a high percentage of immigrants: are advertised Dutch language courses and islamic food traditions; in the streets, Dutch is no longer spoken, but Arabic and Turkish and the building fabric is dominated by islamic religious symbols such as the Mevlana mosque with the tallest minarets in Europe that stand out in the urban aesthetics of the neighborhood.

Rotterdam is intrinsically linked to Islam; the urban fabric is a proof; many neighborhoods have more Middle Eastern and European characters, even in many schools there is a “room of silence” where muslim can pray under the poster of Mecca, some pools and spa buildings have arranged specific times for muslim women; some municipal councilors are muslims, in addition to the mayor Aboutaleb. Even many university professors are of islamic education and also hold key roles as advisors to public bodies. The city’s new urban landmarks are mosques, Arab food stores, islamic restaurants, muslim insignia and Turkish flags, and everywhere there is Arabic music. Some buildings in particular are symbol of multiculturalism, for example the Zuidplein Theater (the muslim Ahmed Aboutaleb is director), who often plans to reserve, in some theatrical performances, entire rows of women only, in the name of sharia.

Neighborhoods such as Afrikaanderwyk, Hoogvliet but also the area of the Begpolder, close to the historic center, are difficult neighborhoods that need urban and social policies that promote urban regeneration. In these districts, the experiment of multicultural society has failed and there is a need for a return to the urban project as a tool for territorial regeneration; a project that acts on the inclusive city and allows the reappropriation of the character of the security of public spaces. Afrikaanderwyk is the area of Rotterdam with the highest concentration of immigrants, characterized by the highest rates of unemployment, crime, social benefits and lack of knowledge of the Dutch language. The Hoogvliet district is located in the southwest of Rotterdam, on the border with the Spijkenisse areas; in the past, it was a sort of satellite district of Rotterdam and, for some years, it was administratively merged with the municipality of Portugal; It has an area of 11 km² and a population of about 34,000 inhabitants, of which over 30% are made up of non-European immigrants, mainly from the Suriname colony, the Antilles and Aruba, Turkey and Morocco. In 2002, a project of urban revitalization was implemented and it started from the multiculturalism of the social fabric of the neighborhood; a photographic campaign entitled “Hoogvliet out” was promoted, photographing the different social composition in the homogeneous background of the typical Dutch house. To eliminate the negative image of the neighborhood, it was decided to implement a project that would replace most of the urban structure built in the 1950s, in
particular, the housing stock and public spaces; the main aim was to reinvent Hoogvliet and adapt it to the needs of the contemporary city. With the project “WIMBY Welcome In My Back Yard”, it also wanted to change the mindset of the residents through a full involvement in the process of urban regeneration; an urban regeneration that has materialized both physically (on buildings) and socially (on the community) and has adopted urban planning that has been based very much on the practice of social listening. The design was anticipated by a shared knowledge operation that allowed to listen to the inhabitants of the neighborhood, to listen to their needs and to design public and private spaces useful and functional to the different community needs, especially functional for the different social classes and different nationalities that constituted the social fabric of the neighborhood.

Another case study is the Bergpolder district; it is a classic Dutch neighborhood, close to the historic center of Rotterdam; the building project, by architects Brinkman, Van der Vlugt, Van Tijen, dates back to 1934 and consists of the classic Dutch building typology with houses of less than 75 m² for workers or small families. The conditions of the building stock and the poor planning and maintenance of public spaces, have affected the social structure of the neighborhood that, in recent years, has suffered a constant exodus of families and an entry by mainly non-EU citizens, especially Turkish and from the colony of Suriname. This different social structure of the inhabitants has had strong repercussions on the use of the neighborhood that, due to the dynamics connected to the sense of widespread social insecurity, has become a dormitory neighborhood promoting its separation from the nearby historical neighborhoods characterized by the multifunctionality and by the heterogeneity of the urban functions. To counteract the social phenomena of “expulsion” of the middle classes and to counteract the phenomena of immigration that is taking place, the municipality has promoted urban interventions, both instruments and policies, that would allow an inversion of these trends and favor the gentrification of the neighborhood; one of the most sought goal was to transform the area into a child friendly district; in 2010 the “Building Blocks for a Child-Friendly City” Plan was approved with a vision at 2030, which provides a detailed strategy for future planning, based on gentrification: buildings, public spaces, services and infrastructures become spaces for experimentation of the creative city. The urban regeneration program, promoted by the Municipality of Rotterdam, provided for the reconnection of the district to the urban dynamics of the city and the improvement of public spaces and private accommodation to encourage a process of social gentrification. More than 5,000 dwellings were demolished, above all the apartments of less than 56 m², which did not meet the needs of the population groups that were to be attracted, and a building policy based on a differentiation of housing typologies, a reduction of subsidized housing (at the moment it was about 70% of the housing stock) and on the creation of single-family buildings and housing with many spaces for private gardens. Furthermore, urban policy included the strengthening of existing public spaces and the creation of shopping centers that replaced small shops.

