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## **Social Reconquest as a New Policy Paradigm. Changing urban policies in the city of Rotterdam**

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### **1 Introduction: the repressive turn in urban policies**

The repressive turn taken in urban policies has been pointed out by many urban sociologists, particularly in the UK and US. Cities no longer form a tolerant microcosmos, where the deviant behaviour of marginal social categories – delinquent youngsters, petty criminals, drug users and drug traffickers, homeless people, prostitutes, etc. – is tolerated to a certain extent as ‘part and parcel of the urban lifestyle’. Public opinion, newspapers, policymakers and social scientists now focus on urban problems – the spatial concentration of poverty, unemployment, multi-problem families, nuisance, violence and other criminal behaviour in deprived urban areas – and generally agree that this multifaceted crisis in our cities necessitates a tougher approach to urban policy. More generally, a shift in attention seems to have occurred in urban policies. Previously primarily focused on fighting social deprivation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and disadvantaged segments of the urban population (cf. the American ‘war on poverty’ of the 1960s and 1970s), urban policy’s central issue nowadays is ‘managing disorderly places’ (Cochrane, 2007).

This hardening in urban policy has frequently been described in American and British urban policy literature. In the UK, observers point to a trend towards a more repressive approach to ‘incivilities’ and ‘anti-social behaviour in British cities’ (Atkinson 2003; Flint and Nixon 2006; Fyfe et al. 2006; Millie 2008). Earlier, Neil Smith described the rise of what he called ‘urban revanchism’ in the USA: the idea that the inner cities should be reconquered from the marginal population categories that were left behind when the middle classes left *en masse* for the suburbs. Now that there is a new trend towards gentrification and the middle classes want to settle in the cities again, they are finding many parts of the city literally inaccessible. Uitermark and Duyvendak describe Smith’s notion of ‘urban revanchism’ as the

“(…) urban strategy to re-conquer the city for capital and the middle classes. (…) Revanchism in its purest form, we would suggest, is predicated on a belief system that naturalises as universal the interests and cultural codes of the white middle class while at the same time essentialises marginal individuals into subjects that cannot be reformed. This ideological construction provides legitimacy to a state policy that aims to take back the city and take revenge on those who occupied it.” (Uitermark & Duyvendak 2008: 1485)

From Smith’s neo-Marxist perspective, urban revanchism is essentially a public strategy in favour of capital and the middle classes to regain the city from the poor. It is “(…) a reaction against the supposed ‘theft’ of the city (…) It portends a vicious reaction against minorities, the working class, homeless people, the unemployed, gays, lesbians, immigrants” (Smith, 1996: 211). For Smith, the perfect example of urban revanchism is the violent clearance of Tompkins Square Park in East Village in Manhattan, New York in 1988. At the time the park was more or less occupied by large groups of homeless people. Although the park functioned as an alternative cultural centre, it also was a source of inconvenience to local residents. When the city authorities decided to clear the park, this resulted in fierce fights between the New York police and homeless people supported by squatters and other political activists. Smith (1996: 218) refers to the ‘homeless war’:

“The closure of Tompkins Square Park in June 1991 marked the onset of a stern antihomeless and antisquatter policy throughout the city that readily expressed the ethos of the revanchist city. (The operation) intended to ‘take back’ the parks, streets and neighbourhoods from those who had supposedly ‘stolen’ them from ‘the public’” (Smith, 1996: 221)

Nowadays, Tompkins Square is once again a quiet park, where children play and local residents sit in the sun, in a highly gentrified district with many offices, shops, and galleries. The Tompkins Square Park incident took place before New York’s mayor Rudy Guiliani, famous for his zero tolerance policies, came to power. These policies aimed to break a supposed negative cycle of crime and degeneration in the city. The idea was that dealing firmly with any violation of the law or public order would result in a safer and more attractive living environment. If local residents returned to the neighbourhoods and the streets, there would be more social control in the public realm and less crime and other deviant behaviour. In other words: “once the city’s public spaces look more inviting and safe, people repopulate

public spaces – and bring even more surveillance by ordinary people on the streets” (Euchner & McGovern (2003), cited: Cochrane, 2007: 77).

