PUBLIC AND SOCIAL HOUSING REGENERATION IN THE US AND THE NETHERLANDS COMPARED

Karien Dekker* and David Varady**

**European Network for Housing Research Conference, Prague,
June 28-July 1, 2009**

*** University of Utrecht, k.dekker@uu.nl
** University of Cincinnati, David.Varady@UC.edu**

DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT CITE OR QUOTE

PUBLIC AND SOCIAL HOUSING REGENERATION IN THE US AND THE NETHERLANDS COMPARED

On both sides of the Atlantic, policymakers are dealing with the question of how to house the poor while at the same time improving the quality of the neighborhoods where poor households live. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) HOPE VI program is one of the most comprehensive policies that have been developed with respect to public and social housing regeneration. In the Netherlands the Big Cities Policy is the dominant approach focusing on deprived neighborhoods, recently aided by the Krachtwijken Aanpak (the Power Neighborhood Approach).

The two policy approaches are based on a certain set of ideas, notions, and understandings of policymakers and academic researchers about the causes of the problems and solutions to deal with them. This paper inventories and analyzes the causes and solutions in the policy discourse on public and social housing regeneration offered by academics and policymakers in the U.S. and the Netherlands. Our aim is to compare and contrast the way Dutch and American experts have approached the following goals: creating healthy mixed-income developments, relocating some residents to healthy neighborhoods, and promoting self-sufficiency among residents and relocatees.

To carry out this comparative research, we reviewed ten recent key publications (both academic and policy publications) from each country. Based on this comparative literature review we derive lessons for both European and American policymakers.

Healthy Mixed-Income Communities

Physical v. social change

HOPE VI public housing revitalization emphasizes physical change—demolition of the rented stock and its replacement with mixed-income housing following New Urbanism design principles—as part of a comprehensive strategy that includes good management. Most cities in the

U.S. have enthusiastically embraced a policy of demolition and redevelopment leading to low-rise mixed-income communities (see for example Brown 2009). In sharp contrast, the New York Housing Authority (NYCHA) has sought to reform its housing focusing on good management and affordable housing even if the apartments are in high-rise towers (Bloom 2008).

In general, Dutch urban restructuring has emphasized physical change: a mix of low and higher income families, demolition of part of the social rented stock, building owner occupied housing or private rented dwellings, along with an upgrading of the existing stock (van Bergeijk et al. 2008). The quality of social management has received less attention (Ouwehand and Davis 2004).

Because Dutch housing experts have increasingly seen neighborhood deprivation as the core cause of the spiral of neighborhood decline (Prak and Priemus 1998, cited in Kullberg 2006) the Dutch discourse about restructuring has changed over the last two decades and increasingly deals with the concentration of ethnic minorities and single-parent households. Countering the segregation of ethnic minorities has become an explicit policy target now and policies emphasize social, economic and safety issues besides physical ones (Kullberg 2006). In addition there has been a recent focus on economic development.

Social cohesion[1]

Although social mixing has been a linchpin for neighborhood revitalization efforts in both the U.S. and the Netherlands, the benefits of mixing have come into question on both sides of the Atlantic. Joseph (2006) notes that there is little evidence from America that income mixing can lead to enhanced social networks or to the insertion of middle-income role models. On the other hand, mixing can lead to enhanced social controls and both better shopping and higher quality public services. Mary Pattillo (2008) drawing from her Chicago gentrification research notes that the existence of life style clashes between in-movers and established residents (e.g. complaints about teenagers using loud profanity) undercuts revitalization schemes; her preferred approach is revitalization with the neighborhood "as is."

