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Neighbourhoods in Transition

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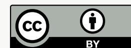

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CHAPTER 4:

NEIGHBOURHOODS IN TRANSITION:
GENTRIFICATION, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Jeroen Moes and Janna Boreas, Maastricht University

Summary

In this chapter, we discuss how a geometry of crises plays out through the politics of gentrification and urban renewal in the case of Wittevrouwenveld; a neighbourhood of the southern Dutch city of Maastricht. Although the Netherlands has been characterised by a generalised rise in the overall standard of living, not all regions and communities have shared equally in this experience and inequalities have been rising dramatically. Taking these socio-economic inequalities as a starting point, this chapter examines how cultural issues of identity and belonging in Maastricht have collided with the political and economic dimensions of contemporary and historical urban planning to generate 'vectors of tension' within local neighbourhoods. At the centre of this vector are agents of the regional and municipal government, long-time residents of the city, project developers, and a diverse array of 'newcomers', such as university students, cosmopolitan 'expats', and ethnic minority migrants. While some inhabitants welcome the city's urban 'renewal' plans, others are highly critical of these actions. We deconstruct how and in which cases such tensions lead to collective action or (apparent) non-action. Overall, the chapter shows how hyperlocal tensions link to a broader geometry of global crises rooted in questions of inequality, identity, action, and inaction.

Introduction

In parallel to exacerbated economic and social inequalities, as well as political polarization during the first two decades of the 21st century, the often-overlooked microcosm of inner-city neighbourhoods has seen increasing levels of inequality. Cities have always had parts of town that were considered socio-economically more or less 'successful' than others, with housing prices and sub-cultural characteristics as clear indicators of these hyperlocal differences. By such measures, on an aggregate level across the Netherlands, important indicators for the quality of life in

Dutch neighbourhoods – such as (perceived) safety,[1] crime,[2] unemployment[3] –have been steadily improving over at least the past decade or so. However, while quality of life in Dutch neighbourhoods has indeed improved in recent decades, this improvement is not equally distributed across all neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods that were already socio-economically stronger have profited significantly more from these improvements, while weaker areas of most cities have been getting worse instead (Dupuy, 2018; Leidelmeijer, Frissen, & van Iersel, 2020; Voogt & Rutten, 2020).

This chapter examines these shifts and their social implications on a micro level by looking at several neighbourhoods in the southern Dutch city of Maastricht, and in particular at a district called Wittevrouwenveld. While this is a relatively small Dutch city (around 120.000 inhabitants), it has one of the longest histories in the country with urban interventions by local governments specifically aimed at social rejuvenation and cohesion. There have been various degrees of success in these interventions, and how 'success' ought to be defined in the first place is subject to continued debate and has shifted over time. One of the most recent of such urban regeneration projects involves the neighbourhood Wittevrouwenveld. This area has long been considered a socio-economically vulnerable part of the city, with a historical presence of working-class inhabitants and predominantly modest social housing. The Netherlands as a whole has a longstanding tradition of government intervention in such vulnerable neighbourhoods (Kullberg, Mouktadibillah, & de Vries, 2021), and within that Maastricht has had a particularly involved history (Knotter, 1999).

In recent decades, Maastricht has seen a large (for its size) influx of both Dutch and especially also international students,[4] higher educated workers from the north of the country and abroad, as well as tourists to the city. The municipal governance has long prided itself in positioning the city as particularly international and European, gaining increasing emphasis since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Similarly, Maastricht University[5] explicitly aims to attract an international student body with 55% of its 21.085 students coming from abroad in 2020 (Maastricht University, 2020). Adding to this, Maastricht and its surrounding area is one of the most popular tourist destinations of the country.[6] At the same time, however, this is an area of the Netherlands with a strong local identity, manifested through such things as an extensive local ritual calendar and culture as well as a widely spoken dialect across several sociolects (Cornips & de Rooij, 2015; Cornips, de Rooij, & Stengs, 2012;

[1] Subjective feelings of being unsafe in one's neighbourhood have decreased by about 5% since 2012 (most recent data available; CBS, 2020)
[2] Registered crime halved in the last two decades (CBS, 2022b)
[3] Unemployment decreased by about 3% in the last decade (CBS, 2022a)
[4] For a discussion on the 'Studentification' of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, see Boersma, K., Langen, H., & Smets, P. (2013)
[5] Founded in 1976 as Rijksuniversiteit Limburg but renamed in 1996 to Universiteit Maastricht and again in 2008 to the English Maastricht University to reflect its international character.
[6] After Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, all of which have between 4,3 and 6,8 times the population size, Maastricht has the highest number of incoming tourists per year in The Netherlands (CBS, 2022c)

Thissen, 2013, 2018a, 2018b; Van Halteren, Van Hout, & Roumans, 2018). The result is that in terms of urban space, these 'newcomers' (Elias & Scotson, 1994) mostly frequent around the centre of the city (where tourist attractions and the university are predominantly located), pushing the 'established' locals further towards the outskirts of town. This is at least true in a symbolic sense, and in much of the lived experience of the city's inhabitants. In terms of expat and international student housing there is however a more complex pattern that intersects with gentrification and urban rejuvenation efforts that this chapter will examine in more detail.

Wittevrouwenveld is geographically located right between the centre and the eastern outskirts of the city. Its historically affordable housing has also attracted (international) students (see Boersma et al., 2013) and specific groups of immigrants. At the same time, it has also remained inhabited by locals with a strong sense of local pride and practices (in terms of rituals, culture, and language). Identities, languages, dialects, hyperlocal sociolects, economics and politics are all important vectors for the tensions that emerge in this neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is the stage at which the municipality and large project developers have been executing a significant urban planning intervention. While some inhabitants welcome these plans and changes, others are highly critical at these attempts to gentrify the area and address these tensions that are ultimately arising from global crises of economic inequality and capitalism. After all, if gentrification is the "[...] production of space for and consumption by more affluent and very different incoming population" (Slater, Curran, & Lees, 2004, p. 1145), or more specifically "[...] the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas [...] to middle-class residential use" (Zukin, 1987, p. 129), then where does that leave the working-class people who lived there?

Below, the chapter is divided into two main sections. First, we examine the historical context of Maastricht and its urban development approaches over time. In particular, we discuss the Stokstraat, which was one of the first examples of large-scale, government planned urban redevelopment projects in the Netherlands. This is relevant not only as a historical parallel to current developments, but also because its sociological effects have rippled through to dynamics that are still ongoing today. In fact, in a very literal, direct sense, many families who were displaced due to the Stokstraat redevelopments moved to Wittevrouwenveld. Moreover, some of the same logics in terms of how urban planning for 'problem areas' was approached at the time have persisted in current approaches for neighbourhoods like Wittevrouwenveld. In discussing these topics, we also address some of the main conceptual lenses through which we regard these topics. The second section of the chapter brings the case of Wittevrouwenveld into focus. Here, we examine how residents respond to these tensions and intersecting crises through three distinct cases of contentious changes in the area. The first is an example of (apparent) non-action; the second is one of attempting to mobilize but ultimately failing to do so; the third of a successful mobilization with a positive outcome.

