

Een arbeidersbuurt onder de rook van 'De Sphinx' : een sociaal-ruimtelijke geschiedenis van het Boschstraatkwartier-Oost te Maastricht, 1829-1904

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Summary

A working class neighbourhood under the smoke of 'De Sphinx'. A socio-spatial history of the Boschstraat Quarter East in Maastricht, 1829-1904

DYNAMICS AND DIVERSITY

Traditionally our view of the residents of the Boschstraat Quarter East in Maastricht during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century has been largely determined by the sociological studies of Litjens and the historical studies of Maenen. These authors held a static view of this 'disadvantaged area', which, in their view, since the nineteenth century, had been home to an inward-looking population, generation on generation, with little social and geographical mobility. Litjens linked this phenomenon to the establishment of glass and pottery works in the Limburgian capital, Maastricht, in particular by the Regout family. Maenen opposed this view and gave a much earlier date for the 'social disorder' in this neighbourhood.

On the basis of research in this, and other, working-class areas in the early 1950s, Litjens and other sociologists, like Haveman, linked social deprivation in areas like these with the notion of 'antisocial behaviour'. In their view, deviant behaviour in the lower strata of society was linked to life in urban slums with poor and run-down accommodation. And an ingrained 'poverty culture', they claimed, led to (self-chosen) isolation from the outside world and to concentration on one's own social and spatial environment by residents, mainly unskilled workers, who married within their own class and stuck to a life in their own (back) streets, and whose children and grandchildren were condemned to a similar existence of poverty and deprivation.

Elsewhere in Europe this static view of such neighbourhoods also dominated for a long time, for example in the studies of British sociologists Young and Wilmott, who, like Litjens and Haveman, held the view of working areas as self-contained, homogeneous communities, with very little geographical and social mobility. Empirical historical research into biographies of inhabitants of these working-class neighbourhoods, however, shows a much more dynamic picture. In 1999 Baines and Johnson showed that in the London working-class district of Bethnal Green during the interwar period there was hardly any continuity in the choice of jobs and residence between fathers and sons. In 1971, Theunissen, based on an inquiry into job mobility of families with children living on poor relief in Maastricht from 1850, made it plausible that paupers did not necessarily give birth to paupers. In 1986 Lis described Antwerp between 1770 and 1860 and stated that the economic growth of the harbour was accompanied by mass migration from the countryside, leading to social disruption and increased poverty. However, no separate 'underclass' arose, but, rather, everybody became submerged in the mass of the labouring poor, that tried to survive by various strategies. In 1987 the Italian historian Gribaudo concluded that in Turin there was

no long-lasting concentration of (migrant) workers in their own districts. The socio-spatial dynamics were much greater than had been hypothesized earlier: people improved their social position and were able to move to relatively better areas. A recent study by Klein Kranenburg (2013) of the inhabitants of the Schilderwijk in The Hague also showed that the (habitation) dynamics of that district during the twentieth century were much greater, because of the continuous arrival of new groups of people.

The present research into residents and housing of the Boschstraat Quarter East between 1829 and 1904 shows that also in this area there was much more variation and dynamics than was supposed by Litjens and Maenen. Regout's enterprise had a diverse workforce, which varied with product (glass or pottery), level of education, gender and duration of employment. The neighbourhood was increasingly inhabited by employees and workers of this factory, which, while making it more of a working-class neighbourhood, at the same time also differentiated the population as to level of education and occupation. Population pressure led to denser housing and habitation, in particular in the centre of the quarter. Although with the growth of the working population the percentage of elite and the upper middle class residents decreased, over the whole period there remained a social differentiation between the centre of the area, with its poor people and shabby housing, and richer residents in the streets on the edge with more expensive houses. Small-scale research into biographies of five generations of two families in the neighbourhood demonstrated that the members of these families frequently worked at Sphinx in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, but that their children and grandchildren fanned out to the rest of the city and took up very different occupations with very different employers.

The dynamic and diverse character of the quarter is worked out here (as in the 'Conclusion' of the present research) for four aspects: the working population of the factory, the population of the neighbourhood, the built environment, and the biographies of members of families that were subject of research.

THE WORKING POPULATION OF THE FACTORY

The glass and pottery works of Petrus Regout & Company, called 'Sphinx' from 1899, came to play an increasingly dominant role in this 'working-class neighbourhood under the smoke of Sphinx'. To a large extent the social and spatial changes in the quarter, both in quantity and quality, were determined by the development of the Regout factory. In order to be able to explain the changes in the size and composition of the population of this neighbourhood, it was necessary to trace how the population of factory workers developed. Figures on sales of glass and pottery and on employment since 1880 are available. Until 1905 sales went up by 44.9 percent, largely due to an increase in pottery sales. As a result, employment for pottery workers increased, although to a lesser extent than sales (by 35.4 percent), but the number of glass workers decreased.