In contrast Fenne Pinkster, in a 2009 study of two neighborhoods in the Hague, finds that low-income residents in a more homogeneous low-income area have a more constricted social network than low-income residents living in a more mixed area. Nevertheless, Pinsker's study does not necessarily prove that income mixing will lead to an expanded social network and more access to jobs. A longitudinal study in a revitalizing neighborhood could address this issue

Dutch researchers point out that the ethnic diversification of Dutch neighborhoods makes it difficult, if not impossible, to bridge cultural differences. Dekker and Bolt (cited in Kullberg 2006) note that the higher the level of ethnic diversity, the lower the level of collective efficacy and social cohesion. Van Bergeijk et al. (in Ouwehand et al. 2008) observe that many Dutch are dissatisfied with their neighborhood's share of unemployed, people that don't speak Dutch, people with other life styles, and large numbers of immigrants; this plus the fact that old and new residents don't interact undercuts efforts to bridge differences. Finally, Marlet et al. (2009) find that social investments aimed at promoting social cohesion (funds for neighborhood committees, neighborhood barbeques) don't lead to reductions in neighborhood social problems. On the other hand, physical investments (e.g. repairs) and the creation of mixed tenure communities do alleviate these social problems.[2]

Van Beckhoven et al. (in Ouwehand et al. 2008) argue that well-designed public spaces could promote social cohesion by encouraging members of different groups to interact. We question two assumptions underlying this strategy. First, members of some ethnic groups may be unwilling to share public space with members of other groups. Second, even if members of different groups shared the same park or playground they might not interact.

Reputation

Historically, American public housing has been stigmatized because of large concentrations of blacks and people on welfare, high rates of crime and drug dealing, and physical deterioration. Some Dutch social housing developments have begun to develop bad reputations due to similar causes i.e. changing populations (from native Dutch to predominantly immigrant), increased crime, and negative reports in the media (Permentier and van Gent 2008, in Ouwehand et al. 2008).

Reinders (in Ouwehand et al. 2008) notes that the symbolic tissue of a Dutch neighborhood can be altered by neighborhood branding and identity strategies, That is, Images, stories and symbols provide the world with meaning and understanding. Branding has also been used to try to change the identity of American HOPE VI neighborhoods. For example, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) used HOPE VI funds to replace Lincoln Homes and Laurel Court, two crime-ridden projects in the city's West End, with City West, a mixed-income, New Urbanist development. The Atlanta Housing Authority has used a similar approach to restructure Techwood, adjoining downtown, Coca Cola's headquarters and Georgia Tech, into Centennial Place (Brown 2009).

Safety

Declines in crime at HOPE VI sites are partly the result of physical changes. Mid- and high-rise buildings with communal hallways –that tended to attract outsiders and criminals—have been replaced with townhouses and garden apartments with private entrances. Strict management is equally important in reducing crime rates. Multi-problem families with a poor record of rent paying or a record of anti-social behavior have been excluded from revitalized developments. In some cases – Atlanta and Chicago, for example—housing authorities have required tenants to have jobs in order to move back. Furthermore, HUD's "One Strike and You're Out" policy, initiated in 1996, was designed to encourage public housing authorities (PHAs) to be more aggressive in rejecting applicants who have criminal histories and evicting tenants who are involved in criminal activities.

Stringent management standards are a prerequisite for improved safety and viable public housing communities (Bloom 2008). There is no question that McCormack Baron, the private developer/manager at Murphy Park (a St. Louis HOPE VI development) takes this philosophy seriously.

All those wishing to rent at Murphy Park are subject to stringent property standards, including credit and criminal background checks. There is a bi-annual housekeeping inspection that residents take very seriously. The community also has a strictly enforced curfew that prohibits loud music and loitering anywhere outside after 10:00 PM on weeknights and Sundays and 11 PM on Saturdays. Congregating in front of townhouses is discouraged at all times. (Khadduri et al. 2003).

It does not appear that the Dutch have moved as aggressively in fighting crime; this may be because the security problem is not as serious yet. Wassenberg and Blokeland (in Ouwehand et al. 2008) advocate increasing "public familiarity" which would enhance social controls, reduce crime, and lead to a greater feeling of safety. We wonder: Would a greater familiarity with neighbors actually lead to a greater degree of social control? Specifically, would some residents feel sufficiently threatened by anti-social neighbors that they might be unwilling to report incidents to management or the police or be unwilling to testify in court?