Urban Development in Maastricht

Maastricht is one of the Netherlands' oldest continuously inhabited cities since it was settled by the Roman Empire, but like many Western-European cities, its largest population boom occurred during the post-WWII baby boom. In the Netherlands, such population increases usually went hand in hand with the development of newly built, state-planned neighbourhoods. The district Akerpoort (later renamed to Heugemerveld) was the first large-scale planned residential expansion constructed in Maastricht, which was built between 1948 and 1955 to address the widespread housing shortage. It was designed as a classical '*arbeiderswijk*' – a 'workers neighbourhood', meant to house the working class in relatively cheap and compact rental homes. It featured a 'parochial' layout, with a (Catholic) church in the middle of the neighbourhood and the main roads leading to the centre of this 'neighbourhood parish'. Most of these houses were built using government funds and rented out as social housing through large housing associations, or 'corporations'. The scale of this type of housing is comparatively very large in the Netherlands due to a historically strong welfare state (Van Kempen & Van Weesep, 1994).

This idea – affordable, large scale and cheaply built rental housing for the proletariat with a church in the middle – soon became a blueprint for many post-war neighbourhoods in Maastricht. Other districts such as Caberg, Pottenberg, Mariaberg or Malpertuis, all follow the exact same formula. All of these were designs by the architect Frans Dingemans, who was appointed director of urban development in Maastricht in 1942 (during WWII), and later became 'city architect' in the 1950s. He died at a relatively young age, but during his years working for the city has had a profound impact on the urban landscape – and consequently on the social structures.

While at the time these neighbourhoods were built on the outskirts of Maastricht, many of these neighbourhoods, including Wittevrouwenveld, are currently considered to be in relatively close proximity to the centre of Maastricht due to the growth of the city over time. This relative shift is relevant in 'real' terms, such as desirability, real estate prices, and access to services, but also symbolically. Today, locals often have an equivocal relationship to the centre of the city. It can be simultaneously the locus of their local identity, and at the same time the stage upon which they see this identity threatened. Over the decades, as in many cities, the centre has also fluctuated between at certain times being seen as a highly desirable place to live in (or close to) and at other times as a highly *un*desirable place. At one point, this fluctuation has been one of the main drivers for one of the Netherlands' first large-scale urban regeneration projects around another Maastricht neighbourhood, the Stokstraatkwartier. This project serves both as an important historical reference point and one of several roots that grew the context for Wittevrouwenveld, as well as a template for understanding some of the dynamics we still see at play today.

The Stokstraat

The Stokstraat is one of the oldest streets in Maastricht, and currently, it is one of the most exclusive shopping streets in the country selling high fashion and exclusive jewellery. It is at the centre of the neighbourhood named after it (Stokstraatkwartier), and today is a core area of the historical centre in the imagination of urban space. Most of the buildings in the Stokstraat today are large mansions built in the 17th and 18th century. Maastricht was early to join the industrial revolution, and so in the 19th century, many people moved from rural areas to the city to become workers for the new industries.

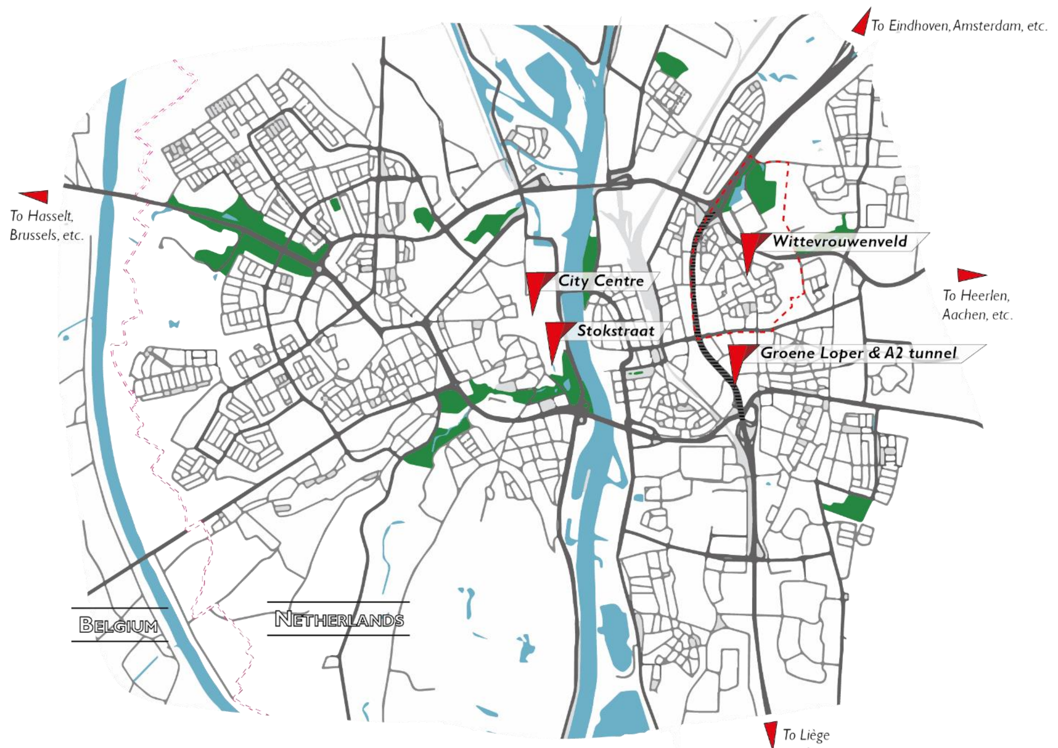

Figure 1 - Map of Maastricht with Wittevrouwenveld, the Stokstraat, and the 'Groene Loper'.

As a result, the city became overpopulated and started to lose its appeal to the wealthier inhabitants who then moved to newer and more spacious neighbourhoods with broad avenues just outside of the city. In streets like the Stokstraat, the old mansions were purchased by absentee landlords (or the previous owners simply kept their old properties after moving to their new homes and thus became landlords). The

mansions were then rented to factory workers in small units of 1 or 2 rooms housing up to 10 people each.

These early industries were highly unregulated under exploitative capitalism, and so these factory workers were impoverished. As a result of overcrowded, poorly maintained housing, and poverty from unschooled factory labour, a range of social issues emerged. Child labour, disease, prostitution, alcohol abuse, and many other such phenomena were typical of early industry in many cities. Compared to other places, Maastricht was late to intervene in these matters and the economic crisis in the 1930s caused mass unemployment that hit these types of areas particularly hard.

Only in the second half of the 20th century, shortly after the Second World War, did concrete plans develop to address the situation, and the Stokstraat spearheaded the new plans. A dissertation conducted in the early 1950s by priest and geographer Harry Litjens concluded that there were 1.200 "problem families" living in the area (Knotter, 1999; Litjens, 1952, 1953). The adjective used to describe this socio-economic group in the study was *onmaatschappelijk*, which translates to 'non-societal' and was meant to indicate an underclass exhibiting a specific 'culture of poverty' (Morris, 1989) that was morally deficient compared to 'proper' society (Knotter, 1999, pp. 11-13). Following the study, a plan was developed by the municipality to renovate and 'clean up' the Stokstraat and its neighbourhood to not only counter social issues like alcohol abuse and prostitution, but also to educate people on how they 'should' behave socially and morally, and to teach them a 'proper work ethic'.

The typical approach to these situations in other cities at the time would have been to tear down the existing buildings and streets and to build new architecture in its place. Renovating instead of demolishing the Stokstraat was in this sense a new way to approach urban redevelopment at the time from an urban planning and architecture perspective. These plans were largely developed by the architect mentioned earlier: Frans Dingemans. Regardless, either approach – demolishing versus renovating and repurposing – would generally displace the original population.