The working population in the factory was not a homogeneous and invariant mass of lowly skilled and unskilled workers. There was diversity between glass and pottery workers, between different jobs in the factory, between workers with steady and temporary jobs, and between men and women. About two thirds of the workers were permanent staff and had

long-term employment relationships, and one third formed a 'flexible shell' of workers on short-term contracts, who sometimes had other jobs or lived on Poor Relief. After 1880 the part of women in the work force greatly increased. Women started to work at a much younger age than men and often had multiple, shorter employment relationships. This may be due to the nature of the work for women in specific departments of the factory, but probably casual labour also suited the family activities of (married) women better. In the Boschstraat Quarter population, those who worked at Regout as casual labourers were overrepresented, compared to the total of employees working at Regout, and this was particularly true for women. Although the proximity of the factory made finding casual jobs easy, nevertheless the majority of workers in the quarter, such as potters, pottery printers and painters, glass blowers, grinders and engravers, can be classed as skilled workers in professional prestige. As skilled workers, their social status can be classed somewhat higher than that of the day labourers, who formed the working-class population of the neighbourhood before the establishment of the Regout factories.

THE POPULATION OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The growth of employment in the Regout factories had great influence on the occupation structure and the social composition of the quarter. This influence of the Regout works is most clearly visible in occupational categories: workers in 'glass and pottery' dominated more and more. In 1829 only two persons (0.2 percent) of all residents with a known job worked in that occupational category, 75 years later this had risen to 1,955 (71.7 percent). In 1880 employment at the Regout factories was a determining factor in the family income of 60.5 percent of all households in the neighbourhood; in 1904 this percentage had risen to 75.5 percent, especially as a result of the growing employment for women. Due to industrialization more men settled in the area. They married faster and had children earlier, as a result of which the total population nearly doubled between 1829 en 1904 (from 2,398 to 4,515 residents) and the average age of the population dropped. In the above reference years the proportion of residents under twenty increased from 41.8 to 50.5 percent. The quarter had relatively many single-parent families, headed by women, presumably because occupational diseases caused early deaths among male glass and pottery workers.

With the growth of the working-class population the social composition of the neighbourhood also changed. A social classification based on occupational titles shows that in 1829 occupations that can be classed as elite and middle class still represented 30.3 percent; in 1904 this had dropped to 10.7 percent. A classification based on taxes showed that the proportion of the groups with the highest tax assessments, and the groups below that, had dropped from 13.8 to 3.3 percent in the course of 75 years. In the course of the nineteenth century the district became less socially differentiated and in the early twentieth century workers with a low social status had become predominant. The Boschstraat Quarter East had become a real working-class neighbourhood: in 1829 69.7 percent of the male heads of families belonged to the two bottom-most occupational categories of artisans and workers, while in 1904 this had risen to 89.2 percent. From this perspective the growth of factory labour led to greater social homogeneity in the area. On the other hand the group of workers

themselves became more diverse, because (more or less) skilled factory workers started to take the place of the day labourers of the 1820s.

Although the Boschstraat Quarter East was an area of Maastricht with a mainly poor working-class population, it was not completely homogeneous, and representatives of other classes were not entirely absent. Manufacturers, upper and lower middle class, and workers lived next to each other, or below, behind or above each other, and economically depended on each other, without social differences being argued away or denied. There were also social differences in spatial terms: there was a dichotomy in the quarter between the poor central area and the 'golden' periphery, broadly reflecting the social status of its inhabitants. This discrepancy between these areas of the quarter already existed in 1829 and was still evident in 1904, but was reduced by the departure of the professional elite from the streets in the periphery. The proportion of this group in the periphery decreased from 27.9 to 6.8 percent of the male main occupants. On the other hand the proportion of the middle class, and of artisans and skilled workers, increased from 55.6 to 61.3 percent and that of lowly-skilled and unskilled workers from 16.5 to 31.9 percent.