Good governance

1. School-housing coordination. Atlanta and St. Louis case studies conducted by Khadduri et al. (2004) show that while policymakers consider school reform essential in achieving successful public housing revitalization, there is little evidence that middle-income families with children are being attracted to HOPE VI communities. This may be because middle-class parents want assurance that middle-class educational norms will be the dominant ones in HOPE VI schools and at present school officials cannot provide such assurances.

The Dutch are trying to incorporate school reform into urban restructuring through "broad schools"—new centers for primary education, social work, youth activities, sports, parental support, and so forth. Van Bergeijk et al. (2008) state that it is too early to identify impacts; integrating the different institutions has created some difficulties.

2. Citizen participation. It is now accepted wisdom that citizen participation is an important part of public housing management both in the U.S. and the Netherlands. Citizen participation typically occurs through involvement in tenant committees. Interest in tenant management –a concept popular among housing progressives during the 1980s and 1990s—has diminished significantly.

Dutch writers emphasize the value of tenant involvement early in the process. Van Bergeijk et al. (2008) indicate that residents who are more involved in the policy-making process prior to the urban restructuring are more satisfied with the level of social cohesion. Furthermore, residents who are involved in the planning process are more likely to be willing to move

and to allow their building to be demolished (Van der Pennen and Van Marissing in Ouwehand et al. 2008).

Tenant involvement may not go well for obtaining project approval as Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority officials learned in the case of English Woods, a physically and socially distressed development on the city's west side. English Woods residents worked along with homeowners in west side neighborhoods who feared the influx of public housing relocatees to successfully persuade HUD to suspend the proposed HOPE VI project.[3]

Impacts

Ironically, American writers are more optimistic about the neighborhood impacts of revitalization strategies than their Dutch counterparts. Popkin et al. (2004) state that HOPE VI has achieved important successes. It has demolished tens of thousands of severely distressed housing units and has replaced these with high-quality, mixed-income developments. Furthermore at HOPE VI sites where distressed "projects" had blighted the area, the new HOPE VI developments have stimulated revitalization in the surrounding communities.[4]

Sard and Fischer (2008) see the need to continue HUD's HOPE VI strategy. According to them, housing agencies should be required to replace large family developments in high poverty areas with mixed-income developments. It would not however be feasible to apply this recommendation in New York City because so much of the public housing is located in high-rise developments (Sard and Fischer 2008).

In contrast van Bergeijk et al.'s 2008 evaluation of Dutch urban restructuring highlights disappointing results including a high incidence of neighborhood problems (litter, crime, complaints about different life styles, [van Bergeijk et al. 2008]). They believe that building new homes and demolishing other dwellings is not sufficient to turn around the 'spiral of decline' in these neighborhoods. Other policies might be more effective in achieving these goals: selective housing admission policies, subsidies for community development. The preceding implies that America's emphasis on strong management in neighborhood revitalization schemes ought to be picked up by the Dutch.

Housing mobility

HOPE VI promotes the revitalization of inner-city "projects" as mixed-income communities as part of a broader poverty deconcentration strategy which includes providing some families with housing vouchers to move to healthy, low-poverty neighborhoods. Results for housing mobility have been disappointing. Families that have relocated with housing vouchers from HOPE VI developments have typically moved to neighborhoods with only slightly lower levels of poverty and similarly high proportions of minority residents (Clampet-Lundquist 2004; Kingsley 2003; Venkatesh 2004).

Popkin et al. (2004) complain that many housing authorities have failed to meet the needs of the "hard to house" including multi-problem families, ones with members suffering from physical or mental health problems, substance abuse, or criminal records. Such households have found it difficult to use housing vouchers in the private housing market. Kleit and Page (2008) express concern that as some PHAs become mixed-income developers they will shift their attention from serving the most needy families.[5] Similarly, Ouwehand and Davis (2004) note that Dutch urban restructuring policy with its emphasis on demolition has resulted in relocation of low-income households. They call for more attention to the housing needs of low-income households and where they should move to.