Social dimensions

In total, around 1.000 people[7] were forced to leave their homes in and around the Stokstraat. These people were classified on a range of how "anti-social" (*onmaatschappelijk*) they were deemed to be, and accordingly housed in various other new neighbourhoods across the city. All of these neighbourhoods were further outside of the city centre, in line with municipality plans to remake the centre into a more posh and elegant area fit for commerce and more exclusive housing. The main areas where

[7] For a sense of proportion: the total population of the municipality of Maastricht as a whole at this time would have been roughly 77.000 people (CBS, 1950, p. 32).

Stokstraat inhabitants were moved to were all outside of what was then considered the centre of Maastricht. Two of the main locations that the Stokstraat inhabitants were moved to were Wittevrouwenveld (the focus of this chapter) and a tiny special-purpose neighbourhood called Ravelijn[8] (Jansen Hendriks & van den Born, 2010). Ultimately, many of the same families ended up living in these new and generally cheaply built neighbourhoods. Much of the pre-existing economic and social issues travelled with them, and often these issues were in fact exacerbated due to the uprooting of the social fabric. As a result, many of these areas are today subject to another round of urban redevelopments because they have long been similarly regarded as socio-economically more vulnerable areas. In other words, the problem that the local government perceived was now displaced with its social fabric deteriorated or destroyed and local identities undermined.

Apart from forced relocation, many people were *effectively* forced to relocate due to economic changes. After the renovation, they could no longer afford to live in their old neighbourhood. And even if they would have been able to do so, they would have found their old streets without a genuine soul, and their community without identity (Jansen Hendriks & van den Born, 2010). In the case of the Stokstraat and similar examples, the urban redevelopment was not done for the benefit of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood under redevelopment. Here lies one component of how the 'success' of urban redevelopment efforts should be qualified. Today, the Stokstraat is an expensive street that attracts a lot of tourists. It is often touted as a success story by the municipality, and surely acts as one of the economic drivers in the local area.[9] Few people still have their homes in the area, and real estate prices have become astronomical. For the most part, the area is primarily zoned for commercial activities.

Here, the notions of *space* and *place* as used in human geography and anthropology offer a useful lens (see, for instance, Aase, 1994; Entrikin, 1991; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Ingold, 2000; Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2017; Paasi, 2002; Richardson, 1982). Simplifying significantly, and sidestepping the academic debate on these concepts, *space* is generally defined as the physical location as such – an open and more or less abstract piece of the world without social meaning in and of itself (Tuan, 1977, pp. 6, 164-165). By contrast, *place* is often defined as a location understood through

[8] The tiny neighbourhood Ravelijn was constructed to be a so-called woonschool. A 'home school', where onmaatschappelijke families were to be 'resocialised' to become 'proper renters' and be taught how live in a 'proper' and moral way. This involved social workers going door to door on a regular basis to teach people how to use their toilets, how to do the household chores, and how to apply for jobs. Ravelijn itself was further spatially stratified as well. Those deemed the most onmaatschappelijk were housed closest to the centre of the neighbourhood; those who scored better were housed on the outer ring of the area and could 'graduate' to regular neighbourhoods upon further improvement.

[9] The website for the Stokstraatkwartier (stokstraatkwartier.nl), set up by the local business association, is quick to list high fashion, gastronomy and 'lifestyle' as the main attractions (Ondernemersvereniging Stokstraatkwartier, 2018). The local tourist office similarly calls the area "the stylish heart of Maastricht", which has "one of the most luxurious and exclusive shopping streets" with the "most beautiful boutiques with fashion, jewellery, flowers, [...] and wine bars" (Bezoek Maastricht, 2017).

human experience – or put differently, *place* is *space* imbued with meanings (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). That is not to say that place can therefore necessarily exist independently of which *space* it provides with meaning. As geographer Edward Relph put this: "[...] space and place are dialectically structured in human environmental experience, since our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context" (Relph, 1976; as quoted in Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 44)

Seen in this way, the 'success' of an urban redevelopment project in the eyes of governments and developers is often defined economically and exclusively in terms of the physical space it entails, often largely ignoring the social place it was before. While the Stokstraat space was in some ways given new meanings (shopping, tourism, prestige) and thus became a new place, the place that it had been got displaced and consequently destroyed due to the dialectical relationship between this place and its space. Regardless of any social problems in the pre-1950s Stokstraat, there had been a high degree of social cohesion, a strong local identity, and social safety in the area (Jansen Hendriks & van den Born, 2010). Since place cannot be simply transformed into something else and supplanted to another space, this destruction of place went hand in hand with the destruction of these modes of living without offering effective alternatives.

Crises

In the time of the Stokstraat redevelopments, as well as during the construction of the large baby boom districts, these projects were often 'grand designs' by architects and city planners who were ultimately civil servants, such as Frans Dingemans. They were often seen as necessary due to crises such as an exploding urban population or rampant dereliction. Because of this type of response, the Netherlands has developed a strong custom of keeping a tight governmental grip on urban and spatial planning (Doucet, 2014; Uitermark, Duyvendak, & Kleinhans, 2007). Infrastructural plans, architectural designs, and urban aesthetics are all heavily regulated and codified. The national, provincial, and municipal governments all have a decisive say on when and how plans materialize. As a result, while gentrification in other countries often connotes a process driven largely by capital and economic processes, in the Netherlands it is heavily driven by government decisions. One consequence of this is that national policies have a heavy impact on local neighbourhoods. While national governments after 1945 exercised strong control over the housing market and invested significantly in social housing specifically for the baby boom generation, there was an increasing tendency to deregulate and privatize the housing market since the early 1990s (see Van Kempen & Van Weesep, 1994, who correctly predicted that decentralisation in the 1990s would lead to housing associations more closely

following market fluctuations). This culminated in 2010, when the neoliberal government disbanded the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.[10] Arguably, these factors ultimately contributed significantly to the housing crisis seen in 2020 and onwards. Moreover, and paradoxically, this trend towards privatization has not necessarily meant that the state has been any less involved in local processes of gentrification (Hackworth & Smith, 2001).

A common understanding of gentrification is the image of a previously poorer area that becomes popular amongst specific groups of people who have sufficient capital to purchase property or pay higher rents and are generally higher educated (Slater et al., 2004, p. 1145). Such popularity can often be caused by the appeal of a strong social fabric, cultural diversity, and colour in an area like this, or simply because of housing market pressures in other parts of a city pushing people to still more affordable neighbourhoods. Global and local capital is then soon to follow this development by opening branches of their businesses in the area, and perhaps more importantly by buying up large parts of the available housing properties there, driving up prices.[11] The same basic mechanics and outcomes do apply in the Netherlands as well, but due to the strong government grip on urban planning as discussed above two main aspects are particularly relevant. First, redevelopment plans are comparatively more heavily initiated and decided upon by (local, provincial, national) governments. Second, this means that especially local governments have two important stakes in the process: to plan and develop urban space, and to represent and include their citizens in political decision-making.