Smith’s analysis fits perfectly with Mike Davis’ (1990) portrayal of *Fortress L.A.* Davis also describes radical changes in urban policies in recent decades. In contrast to the classic ideal of the reformist city endeavouring to unite social classes and ethnicities, current urban policies in Los Angeles are aimed at the spatial and social separation of different population categories. The rich live in their protected gated communities. LA’s new downtown – constructed with billions of dollars of public money to attract companies to resettle the deserted inner city – is built in such a way that homeless people and local residents from the surrounding poor areas are excluded. Uncomfortable street benches are meant to discourage homeless people, and more generally there is a ‘militarisation’ of the city and a ‘destruction of accessible public space’:

“Photographs of the old downtown (...) show mixed crowds of Anglo, Black and Latino pedestrians of different ages and classes. The contemporary Downtown ‘Renaissance’ is designed to make such heterogeneity virtually impossible. It is intended not just to ‘kill the street’ (...), but to ‘kill the crowd’, to eliminate that democratic mixture on the pavements and in the parks that Olmsted [the architect of New York’s Central Park; ES & GE] believed was America’s antidote to European class polarizations.” (Davis 1990: 231)

Like Smith, Davis describes how the Los Angeles police force (LAPD) was instructed “(...) to ‘take back the streets’ from what is usually represented as an occupying army of drug dealers, illegal immigrants, and homicidal homeboys” (Davis 1995: 366).

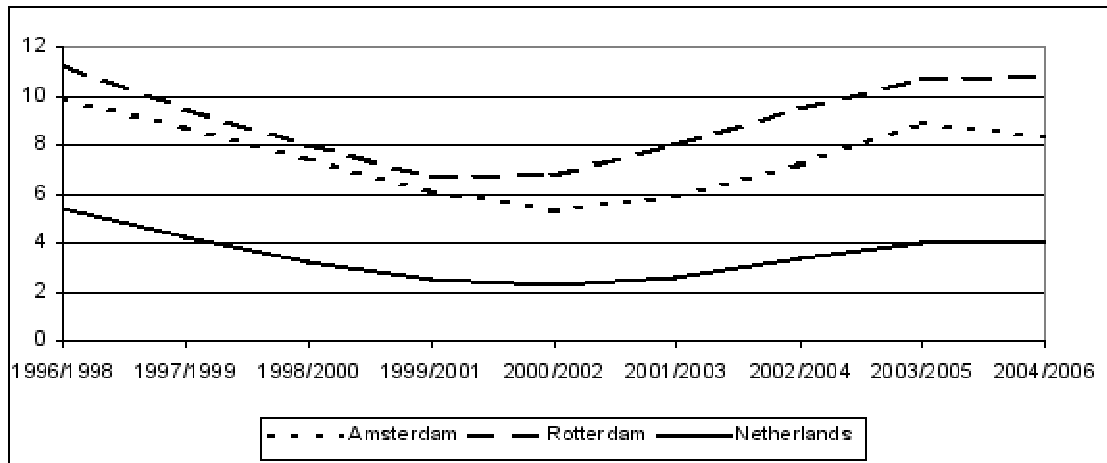
One can wonder, of course, to what extent the analyses of Smith and Davis accurately describe current urban policies in American metropolises like New York or Los Angeles, but here we will explore whether their ideas apply to urban policies in Europe. Smith’s notion of urban revanchism in particular inspired several European urban sociologists. Macleod (2002), for instance, argues that urban policy in Glasgow (Scotland) can be described as ‘revanchist’. With some limitations, which will be examined later on, Uitermark and Duivendak (2008) argue the same with regard to recent urban policies in the Dutch city of Rotterdam. We take another position. This article describes recent urban policies in the Netherlands, with particular reference to Rotterdam. Although there are certainly some similarities between the Rotterdam approach and Smith’s notion of urban revanchism, especially the focus on surveillance and firm policing, we will argue that there are also crucial differences.