The Boschstraat Quarter East proved to be much less homogeneous than Litjens, Havenman and Maenen presumed in the 1950s. Just like in other Dutch cities, the neighbourhood was socially diverse: poor and rich lived closely together, in some streets even next to each other, and streets often differed in habitation and housing. As the Dutch urban history studies since the 1970s also show, this mixed character, also of nineteenth-century working-class neighbourhoods, conflicts with the urban geographical models of the so-called 'Chicago-School', that presumed more or less homogeneous inhabitants in working-class, middle-class and elite districts.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Because of population growth spatial pressure in the Boschstraat Quarter East increased: between 1829 and 1904 the population grew by 88.3 percent, while the number of dwellings and buildings increased only by 58.3 and 11.6 percent, respectively. As a result of this, settlement density increased from 3.8 to 4.5 occupants per dwelling and from 8.0 to 13.4 occupants per building. A correlation between settlement density and occupant status may be presumed. The number of occupants per room decreased the higher the position on the social ladder of the occupants, that is to say the higher their occupational status and the more local taxes they paid. A property study by the Maastricht Health Commission in 1904-1905 gives an insight into quality of accommodation of 745 examined dwellings with one, two or three rooms. The study established that 40.8 percent of the dwellings had crucial architectural flaws, a quarter of which could not be repaired. In 62.7 percent of the dwellings hygienic conditions were described as mediocre or bad.

As a consequence of the higher building density the centre of the quarter deteriorated into a slum, with limited public space, crowded and gloomy streets, dense and often run-down dwellings, with entirely inadequate facilities. The Boschstraat Quarter East can be seen as the edge of the city centre, caught in a downward spiral of poverty and negligence. Of course the decline of the built environment was related to the limited prosperity of the

residents of the neighbourhood, but was also the result of the conduct of the real estate owners. While the number of houses had increased, there were fewer owners in 1904 compared to 1829: 137 versus 157. At the start of the twentieth century the majority of these owners had lived close to their tenants and had not differed much from the tenants from a social point of view. The owners were often more concerned with the return on their investment than with the careful maintenance of their property. A striking example was the Regout *cité ouvrière* in the St.-Antoniusstraat, which, according to the Health Commission officials, in no way conformed to the contemporary standards, as set down in the 1901 Housing Act.

Yet the built environment was not uniform; diversity between houses and dwellings remained. There was considerable variation in size, quality and ownership between the buildings in the centre and those on the periphery of the neighbourhood. Both in 1829 and in 1904, higher average occupational status and higher income of the residents of the 'golden' edge correlated to fewer dwellings per house and fewer occupants per dwelling. Real estate ownership also varied: on the periphery the proportion of residents who owned their dwelling grew from 58.6 to 70.3 percent, while in the middle of the neighbourhood it decreased from 45.5 to 33.8 percent. Then again, this pattern did not always apply: a study of ten particular buildings between 1860 en 1920 shows considerable variation per street.

INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY

Research on two families over five generations between approximately 1770 and approximately 1940 confirmed the great influence of the glass and pottery works on the neighbourhood, also at micro-level. More than fifty research subjects in the central (third) birth cohort of the families Habets-Smit and Anten-Swarts (born between 1840 and 1890), lived in the neighbourhood most of their lives and looked for wedding partners there. Nearly everyone worked at Regout at some time, although they did not solely rely on that employer for an income and had other jobs too. The job opportunities at Regout's may have been the reason to settle in the Boschstraat Quarter East. In this sense there was a clear correlation for this generation of nineteenth-century industrial workers between industrialization and accommodation in this neighbourhood. For this generation of workers the quarter matched Topalov's view: through endogamy, affiliation, provenance and profession the neighbourhood offered a social safety net, tying them to this area.

For the next cohorts (the fourth and fifth generation of the families in the research) the social and geographical ties to factory and neighbourhood no longer existed: they no longer worked at Sphinx necessarily, they moved to new housing estates on the edge of the city, and they found their wedding partners elsewhere. So they did not lock themselves up in the neighbourhood. The pattern of life, work and marriage changed, even though these changes did not immediately lead to upward social mobility. For the members of these families there is no evident intergenerational correlation between nineteenth-century industrial employment and the later social depravity of the Boschstraat Quarter East. However, there may be an intergenerational correlation for other families, in particular, those who stayed on in the neighbourhood.

These conclusions on the dynamism and variation of the development of the Boschstraat Quarter East correspond more closely with the views of Baines, Johnson, Lis and Gribaudo on worker-class neighbourhoods than with the static view of social scientists, such as Litjens, in the 1950s. The present research shows that from the 1830s, under the smoke of “De Sphinx”, the Boschstraat Quarter East developed into a neighbourhood of the labouring poor. This research places that development in perspective. The development of this Maastricht neighbourhood can be compared to similar developments in Antwerp or Turin, although on a smaller scale. Also, the local population in the Boschstraat Quarter East was, and remained, more homogeneous, while Lis and Gribaudo found that the streets in Antwerp and Turin, respectively, were dominated by destitute immigrants from the countryside.