While in countries like the United States, where a lot of studies on gentrification are situated, the municipal budget largely depends on the immediate *local* tax base of residents (Uitermark et al., 2007), Dutch municipalities derive their budgets predominantly from *national* taxes. This creates a different incentive structure and more top-down direct involvement of local as well as national politics. That is not to say that capital has no bearing on the matter – quite the contrary. However, comparatively, in the Netherlands this relationship between urban space and capital is generally strongly mediated by politics, which in turn can be (and often is) driven by economic considerations. Because of this political involvement, many urban redevelopment, or "urban restructuring" (Kleinhans, 2003; Van Kempen & Priemus, 1999) plans start from a policy or at least discourse of wanting to improve social cohesion or local economic reinvigoration. This is often seen as key to reducing crime and improving living standards. In the same vein, local governments often make some

[10] Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieu or VROM

[11] In recent years, Maastricht has held a top position amongst Dutch cities with the highest percentage of housing properties being sold to real estate traders, absentee landlords, and companies rather than private individuals (for an indication of basic statistics on this, see: CBS, 2021).

efforts to involve local stakeholders and inhabitants during various phases of development.

The irony, of course, is that despite such efforts and ideals, urban redevelopment will usually lead to the displacement of many of the original inhabitants of an area. As discussed above, this happens either through direct (and in some instances forced) relocation, through people choosing to live elsewhere due to the changes around them (a loss of the 'soul' of an area, or the destruction of place), or through the "success" of the redevelopment (from a policy perspective) itself in the slightly longer term. After all, if success is defined through economic metrics and focuses on space instead of place, the wealth in the space (i.e. this physical part of the city; not necessarily the place as it exists) will increase. Consequently, so will land value, housing prices, and rents. If left insufficiently regulated (Van Kempen & Van Weesep, 1994), higher property values and rent amounts incentivize housing corporations to sell off their properties or rent them on the private sector instead of as social housing. This will lead many of the remaining original inhabitants to become unable to afford to live in their own neighbourhood. Because of this – amplifying the point somewhat to drive it to its cynical conclusion – involving residents in redevelopment plans and asking them *how* redevelopment should happen rather than *whether* it should can therefore ultimately be the same as asking citizens to support and legitimize their own eviction and the dismantling of the places they call home.[12]

The section above discussed the necessary historical context of urban redevelopments in the Netherlands in general and Maastricht in particular, and addressed the framework through which we see these dynamics play out in this particular type of gentrification. In the following section, we will look at the contemporary case of Wittevrouwenveld; a Maastricht neighbourhood that is currently in the middle of such a process of planned gentrification. Firstly, we will briefly go over the history and current socio-economic context of the area. Secondly, we address different responses to crises that we see as representing the range of repertoires that residents employ to engage with decisions made by the municipality involving their neighbourhood. We will do so by using distinct moments of (non-)action (Lowe, 1986, pp. 3, 55) around three concrete contentious proposed or actually implemented changes: a name change of the district, a local place with high symbolic and social value called *Stenenveldje*, and the removal of a public playground.

[12] To be sure, we are not arguing here that municipalities employ instruments for citizen engagement in urban planning in order to knowingly mislead them. We have no reason to assume anything other than that the intentions truly are to involve citizens in the political process. The point here is rather that the historical and contemporary (neoliberal) framework within which this happens emphasizes economic development as the primary metric regardless of whether governments or markets organize and regulate this, and considers distinct urban areas spaces first and foremost rather than places.

Geometries of Crisis in Wittevrouwenveld

Wittevrouwenveld,[13] historically called Oostermaas ('east of the river Meuse') – is an area of roughly 1,5 square kilometres with 5455 inhabitants (CBS, 2019). Housing associations own 49% of the homes (i.e. social housing), 27% is privately owned, and the remaining 24% are owned by private investors (CBS, 2021). The average value of homes is estimated at € 151.000 (CBS, 2019), which is in the lower end of the lowest quartile of housing prices in the city (along with nine other neighbourhoods). Roughly 39% of inhabitants are immigrants, with 21% classified as "Western" and 18% as "non-Western" in official statistics (CBS, 2019). "Immigrant" here only includes first- and second-generation immigration. In practice, the former are mostly European students and expats from Europe and North America. Culturally speaking, the remaining 61% of inhabitants are either of third- or later-generation immigrant descent, people who 'immigrated' from elsewhere in the Netherlands, and 'locals'. The latter group is relevant to point out given strong local identity and the prevalence of the local dialect with distinct hyperlocal sociolects and behavioural cues (Cornips & de Rooij, 2015; Cornips et al., 2012; Thissen, 2013, 2018a, 2018b).

Wittevrouwenveld was named after farmlands in the area that were once owned by the Catholic convent of the *Witte Vrouwen* ('white women'), with references to the name going back to the year 1527. Between the 12th and 15th century, the area was mainly used as a lazarette, or 'leper colony', after which this was demolished and gradually attracted sparse housing. From the end of the 19th century onwards, the local population increased more significantly, and when Maastricht annexed the area in 1920 it was used to build a workers' district (*arbeiderswijk*) to house the rapidly expanding industrialization of the city. In 1949 Maastricht's first 'gallery flat' (early high-rise building, aimed at working-class residents) was built by architect Frans Dingemans (see above) in anticipation of relocating workers from other parts of the city, such as the Stokstraat.

In 1959, the N2 (later A2) motorway was constructed with Wittevrouwenveld to the east and the city centre to the west. This motorway to this day is the main artery between the rest of the Netherlands towards Europe south of the country. The Netherlands is an export-heavy economy (Rotterdam is one of Europe's main freight

[13] The authors of this chapter each have personal connections with Wittevrouwenveld. It is important to note how our experiences may have shaped study (Della Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 25; Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis, & Dillon, 2003). Janna has lived in Wittevrouwenveld for almost four years. She is familiar with regional customs, cultures, and languages also through her own youth, and she has been deeply involved in Wittevrouwenveld through university outreach programmes such as Match and neighbourhood politics. She has interviewed and observed many local residents for this and earlier research and currently lives in one of the houses that are in the middle of on-going redevelopment plans. Jeroen has observed and interviewed residents in various Maastricht neighbourhoods in recent years, focusing on similar working-class or post-industrial areas. He grew up in Maastricht in similar neighbourhoods. His direct ties to Wittevrouwenveld are through his great-grandparents who lived in the eastern part of the neighbourhood.

harbours), and as such, this is a very busy stretch of motorway. For many years, the only intersection with traffic lights along the A2 motorway was located here as well, causing significant noise and pollution issues for the area.

The area saw several renovations and urban renewal projects, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. The municipality and social organizations initiated and funded a very high number of initiatives in the area in response to social issues and occasional unrest. Then, in 2007, the Dutch Minister of Integration and Housing (a ministry since abolished) Ella Vogelaar compiled a list of the 40 most 'problematic' neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. Colloquially, this list was referred to as the '*Vogelaarwijken*'. Wyckerpoort, Limmel, Nazareth, and Wittevrouwenveld were four neighbouring areas in Maastricht that appeared on that list. These areas all share similar demographic and historical characteristics. The initiative provided additional national funding to address social issues in these areas. For Wittevrouwenveld and Wyckerpoort, the municipality decided to plan for a new local commercial centre between the areas and revising a school and a local park.

Additionally, from 2010 onwards the municipality and the province started construction on the tunnelling of the A2 motorway that had cross-cut the area since 1959. This was a major infrastructural project involving several large stacked tunnels in both directions, costing around € 1.2 billion.[14] The tunnel itself saw completion in 2016, and the project in general including urban redevelopment is projected to complete in 2026. On the roof of the tunnel, where the motorway had been, a narrow and long park was completed in 2017 which was dubbed the *Groene Loper* ('green walkway', though sometimes mockingly called 'Gouden Loper', or 'golden walkway' by locals; Planthof, 2022), with new, more expensive[15] housing projects along this park and deeper into the areas behind it.