Civic leaders and politicians across the U.S. have expressed concern that residents "vouchered out" from HOPE VI developments recluster in nearby neighborhoods vulnerable to racial and income change and that this reclustering results in a shift of crime from the projects to more suburban-type neighborhoods (Rosin 2008).[6] Similarly, Kleinhans and Slob (in Ouwehand et al. 2008) observe that Dutch urban restructuring sometimes stimulates a "waterbed effect" (i.e. restructuring shifts crime and other social problems to other neighborhoods). Unfortunately there has been little empirical research in either country to test whether public housing relocatees are responsible for changes in crime rates.

Turner et al. (2008) argue that "public housing transformation will fail to achieve its full potential if policymakers and practitioners do not recognize and tackle the special challenges posed by racial discrimination and segregation." In other words, public housing transformation needs to take on the goal of racial as well as income integration. To achieve this goal would require benign quotas at HOPE VI sites (i.e. whites would need to be given preference in order to attain racial balance) and a housing voucher

dispersal policy aimed at predominantly white neighborhoods. Politics and the recent court rulings make it highly unlikely that housing policy will focus explicitly on race (Varady forthcoming a).

Similarly, a strong argument can be made that Dutch housing policy needs to go beyond income mixing to focus on ethnic mixing as well. Van der Laan Bouma-Doff (2007a, 2007b) shows that Dutch ethnic segregation patterns hamper the development and maintenance of ethnic bridges, that is, actual contacts between ethnic minorities and native Dutch. This suggests the need for policies to stabilize existing mixed Dutch-immigrant social housing estates as well as ones to disperse immigrants to predominantly Dutch neighborhoods throughout the city.

Van der Laan Douma-Doff's study implies that ethnic dispersal policies should focus on the less-deprived immigrants because they are most likely to interact with native Dutch. Furthermore, ethnic dispersal policies need to be sensitive to differences among immigrants in interest in integration, i.e. Moroccans and Turks exhibit less propensity to meet and interact with native Dutch than Antilleans.[7]

America's experience with racial dispersal policies (e.g. fair share housing, benign quotas in subsidized apartment buildings) suggest that ethnic dispersal policies would be resisted by both immigrants and native Dutch. Would Dutch politicians at the national and local levels have the political will to adopt and implement such policies?

Self-sufficiency

Although HOPE VI ostensibly seeks to promote increased self-sufficiency (moving from the world of welfare to the world of work), up to now HOPE VI has been far more successful in addressing distressed buildings than the distressed residents of such buildings, most of whom are black, single mothers with children. Two decades of sophisticated research on housing vouchers –the Gautreaux program (race-based) and Moving to Opportunity (race neutral) provide mixed and inconclusive results on whether relocation to low poverty or low minority neighborhoods improves employment prospects and reduces dependency (Turner et al. 2008; Varady forthcoming). This research implies that income mixing at HOPE VI sites is unlikely to promote social mobility among existing low-income residents.

Thus, American housing policy must build up the self-sufficiency component of public housing revitalization. This means addresses dysfunctional family structure in the black community with its exceptionally high rates of teenage illegitimacy and high rates of single parenthood Moynihan (1965). Ways need to be developed to encourage black men to rejoin their families and to take responsibility for raising their children (Harris 2008; Holzer 2008). President Barack Obama's endorsement of efforts to strengthen black families has helped to make discussion of this subject, up to now highly controversial, politically correct (Cooper 2009).

The Dutch publications we reviewed did not devote much attention to the self-sufficiency component of neighborhood revitalization. Van Meijeren et al.'s 2008 book chapter (in Ouwehand et al. 2008) is an exception; they show how economic development policies aimed at small companies could not only enhance the quality of the neighborhood's environment but also aid residents in getting by and getting on. Whether Dutch policymakers need to focus on strengthening family structure among native Dutch and among immigrants is an unanswered question that ought to be dealt with in future research.