## **2 Rotterdam: a port and industrial city in decline**

### *Stalled economic development*

'Rotterdam works!', they used to say along the *Nieuwe Waterweg* (New Waterway) – the Maas river on which the city is built. For decades, Rotterdam's world port and associated industries made it the industrial centre of the Netherlands. However, like so many other old industrial cities, Rotterdam suffered severely from the economic crises and other developments in the 1970s and 1980s. The oil crisis, technological advances (particularly in the communications and transport industries) and the competition from low-wage countries caused tremendous job losses in the port and associated industries. Between the late 1960s and the early 1990s employment in the Rotterdam city centre decreased by 25 percent and in the surrounding districts by 40 percent (Burgers 1999: 37). Up to the 1980s, the unemployment rate in Dutch cities was similar to that in the rest of the country, but subsequently things changed – certainly in Rotterdam (figure 1). Amsterdam also had to cope with job losses and increasing unemployment, but in Rotterdam the impact was disastrous. Kloosterman and Trip (2005) point out several reasons for this. Rotterdam had always been a port and industrial city, whereas for a long time Amsterdam was a typical commercial town and in addition a centre of culture and tourism. Although both cities lost industrial employment, Amsterdam gained much more employment in the service sector. Service employment also grew in Rotterdam, but this was not in the most innovative sectors such as ICT and communication, but more in public services and education. Finally, Amsterdam's hospitality and cultural industries provided more employment than in all other Dutch cities together. This is important because it is exactly this 'fun-sector' that offers low-skilled employment.

**Figure 1. Unemployment rates in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Netherlands (1996-2006)**



Source: Statistics Netherlands, Statline (own computation)

The composition of the working population is a second major economic difference between the two cities. Much more than Rotterdam, Amsterdam is a mixed city that is also attractive to the middle classes, as well as the educated and economic elites. The working population in Amsterdam has a higher proportion of highly skilled workers than in Rotterdam (45 versus 30 percent).<sup>1</sup> This has huge consequences for the economic prospects of both cities. Amsterdam has a large pool of qualified workers (including the ‘creative class’; Florida 2002) for the growing service economy. In Rotterdam people from outside the city take most of the skilled jobs. Rotterdam's working population has a higher percentage of low-skilled workers, including many people with a migrant background, whose chances on the current post-industrial labour market are low (Snel et al. 2000; Burgers & Musterd 2002). This also explains the persistently high unemployment rate in Rotterdam.

### *Multicultural Rotterdam*

With almost 600 thousand residents, Rotterdam is the second city of the Netherlands. The population has been more or less stable for many years, but behind this apparent stability fundamental demographic changes are taking place: some population categories are leaving the city while others settle in their place. One aspect of this selective migration to and from the city has already been mentioned. Rotterdam is fairly unattractive to the middle classes, an important reason being that the most popular living arrangement – a family house with a garden – is scarce. The Rotterdam housing stock consists largely of social housing, inexpensive rental accommodation, older housing, apartments and staircase entrance flats (see Table 1). This does not meet the wishes of the middle classes (cf. Dieleman & Kloosterman 2000). Anyone who can afford it looks for a more expensive and more attractive family house

in the suburbs around Rotterdam. Rotterdam is therefore currently engaged in an ambitious programme to create more heterogeneous neighbourhoods. In many poor areas, cheap housing is being replaced by owner-occupied housing for higher income groups (social mixing).

**Table 1: Characteristics of the Housing Stock in Rotterdam and the Netherlands as a whole (2003) (per cent)**

	Rotterdam	Netherland
<i>Type of dwelling</i>		
single-family dwelling (in %)	22	71
Social rented housing (in %)	55	35
Owner-occupied (in %)	23	54
<i>Purchase and rental prices</i>		
rent - low	42	24
rent - medium	24	16
rent - high	8	6
purchase - low	11	11
purchase - medium	8	17
purchase - high	8	26