3. Results and Discussions

In recent years, the urban pressure, resulting from massive immigration, is continuously increasing; at the national level, polycentric urban development is now spreading towards Gelderland (Arnhem-Nijmegen) and towards Brabant (Breda-Tielburg-Eindhoven), creating the “Central Netherlands Urban Ring” (Central Urban Ring of the Netherlands). As underlined, in Rotterdam, a process of radicalization of Islam has been going on for years; a part of the new immigrants and the children of the old immigrants do not want to integrate themselves for religious diversity. Challenging this situation, the Municipality of Rotterdam has promoted a lot of urban...
programs that have the aim to create an inclusive and safe city and in which diversity has a strong value and is considered as a strategic urban resource.

In 2005, the Regional Spatial Plan (2005-2020) was approved; it has three main aims: improving the quality of residential areas, strengthening and diversifying the urban economy, increasing urban cohesion; in 2007, it was approved the Urban Vision 2030 and in 2010 began to be implemented the Building Blocks for a Child Friendly City Plan. Urban acupuncture interventions are provided to carry out mainly on residences and public spaces; for example, the creation of housing for families with children is provided, with a minimum area of at least 85 m², a direct correlation between public road and private entrance, the presence of a lift, at least one room for each child and areas for the game outside. For public spaces, there is an increase in surface dedicated to play areas and to schoolyards area; moreover, it is favored a “multitasking use of the space” practices, promoting a governance of public spaces that favors their intense use in the different hours and days of the week through the multiformality of their project which makes them suitable for hosting different activities.

The Netherlands is an interesting case study regarding public housing policies, first of all because, in no other European countries, the social housing sector can cover 35% of the total housing stock; there are about 500 foundations and housing associations that manage about 2 million accommodation. Since the 1990s, the situation has changed slightly because the public funding system has reduced funding and public subsidies, resulting in the need to alienate many public housing to private individuals but has not caused any noticeable changes in the sector, especially in cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the percentage of housing owned by social housing associations still stands at around 50% of the entire municipal housing stock. As far as spending capacity is concerned, 95% of the accommodation is characterized by a rent below the threshold of the “liberalization limit”, while the deregulated rents are intended for bargaining, on the basis of the rules of the market. Rotterdam is a rental city and rent protection is strongly embedded in the Dutch law; a renter cannot be expelled without very pressing reasons, even if the contract was temporary and has ended; this means that neighborhoods cannot simply be overrun by sudden gentrification and that the entire process is usually gentler and includes more cooperation with the local population. The policy goals of the Dutch local and national authorities is explicitly to create mixed neighborhoods [28]. That means gentrification is often seen in a positive light by the inhabitants of an area, such as Uitermark et al. [29] found in Rotterdam, where the municipality was attempting to upgrade the socio-economic composition of a neighborhood and most inhabitants felt the changes were not going far enough, rather than protesting against them.

In the areas with the strongest immigration, some phenomena that have immediate repercussions on places and physical space happened, such as the value connected to the property rate; in Rotterdam the average ownership rate is about 33% but falls to 18% and even 16% in those neighborhoods, such as those mentioned, in which there is a high percentage of immigrant residents. The results on the quality of housing and public spaces are easily found; Rotterdam, on a total population of about 600,000 inhabitants, has a presence of Turks and Moroccans of 15%, with a high presence of mosques and muslim buildings; the strong demographic pressure has ferocious repercussions on mobility and related phenomena such as congestion and pollution.

Bart Jan Spruyt, a protestant intellectual, describes the ease enjoyed by immigrants: “Here an immigrant does not need to struggle, study, work, he can live at the expense of the state: We have created a parallel society. Muslims are the majority and in many neighborhoods, they pretend sharia. It is no longer Holland. Our use of freedom has come to affect us, it is a process of self-Islamization”. Rotterdam city
councillor Tanya Hoogwerf writes: “Rotterdam is the largest port in Europe, the way in which it rose from the ruins of the Second World War makes it a capital of human resilience, but it is not discussed: we are not a successful multicultural experiment, we are a failure. Multiculturalism is reduced to community segregation, and the massive presence of Islam has had a negative effect on the city. The less integrated immigrants from the linguistic point of view, the level of education, the employment rate, the acceptance of modern values of Dutch society are among the muslims”. From an urban point of view, the municipal administration of Rotterdam is encouraging functional mix and moving away from zoning-based modernist planning; the strategy is highly pragmatic because the administration’s aims are effectively condensed into appropriate urban vision with certain time intervals for implementation; for example, the Urban Vision, approved in 2007 seeks to achieve its aims within a time frame defined in 2030 and a further vision, defined in 2025, which aims to make Rotterdam one of the best resilient cities in the world, with a reduction of 50% of polluting emissions.