These changes have already had a profound impact on Wittevrouwenveld, its inhabitants, the value of local real estate, and the demographic composition of the area (see also Phillips, 2004). For almost 60 years, the neighbourhood had been physically cut off from the city centre by the busy A2 and its dangerous intersection. Now it was connected to it through a park and new and comparatively expensive housing. Throughout its existence as a working-class neighbourhood that largely had to fend for itself through local social relationships; now it was partitioned into different

[14] The national government invested € 680 million in the development of the 'King Willem-Alexander Tunnel', the municipality € 95 million, and the province of Limburg € 54 million. The remainder was financed by European subsidies (€ 20 million), the neighbouring municipality Meerssen (€ 1 million) and private investors (€ 40 million). Private investors in exchange received real estate locations from the municipality (Team communicatie A2 Maastricht, 2020).

[15] Often, such an approach is part of a strategy called 'housing redifferentiation', or "[…] adding more expensive dwellings to low-income areas by removing inexpensive dwellings through demolition, together with the sale and upgrading of existing dwellings" (Lees, 2008, p. 2455).

economic and cultural areas. In other words, Wittevrouwenveld had entered a phase of Dutch-style gentrification.

In addition to the usual market dynamics under capitalism, what this type of gentrification entails is a complex process of politics and intentional spatial planning regulations and decisions. While this means that in principle, citizens can have a degree of agency over the outcomes, it is important to recognize that this process is complex, very bureaucratic and would require a great degree of effective collective organizing, legal resources, and knowledge.[16] Not much effort seems to be made to make this process easily accessible and perceived as relevant for people living in the neighbourhood. Direct and transparent opportunities with a mandate to make real decisions are few, if any. Many residents did not have a clear view on which developments are planned, or which houses will be demolished or renovated. Specific plans about these things were also not readily available online. This led to a lot of information being based on rumours going around in the neighbourhood, with various versions of the same stories circulating within brief periods of time. When a limited number of information meetings were organised, residents were confronted with plans developed by professionals in the field, underlining the power imbalance based on knowledge, organization, and (legal, financial, bureaucratic, etc.) resources. At this stage, at best, any input gathered amongst these citizens would have been about the question of *how* redevelopments would take place; not about *whether* or even *where* they ought to happen. Clearly, the matter of informed consent regarding possible (presumably unintended) consequences such as the displacement of the current neighbourhood residents due to future economic pressures or the destruction of place as discussed above, is even further removed from this process.

Like the process of gentrification itself, the responses and actions of the residents and others concerned with and committed to the neighbourhood are plentiful, contradictory, (dis)connected, and not always visible to outsiders. Below, we review this repertoire of responses by looking at three different contentious cases. The first type of response consists of apparent non-action (Lowe, 1986, pp. 3, 55); not directed towards institutions, not presented visually, not expressed through organised collective action, and therefore also rarely visible to outsiders.

[16] Additionally, many people live on a comparatively low wage or have to get by on social benefits. Often, they rent a home through social housing and do not have any material agency in terms of choosing where to live. They are therefore dependent on large and powerful housing corporations to invest in their homes, do repairs or renovations. It can even be in the interest of these corporations not to invest in homes. If residents leave their homes on their own accord, this would free up possibilities for renewal projects and increased rents.

Figure 2 - Detail map of Wittevrouwenveld, the new commercial centre, Stenenveldje, and the *Groene Loper* / A2 tunnel

These externally invisible responses were present after a change in postal code and a subsequent attempt to rename the neighbourhood. Secondly, the case of *Stenenveldje* shows how an initially active response turns into a sense of powerlessness through constantly discouraging interactions which stifles any incentives for collective mobilisation. Thirdly, the responses to the decision of the city council to remove many playgrounds throughout the city reveal that collective mobilisation and action directed towards institutions can nevertheless be successful under certain conditions, also in neighbourhoods like Wittevrouwenveld.

From Wittevrouwenveld to Scharn-Noord: apparent non-action

The eastern part[17] of the neighbourhood, which was considered the 'worst' part of the neighbourhood 40 to 50 years ago, has been redeveloped several decades before the current renovations. Residents of this area expressed that at a certain point, they received the message that their postal code had been changed. Instead of it ending on 24,[18] which is for its residents indicative of Wittevrouwenveld, it changed to 26, which is indicative of Scharn, the comparatively more affluent neighbourhood south of Wittevrouwenveld. Additionally, new people coming into the neighbourhood started referring to this part of the neighbourhood as 'Scharn Noord' ('North Scharn'). Erik, Chantal and Wouter, three residents of Wittevrouwenveld, mentioned that the name Scharn Noord was given to the area in order to attract more people to come to the neighbourhood.[19] Otherwise, people would not want to buy a house in that area due to the bad reputation that is connected to the name Wittevrouwenveld. Scharn is a neighbourhood that is perceived as a better neighbourhood than Wittevrouwenveld as its residents are socioeconomically better off, and is not associated with the stigma of a working-class 'problem area' that was listed as one of the *Vogelaarwijken* in 2007 (see above). It has higher real-estate prices, higher average levels of education, and a comparatively large expat community.

While the change in postal code went along with an attempt to rename and rebrand that part of the neighbourhood, potentially erasing not only part of the place (Tuan, 1977) that was, but also its name, long-term residents of Wittevrouwenveld refused to call this part of the neighbourhood Scharn Noord. It still is and probably always will be Wittevrouwenveld to them. Erik, for instance, during a conversation with Janna in front of a map of Wittevrouwenveld mentioned: "and that over here is actually... well they call it Scharn Oost or Scharn Noord or something, but that is 't Vrouwenveld[20] plain and simple." Similar to this response, is what Chantal and Wouter expressed to new people that came into the neighbourhood thinking they bought a home in Scharn-Noord. Specifically, Wouter explains:

> *Yes the municipality.. you got.. of course you have gotten letters about it, but you know someone was always born here lives in 't Vrouwenveld plain and simple. I live in 't Vrouwenveld. But officially I live, I live in Scharn-Noord.*

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[17] The area east from the Czaar Peterstraat and Koning Clovisstraat.

[18] Younger generations also symbolically refer to their neighbourhood using the number "24".

[19] Indeed, this appears to have been a marketing term used by project developers and real-estate agents in the early 2000's, such as this example from project developer Grouwels Daelmans: https://www.gd.nl/referenties/scharn-noord-maastricht

[20] Older generations refer to Wittevrouwenveld as 't Vrouweveld.

Wouter further mentioned that this situation has sometimes led to confusing conversations concerning deliveries because people write down the wrong postal code if he tells them that he lives in Wittevrouwenveld. Nevertheless, he refuses to tell people that he lives in Scharn Noord.