Conclusions

To promote cross-learning between American and Dutch housing officials and researchers concerning public and social housing revitalization we have reviewed a sample of recent literature from both countries. The results highlight many commonalities but also some differences.

American and Dutch policymakers now share a common comprehensive outlook toward revitalization which includes an emphasis on both physical improvement and social mixing. However, Dutch policymakers could learn from America's strict approach to management which has led to dramatic improvements in safety at HOPE VI sites. Marketing and positive news stories can play a role in promoting positive images at revitalization sites but this can only be effective in conjunction with efforts to improve the social climate of these areas by screening out multi-problem, anti-social families.

Both countries recognize the need to coordinate efforts to create mixed-income, mixed-tenure communities with efforts to improve public

school quality. However, policymakers in both countries need to recognize that these efforts are unlikely to work unless middle-income parents with children are assured (and this is difficult to do) that middle-class norms will dominate in these schools.

Dutch policymakers could benefit from America's experience in linking public housing revitalization with housing mobility that is, using vouchers to enable residents who are willing, to move to healthy, low-poverty areas. Housing mobility is no poverty panacea, however. Many "hard to house" families have difficulty using vouchers in the housing market and vouchering-out may lead to reclustering and in turn, the transfer of social problems from one location to another (the waterbed effect). Efforts to monitor geographical shifts are needed as well as programs to address reclustering-related problems when they occur.

Integrating ethnic immigrants—especially Muslim ones—is a hot button issue in the Netherlands. Recent research suggests that Dutch policymakers need to seriously consider policies to promote ethnic dispersal as well as ones to stabilize ethnically mixed social housing estates. America's experience with policies explicitly focused on racial integration suggests that ethnic dispersal will be fraught with political and legal controversies. Weighing the political costs against the social benefits will be a challenge for Dutch policymakers.

Finally, Dutch neighborhood revitalization policy needs to adopt HOPE VI's explicit focus on family self-sufficiency. This would include an emphasis on economic development as well as social programs aimed at bringing back the absent father.

References

Bloom, Nicholas Dagen. 2008. *Public Housing that Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Briggs, Xavier de Sousa, and Peter Dreier. 2008. Memphis Murder Mystery? No, Just Mistaken Identity. Shelterforce Online http://www.shelterforce.org/article/1043/memphis_murder_mystery_no_just_mistaken_identity/ Posted on July 22.

Brown, Robbie. 2009. Atlanta is making way for new public housing. *New York Times*, June 21, 16.

Cooper, Helene. 2009. President delivers exhortation to fathers. *New York Times* June 20, A10.

Harris, Kirk E. 2008. Fathers from the family to the fringe: Practice, policy and public housing. In *Public housing and the legacy of segregation*, edited by Margery Austin Turner, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette Rawlings. Washington DC: Urban Insitute Press.

Holzer, Harry J. 2008. The employment problems of black men in segregated urban areas. In *Public Housing and the Legacy of Segregation*, edited by Margery Austin Turner, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette Rawlings, 237-46. Washington DC: Urban Insitute Press.

Joseph, Mark L. 2006. Is mixed-income development an antidote to urban poverty? *Housing Policy Debate* 17, 2: 209-34.

Kelly, Michael. 2008. Staying in the 'Hood': Community relocation as a centerpiece for the next generation of urban revitalization. In *Public housing and the legacy of segregation*, edited by Margery Austin Turner, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette Rawlings. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press.

Khadduri, Jill, Jennifer Turnham, and Ann Chase. 2003. Case Studies Exploring the Potential Relationship Between Schools and Neighborhood Revitalization. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates Inc.

Kingsley, G. Thomas, Jennifer Johnson, and Kathryn L. S. Pettit. 2003. Patterns of Section 8 relocation in the HOPE VI program. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25, 4: 427-47.

Kleit, Rachel Garshick, and Stephen B. Page. 2008. Public housing authorities under devolution. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 74, 1, Winter: 34-44.

Kullberg, J. 2006. *The Drawing Table Takes Over the Neighborhood*. The Hague: The Netherlands Social and Cultural Planning Agency.