4. Conclusions or New Openness? Towards a Management of Diversity

In many nations, and also in The Netherlands, the gentrification process that accompanies the regeneration of degraded neighborhoods is, instead, promoted and desired by the municipalities involved, that add the characters of gentrification within the municipal policies and the urban development vision of the territories administered. In Rotterdam in particular, both in the case of the Hoogvliet district and the Bergpolder district, the gentrification is strongly desired by the municipality. A goal of the planning policy is to reduce mobility with the “city-compact” policy and building the main residential areas on the borders of the existing cities; because of its links with economic policy, the compact city does not only increase urban density, but also urban quality. An attractive architectural environment and quality improvement should stimulate the mix of functions and reduce monofunctionality; social segregation should also decrease and urban living conditions improve through the solution of ecological problems (energy, water waste): compact cities should be sustainable cities.

The social challenges that characterize contemporary cities, especially caused by the violent immigration, have defined a new urban paradigm and new forms of collaboration; a reference to this new urban policy approach is contained in the New Europe-Cities in Transition project that, in the last two years, has produced a precise mapping of urban innovation actors in the Netherlands, with the precise identification of the city makers, or those figures who “can activate small-scale and adaptable solutions to the needs of their community, and face social challenges. They redevelop abandoned spaces, engage in urban agriculture, build co-housing projects, activate community enterprises to improve local welfare and facilitate employment”. “In times of worsening migration policies, the decline of multiculturalism and renewed assimilationist pressures, becomes even more relevant to question how urban governments take up the new restrictive orthodoxy. Declared policies and practiced policies, national dimension and local dimension, closures and openings do not align, but are intertwined in different configurations” [30].

Classical approaches to diversity management have shown their limitations, because they ignore or reject diversity or they accentuate it too much, giving it an exaggerated importance and thus reinforcing the cultural barriers between the various ethnic groups [31].

Urban policies implemented in the different municipalities, must continually be confronted with data on migratory phenomena; until a few decades ago, as we have seen, local governments promoted policies and actions more open to integration of reception; today, instead, protectionist and social exclusion
policies prevail; the administration is constantly confronted with a constantly evolving phenomenon and cannot know it to govern and manage since it is widely multifaceted; immigrants are often more diversified and difficult to manage; this diversity and heterogeneity involves many problems in their welfare and in promoting active governance processes that can integrate them and make them part of the social communities in which they are part; there is a need to continue to promote their civic and social participation and fight isolation.

The urban planners must continue to promote the formation of inclusive, multi-faceted and multitasking cities that are able to capture the diversity of sociality that inhabits the strategic character that makes them different and unique from others and to experiment welfare and social governance models that allow the shared experience within the urban analyzed contexts; only by making the immigrants protagonists of sociality and of urban civilization could be realized stainless cities that resist to climate change and, above all, to social changes; to this end, there is a need to develop skills and culture; we need to develop and govern the technicality and to combine it with governance aspects that provide, where necessary, inclusive or exclusive democracy, practices for the management of choices and for the resolution of conflicts; it is necessary to act on the fabric settlement and on public spaces, make them multi-faceted, safe and usable and take care of the maintenance and transformation practices of the studied territory.

If we had to indicate a slogan to define the intercultural city project, the term “Management of Diversity” would be borrowed [32] because it effectively summarizes the urban planning approach that has to be pursued and that presupposes a management of diversity; which suggests the heterogeneity and the wide difference at the basis of the social community of the contemporary city; the management of diversity tends to set up a balanced, even weak, equilibrium circus, which must be experienced in the administration of urban diversity; a diversity that is different from any previous historical typology, with features and characteristics that are absolutely new and, in some ways, potentially innovative, but which must be supported by a strong and decisive action by urban administration that can decline diversity in resources and not in urban problem.

In the Netherlands, but this could be promoted in every country, all these actions have the worth of being participatory and shared; they are defined by the central government in agreement with the municipalities and become the object of study within the university courses of the different polytechnics of the country and of the main schools of urban sociology; involving and sensitizing the technicality in a democratic and active way but also defining paradigms and rules for the project of the future city. Finally, we can affirm that a good urban plan must overcome the problem of immigration and ethnic diversity, to understand the complicated mosaic of differences in contemporary urban communities; to achieve this strategic aim is important to develop a strong policy and to form an inclusive governance able to manage the diversity and the wealth of contemporary city; as established, there is a need for a return to the urban project as a tool for territorial regeneration; a project that acts on the inclusive city and allows the reappropriation of the character of the security of public spaces. Only following this strategy can we try to pursue the realization of a safe and inclusive urban environment.

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