According to some sources, the current status of the area is still part of Wittevrouwenveld, regardless of the change in postal code. However, compared to most other countries, the Netherlands has a highly detailed and regulated postal code system which should mean that postal codes are unique and specific to administrative neighbourhoods (*buurten*, rather than *wijken*), which would suggest that a change in postal code is bureaucratically equivalent to a change in neighbourhood. Regardless, most people in the neighbourhood that Janna has spoken to believe they live in Wittevrouwenveld. We are unsure whether the attempt to rebrand this part of Wittevrouwenveld was mostly branding by project developers or part of a strategy from the municipality.[21] Rebranding through naming and framing is a fairly common strategy in the city. Some of the previously industrial areas have been redeveloped and given posh-sounding (to locals, at least) French names such as Céramique, and Belvédère, for example. Wittevrouwenveld itself has a contemporary example too in the so-called *Groene Loper*, discussed above. Regardless, in terms of local acceptance of the change in postal code, the suggested change to Scharn Noord has not been successful.

Focussing on how residents in the neighbourhood responded to the change in postal code and the subsequent attempt to rename that part of the neighbourhood, it is clear that their actions are directed towards their fellow neighbours; not governments or developers. Residents express their frustrations with this situation to their close neighbours during small talk conversation on the street, in the supermarket, or when they have people over for coffee in their home. Consequently, it seems that the discourse of "it is still Wittevrouwenveld" spreads like wildfire within the neighbourhood as if it is the latest piece of gossip. However, residents do not communicate how they feel about the situation in a way that is directed towards relevant institutions such as the municipality. These responses of residents and this discourse in the neighbourhood are very likely to be left unnoticed by the municipality and other relevant institutions that could act upon the dissatisfaction and confusion among residents.

This type of response, communicating frustrations to fellow residents in informal situations but not towards institutions or other stakeholders through a formal process, is a response that is often present in the neighbourhood, also beyond the postal code change. These types of conversations, in which residents express their

[21] Similarly, the project to redevelop another working-class neighbourhood some years prior used the alliteration 'Manjefiek Malberg' ('Magnificent Malberg') in an attempt to subvert the existing stigma surrounding the area.

dissatisfaction with what is happening around them in general or specifically in their neighbourhood, are often interwoven with sentiments of powerlessness and of not being listened to no matter what one does, and are ingrained in local cultural codes (see also Collins, 2017; Hauser & McClellan, 2009; Leondar-Wright, 2013). Furthermore, through this informal style of exchange, misinformation and opaqueness about the facts of any changes are perpetuated and often exacerbated. In the next two cases, discussed below, this behaviour is also common. In these instances, however, some people in the neighbourhood do decide to also communicate their dissatisfaction directly towards relevant institutions and stakeholders, with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Stenenveldje: discouraged to act

Stenenveldje ("small stone field") was a tiny patch of asphalt with a fence around it at the end of a street called Burgemeester Bauduinstraat in Wittevrouwenveld, right across from a playground (see following section). Children and youth of all ages made use of this field to hang out or play ball games. During summers, neighbours organised barbeques there. Teenagers in the neighbourhood saw Stenenveldje as one of the few places in the neighbourhood where they could hang out without being afraid neighbours would start complaining or call the police. Whenever neighbours did experience any nuisance they talked it out with the youths instead of anonymously calling the police. All of this was made possible due to a strong social cohesion and social control in the direct vicinity.

Stenenveldje has a long history and symbolic relevance in the neighbourhood. Eric, a '*Wittevrouwenvelder*' in his fifties, has many memories from his youth of that place when it was just an empty field full of weeds. He and his group of friends spent many hours hanging out there as the house on the corner housed one of their families. He mentions:

> *We always gathered there and then we kept hanging around there and back in the days across [...] there was a wall with iron rods on which you could sit and then across the street you had a snack bar and we always went to eat and drink there.*

While for many residents, especially the youth, this space in the neighbourhood was a very meaningful *place*, from an urban planning perspective it was empty *space* (Auge, 1995; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). The area and the building behind it did not have a clear use or relevance for the renewed neighbourhood, and its current social use as a place for residents would not fit the ambitions of the redevelopments. Consequently, it was decided that the plot be sold and new apartments built in its stead to fit in with the development of the *Groene Loper*, which is directly adjacent.

Figure 3 - Stenenveldje.
Source: Janna Boreas.

This decision was made several years ago, but residents were made aware of this during the second half of 2020. During a conversation between the chair of the neighbourhood network of Wittevrouwenveld and a project developer of the *Groene Loper*, the removal of Stenenveldje was mentioned informally. This took him by surprise and after asking around, it became clear that residents had also not been well-informed about this decision. Residents of the area were upset about this, especially because the developer stated that Stenenveldje was not currently being utilized by the neighbourhood. Such a claim may be due to the over-arching paradigm of planned economic development of urban spaces within the framework of capitalist assumptions, as we have seen throughout the historical development discussed prior. And so, where residents experienced place, the developer only saw space. While residents deny this, the project developer claims that they were informed by way of a letter that explained what was going to happen to the area. This letter was later submitted to the neighbourhood network by Project Bureau A2. In the letter, COVID-19 was given as the reason for not informing residents earlier, because this would have made organising a face-to-face meeting impossible. Furthermore, the letter

refers to a plan that was already presented in 2018, yet none of the residents were aware of this plan.

Figure 4 - Two photos of Eric's group of friends at Stenenveldje.
Source: interviewee's personal archive.

This exchange is one of many examples of miscommunication between project developers and the municipality on one side and residents on the other. At best, this reveals how both sides have different expectations about how communication ought to happen despite best intentions on both sides. At worst, project developers and local governments may occasionally be under pressure to underinform residents for what they consider to be the greater good (neighbourhood or city development) or simply financially the most opportune course of action. There are high financial stakes involved in such large-scale projects, and for the municipality, the Groene Loper project including the large tunnel for the A2 motorway is a prestigious redevelopment involving significant national funding. As such, on a level playing field, input from citizens currently living in the area could be seen as a nuisance rather than essential.

Whether the true issue here is the former – different styles and expectations to communication – or the latter – more cynical deception of current residents – the outcomes are identical: residents are underinformed, therefore cannot protest, and as such implicitly appear to legitimate the drastic changes to their neighbourhood from the perspective of outsiders. One resident, for example, mentioned that she might have seen the letter but did not recognise it as something important and thought it was a door-to-door advertisement. If we follow the more charitable explanation that project developers and the municipality genuinely do want to inform and gather input from residents, this type of communication can seem very reasonable from the perspective of an urban developer. At the very least, it fulfils any formal requirements of informing citizens. However, beyond the question whether it is also sufficient, it does not suit the communication style of people living in the neighbourhood and as such, it does not, in fact, actually inform the people it is meant to inform.

Regardless of the intent of the municipality and the project developer, the communication about the decision left many residents highly frustrated with the municipality. This frustration and anger was voiced by residents to each other in Facebook groups or through informal conversations in the streets or in the supermarket (as described in the previous section). Within this discourse, it is considered a given that local residents cannot have any influence on these decisions whatsoever. Instead, resignation and defeatism prevails: 'they will not listen to us anyway, so why bother'. The subtext here speaks to power inequalities through various mechanisms that intersect both economic and cultural capital: class (i.e. working class versus elites, cf. Collins, 2017; Leondar-Wright, 2013), knowledge (of zoning laws, urban planning, bureaucracy, procedures), language (formal versus informal, and often Dutch versus local dialect or Dutch as a second language, cf. Hauser & McClellan, 2009; Paunonen, Vuolteenaho, & Ainiala, 2009; Volosinov, 1986), and resources (financial, legal, organizational).