Marlet, Gerard, Jost Poor, and Clemens van Woerkens. 2009. *Benefitss for the Street: The Effect of Investments by Housing Corporations on Nuisances, Crime, and Dilapidation in the Neighborhood*. Utrecht, The Netherlands: Atlas voor Gemeenten.

Moynihan, Daniel P. 1965. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Washington DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research.

Ouwehand, A., and S. Davis. 2004. *Operation was Successful, Further treatment Needed: Evaluation Research into the Neighborhood Approach of Post-WW II Neighborhoods in the Nineties*. Delft: The Netherlands: Research Institute OTB.

Ouwehand, Andre, Ronald van Kempen, Reinout Kleinhans, and Henk Visscher (Eds.). 2008. *Knowing about Neighborhoods: Policy and Practice in Urban Renewal*. Delft: The Netherlands: IOSW Press under the imprint of Delft University Press.

Pattillo, Mary. 2008. Investing in poor black neighborhoods "As is," In Public Housing and the Legacy of Segregation, edited by Margery Austin Turner, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette Rawlings. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press.

Pinkster, Fenne M. 2009. *Living in Concetrated Poverty*. PhD thesis, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

Popkin, Susan J., Diane K. Levy, Laura E. Harris, Jennifer Comey, Mary K. Cunningham, and Larry F. Buron. 2004. The HOPE VI Program; What about the residents? *Housing Policy Debate* 15, 2: 385-414.

Rosin, Hannah. 2008. American Murder. *Atlantic Monthly*, July/August: 40-54.

Sard, Barbara and Will Fischer. 8 October 2008. Preserving Safe High Quality Public Housing Should Be a Priority of Federal Housing Policy. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* <http://www.cbpp.org/9-18-08hous.htm>.

Turner, Margery Austin, Susan J. Popkin, and Lynette Rawlings. 2008. *Public Housing and Legacy of Segregation*. Washington DC: Urban Institute Press.

Van Bergeijk, Erik, Anita Kokx, Gideon Bolt, and Ronald van Kempen. 2008. *Does Restructuring Help? Effects of Urban Restructuring on Neighborhoods and Residents*. Delft: The Netherlands: Eburon.

Van der Laan Bouma-Doff, Wenda. 2007a. Confined contact: Residential segregation and ethnic bridges in the Netherlands. *Urban Studies* 44, 5/6: 997-1017.

Van der Laan Bouma-Doff, Wenda. 2007b. Involuntary isolation: Ethnic preferences and residential segregation. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 29, 3: 289-310.

Varady, David P. forthcoming b. Social disorders in the early stages of public housing decline: A Helsinki case study. *Housing Studies*.

Venkatesh, Sudhir A., Isil Celimli, Douglas Miller, Alexandra Murphy, and Beauty Turner. 2004. *Chicago Public Housing Transformation: A Research Report*. New York: Columbia University Center for Urban Policy Research.

---

[1] The term "social cohesion" is rarely used in scholarly writing about U.S. public housing. Nevertheless, the concept is useful for evaluating the social effects of American revitalization schemes.

[2] Tenure diversification would alter the demographic mix and reduce the number of multi-problem families. This would decrease the incidence of neighborhood social problems.

[3] HUD funding was however used to fund the demolition of some of the most distressed structures.

[4] In many of her publications Popkin criticizes HOPE VI for not addressing the needs of the "hard-to-house."

[5] Michael Kelly Director of the Washington DC Housing Authority (2008) disagrees noting that because anti-social tenants have made neighbors' lives miserable, they do not deserve priority help.

[6] A group of housing experts led by Xavier de Souza Briggs and Peter Dreier (2008) critiqued Rosin's *Atlantic Monthly* article noting that it lacked empirical evidence that Section 8 relocatees were responsible for increases in crime.

[7] It is not clear why this is the case. It could be that because of their attachment to Islam, Muslim immigrants resist meaningful social interaction with non-Muslims.