Nonetheless, helped by a single moment of community indignation as well as a concrete site to direct it at, this time some residents did decide to take collective action directed outwardly towards institutions. With the help of the neighbourhood network, they contacted the project developer and the municipality. They voiced their discontent about the decision and the way it was communicated, and their intentions to work towards a more satisfying outcome. After all, the letter that Project Bureau A2 had allegedly sent to nearby residents stated that: "The field that currently exists [Stenenveldje] will, unfortunately, be removed. We are currently in talks with the municipality about an alternative [venue]. Perhaps there are ideas about this in your neighbourhood. We would like to hear those." This phrasing seemed as if the developer is open to relocating Stenenveldje to a place that suits the residents.

In reality, it took a lot of effort and reminders from residents and concerned allies to actually start this process. The developers quickly placed the responsibility for this on the municipality. Following this, the chair of the neighbourhood network had to email and call many times before someone from the municipality actually took the issue on. It took several months until a municipal civil servant, two project developers, and a social worker organised an online meeting with some of the residents and youth of the neighbourhood. The project developers again blamed the COVID-19 crisis for the lack of communication and information, even though the lot was already sold several years prior to the outbreak of COVID-19.

In preparation for the meeting some youngsters sat down with a social worker to write down what meaning and utility Stenenveldje had in the neighbourhood, effectively acting as a broker to bridge the discrepancy in cultural capital. The resulting document also included worries about the consequences of removing the field, such as possible nuisance complaints from other neighbourhood residents and resulting stigmatization of local youth. It ended with ideas for compromise that included the suggestion of relocating the field to another plot within the neighbourhood. This document was sent to the municipal civil servants and the project developers before the online meeting. However, during the meeting, they stated that they never received such a document when the youngsters referred to it. Consequently, the civil servant expressed they should first read the document and then set another meeting.

In addition to miscommunication around the letter and then the youth proposal, another, more structural source of miscommunication was caused by differing expectations regarding language and conduct. During the meeting there was little space to express disappointment, anger and sadness for the lack of involvement of residents. This 'emotional' response was not seen as appropriate for a meeting of this kind. This left the residents and the youngsters feeling very frustrated and not taken seriously. As a result, they and other residents regularly expressed not being interested in protesting anymore as they felt that the municipality would not listen anyway, no matter what they would do. This outcome further strengthened the

discourse of powerlessness that already existed. Throughout, this understanding of such a linguistic and behavioural inequality ran deep in attitudes towards the municipality and the power of large project developers, leading to feelings of helplessness, apathy, and submission.

The chair of the neighbourhood network, however, did not give up yet. This was made possible by the fact that in contrast to local residents, this person did have the prerequisite social capital (i.e. knowing whom to call, personal relationships within the field, etc.) and cultural capital (knowing how to speak, how to behave, etc.) required to act as a broker between the residents and the municipality or project developers. After several further emails, calls and another meeting the promise was finally made that the field would be relocated to another park in the neighbourhood. However, this new solution would only be temporary as this area is also subject to big developments in the near future, again underlining the prioritization of valuable space over symbolic place. These new developments are planned to also include sports facilities. At the time of writing, the precise plans for this are still in development. This procedure notably also does not include significant involvement of local residents. As before, the few attempts to involve local residents were conducted in a way that was not attractive or accessible to local residents and did not include formal agency and decision-making power for them. One resident who visited one of these meetings expressed that he felt that all decisions had already been made, and residents were only invited to lend legitimacy to the plans. Furthermore, most people who did show up to this meeting were not actually residents of the neighbourhood, but instead professionals interested in the developments of the area.

The case of Stenenveldje is an example of how many residents disagree and are frustrated with a decision the municipality has made and a few of them are willing to put their discontent towards changing the outcome of that decision. Besides expressing their feelings to their fellow residents, these residents also communicated towards institutions that they want to see a different outcome. It is important to note here that this moment of organizing and protest was helped by certain key variables. First, there was a shared, single moment of indignation. Second, attention could be focused on a single, concrete place; Stenenveldje (as opposed to the less tangible area code change). Finally, the power inequalities in knowledge, organization, resources, language and conduct were compensated to a degree by the fact that there were brokers who acted in support of these actions. In particular, social workers helping youth develop an alternative proposal, and the neighbourhood network persistently contacting project developers and the municipality.

In the end, however, constant miscommunication (whether intentional or not), lengthy delays, a lack of actual decision-making power for locals, and misalignments about expectations on conduct and language all led to further feelings of disappointment and powerlessness. As a result, the few active residents ultimately returned to

communicating their frustrations only to their fellow neighbours, strengthened in their conviction that this is all they can do, as described above in the case of 'Scharn Noord'.

Municipality to demolish playgrounds: successful mobilisation

The third and final case in our analysis revolves around the decision from the municipality to demolish a number of playgrounds in the city. Below, we offer a brief description of this moment of discontent where mobilisation was in fact realized, and their goals effectively attained. Some of the same dynamics remain at play as in the previous two cases, but by contrast, some key aspects tipped the balance in favour of residents ultimately being heard.

In March 2021, the municipality announced that it was planning to remove 125 out of the 200 playgrounds in Maastricht due to budget cuts (Philippens, 2021; Philippens & Bartholomeus, 2021). Maastricht had a comparatively high deficit of €27 million and this decision would save up to €200,000. This news resulted in an uproar across the city. Many residents, also in Wittevrouwenveld, strongly disagreed with this decision and emphasized how important the playgrounds are for not only the children in the city but also for sense of community and integration and mutual understanding of different groups in the city (Philippens, 2021). All over Maastricht, (grand)parents, neighbourhood networks, and other social/welfare organisations put up banners at the playgrounds in their neighbourhoods, sent letters to the city council, and contacted the media or their local political representatives. An online petition was started to call on the city council to reverse the decision (Geerts, 2021). A local photographer started an initiative where parents were asked to post pictures on social media of their children playing at a playground with *#redmijnspeeltuin043* ('save my playground 043 [the Maastricht phone area code]' Sosef, 2021).

The removal of the playgrounds would also impact Wittevrouwenveld as only three out of nine playgrounds in the neighbourhood would be kept (Philippens & Bartholomeus, 2021). Residents in the neighbourhood responded in several different ways. As with the other two cases, it became one of the main topics that were discussed in the streets and the shops. Frustration was again also expressed in the neighbourhood Facebook groups. However, in addition, a sizable number of residents also decided to take action and communicate their dissatisfaction in a very visible and public manner directed towards the municipality. A group of mothers started a Facebook group to coordinate action and protest. They designed posters and asked the social workers at the community centre to print them. These posters were distributed and many residents hung them on their windows. In addition, this group of mothers called on their neighbours to hang stuffed animals, dolls or other toys to the fence surrounding the playgrounds in the neighbourhood (one of the larger ones is

located across the street from Stenenveldje). It was meant to be a silent protest that was also designed to be COVID-19 proof. On top of this, a group of residents made some banners that were signed by many children in the neighbourhood. These banners emphasised the message that children should be able to play at playgrounds. On behalf of the neighbourhood, the neighbourhood network also wrote a formal letter to the city council to request they reconsider their decision and listen to people in the neighbourhood. To streamline communication with the municipality, the neighbourhood network reached out to residents to form a group with whom a representative of the municipality could talk.

Residents and representatives of organisations from all over the city were able to voice their perspective in a *stadsronde* ('city round', see Gemeente Maastricht, 2022) which is a regular instrument for citizens to directly speak with the city council. A total of 13 people were able to speak on the behalf of their communities (Philippens & Bartholomeus, 2021). On 20 April 2021, the council voted to not go through with the decision. Instead, the council gave an alderman the responsibility to speak with residents from all neighbourhoods and make a new proposal based on these conversations (Van Appeven, 2021).

We would like to point to five key differences and similarities between this final case and the previous two about Scharn Noord and Stenenveldje. First, the similarity between all three cases is that these events first developed within a discourse of futility and resignation where grievances were expressed daily to fellow residents *about* the municipality and project developers, but not *at* them. This remained true throughout the process in all three cases, and even in the playgrounds protest several people withdrew from the protest in later stages because of such reasons.

Second, while the issue around the area code change and the framing around Scharn Noord was not as clearly focused on discrete, identifiable, and tangible places, both Stenenveldje and the playgrounds were. Third, and similarly, there was a singular moment of indignation for the latter two due to a government decision being announced (in the case of the playgrounds) or information suddenly becoming public knowledge (in the case of Stenenveldje). For Scharn Noord, this was a more opaque and gradual, with confusion around its status persisting to this day.

Fourth, the latter two cases had some resources to offset the power imbalance between residents on the one hand, and the municipality or project developers on the other. The Scharn Noord case did not. These resources were very concrete. In both cases, they included notably social workers and the neighbourhood network, who helped in two main ways: through compensating some of the inequalities in terms of social and cultural capital, and by providing concrete resources. The latter is the straightforward matter of providing printers to create posters, materials to make banners, and offering facilities and help in the creation itself. The former includes

brokering the relationship towards the municipality (i.e. knowing who to address and when, using which platforms and formats, with which kind of language use, and by using which types of instruments), as well as motivating collective organization and advising on how to coordinate such an initiative.

The degree to which resources were available or effective did differ between Stenenveldje and the playgrounds case, however, which leads us to the fifth and final point of difference between these three cases. While such support was instrumental and initially effective in the case of Stenenveldje as well, it never reached the same level as it did during the playgrounds case. Whether or not the Stenenveldje protest would have been successful otherwise is difficult to predict. The issues were more complex, to begin with, and involved several more powerful stakeholders (with significant financial means) and would have required further expertise and persistence. Undoubtedly, the difference in support is furthermore partially due to the fact that the case of the playgrounds protest was city-wide, and not just focused on Wittevrouwenveld. This provided momentum beyond the confines of the neighbourhood itself, and likely emboldened *Wittevrouwenvelders* to go beyond the discourse of futility that might have otherwise dominated. If this is the case, it would further underline the notion that they – residents of a working-class 'problem neighbourhood' – *especially* are not listened to.

A final difference between Stenenveldje and the playgrounds protest is likely also how both places are regarded by both residents and outsiders. Playgrounds are easily seen as unthreatening and uncontroversial to virtually all people, whereas a place like Stenenveldje might have been seen by some as potentially problematic (e.g. noise nuisances, loitering, etc.). It is possible that such a distinction also made the brokers who were instrumental in both cases more cautious to openly commit without reservations to the Stenenveldje case.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we set out to take the case of Maastricht, and in particular the neighbourhood Wittevrouwenveld to describe and better understand how large-scale urban redevelopment projects lead to social tensions, and how these then lead to action or (apparent) non-action. First, we described how the Netherlands, and particularly Maastricht have historically approached urban 'renewal' by looking at the Stokstraat. We saw that the Stokstraat *place* as it existed in the eyes of its inhabitants was effectively demolished and its residents displaced to various other parts of the city. The *space* was then remade into a new and entirely different place, for entirely different people.

Many of the families displaced from the Stokstraat ended up moving to Wittevrouwenveld, which is where our chapter focused next. In this second section, we used three examples of contentious changes in the neighbourhood (Scharn Noord, Stenenveldje, and the playgrounds protest) to understand the micro level of how (1) residents in areas such as Wittevrouwenveld understand and frame their relative power and bargaining position towards governments and project developers, and (2) under which conditions this stance can lead to effective mobilization and successful collective action.

There are a number of key conclusions that warrant special emphasis. Firstly, while governments have certainly become more thoughtful in their approach to comparatively vulnerable groups of citizens since the 1950s when large groups of people were forcibly displaced from the Stokstraat, some of the same underlying principles and dynamics remain. One such logic is that urban redevelopment is first and foremost conceived within a capitalist paradigm of economic development. That is to say, even if the rationale and motivation is that a neighbourhood that does better economically will by extension have more prosperous inhabitants, then this is true only in a statistical sense. The fallacy here is that for the most part, the inhabitants themselves will have been replaced. The Stokstraat today is one of the most expensive areas in the country. None of the original inhabitants still live there. Put differently, urban areas within this framework are primarily seen as spaces (without intrinsic meaning, and therefore open to redefinition). During the process of redevelopment itself, the same difference in perspective emerges again: where inhabitants see place, developers see space. As such, these processes destroy or gradually deconstruct places (symbolically meaningful areas to people using the spaces) in order to reconstruct new places, for new groups of people. The original inhabitants are displaced elsewhere along the way – either forced, as in the Stokstraat, or indirectly, as in Wittevrouwenveld.

Secondly, in contemporary examples such as Wittevrouwenveld, residents are at best asked *how* certain, specific aspects of the redevelopment plans should be implemented; not *whether* redevelopment ought to happen in the first place. Moreover, *if* people are asked to contribute, this happens under highly skewed power relations. First, it is nigh impossible to ensure informed consent to redevelopment plans because these processes are highly complex and include a degree of risk and uncertainty. For a plan to be deemed 'successful' from the perspective of a project developer (or likely also a local government), real-estate prices will inevitably rise in the future, pricing original inhabitants out of their homes. Second, as we discussed by looking at three micro cases, power dynamics in these instances are skewed due to inequalities in terms of knowledge, organization, resources, and language. These same types of economic, and especially social and cultural capital proved crucial differences in determining the success of mobilization as well as successful collective action.

Finally, and building on the previous point, we identified some of the material factors that determined the degree to which resistance was (or was not) effectively mobilized and brought to successful completion in the case of Wittevrouwenveld. Let us highlight two main points here in conclusion. First, given the skewed power relations described above, there were several instances in which brokers (social workers, neighbourhood network) were instrumental by acting on behalf of *Wittevrouwenvelders* towards institutions and bureaucracy, or helping them with organizing and facilitating action locally. These aspects alleviated some of the inequalities in social and cultural capital by supplementing differences in aspects such as knowledge (e.g. about institutions, bureaucratic process) or language and conduct (e.g. formal language, letter writing, political conduct). Second, a striking constant in all three of the micro cases, and in fact, in virtually all other similar points of contention we have seen in the neighbourhood, the prevailing discourse amongst most residents is one of futility and powerlessness. An acrimonious resignation to the fact that no matter what they do or say, governments and project developers will never listen to them anyway. Without context, this could perhaps be easy to dismiss by some as 'not trying hard enough', or 'giving up'. However, in many ways, history has not proven them wrong. Moreover, an important component of this inability to be heard stems from the inequalities listed above. In that vein, one could wonder whether citizens should be expected to adapt to linguistic, procedural, bureaucratic and organizational expectations from their governments in the first place, particularly when it entails fundamental changes in their direct living environment. Perhaps such expectations ought to work the other way around.

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