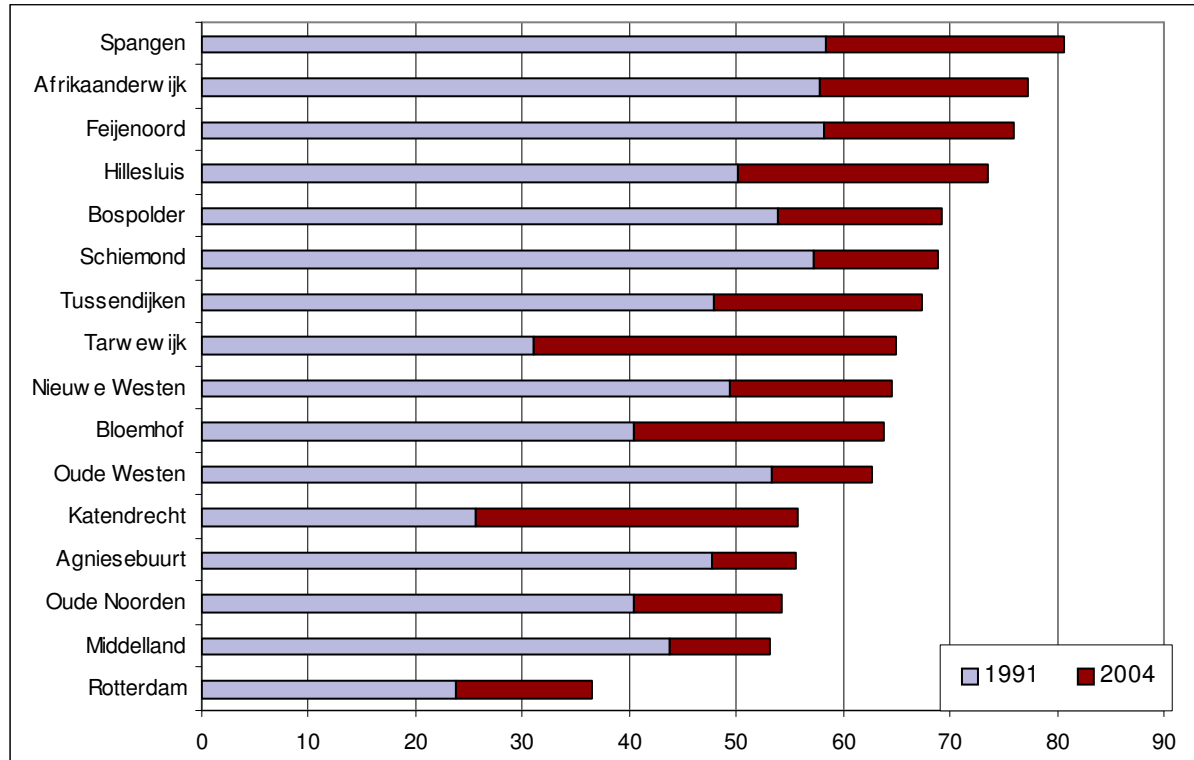
Source: Engbersen et al. 2005: 33

Rotterdam's negative image as an unsafe city is also encouraging the middle classes to leave, including middle-class groups with a migrant background (the 'black flight' phenomenon). Their place in the city is taken by vulnerable and low-income groups, among them many immigrants, that are attracted by the relatively cheap supply of accommodation in Rotterdam. But many young people too go to cities like Rotterdam for the educational facilities and urban culture (Van de Wouden and De Bruine 2001; Engbersen et al. 2005; Van Praag 2005).

The most visible consequence of these selective migration processes to and from the city is the gradual change in the composition of the Rotterdam population. Although there were already many 'guest workers', Rotterdam was still a predominantly 'white' city in the mid-1980s. Today, the proportion of ethnic Dutch in the Rotterdam population has fallen to 54 percent. Over 35 percent of the Rotterdam population is made up of first and second generation migrants from various non-Western countries. The remaining ten percent are migrants (and their offspring) from other EU and other Western countries.<sup>2</sup>

Rotterdam has become a truly multicultural city. According to the Rotterdam research bureau COS (2003), the minorities of today will form the majority of the Rotterdam population in the foreseeable future. We will see that this population forecast led to much debate and drastic policy measures in Rotterdam. However, ethnic minorities already represent a large majority of the population in quite a few Rotterdam districts (figure 2).

**Figure 2. Rotterdam districts with the largest proportion of ethnic minorities\* (1991-2004)**



Source: COS (own computation)

Ethnic minorities = first and second generation migrants (with at least one foreign-born parent) coming from non-Western countries

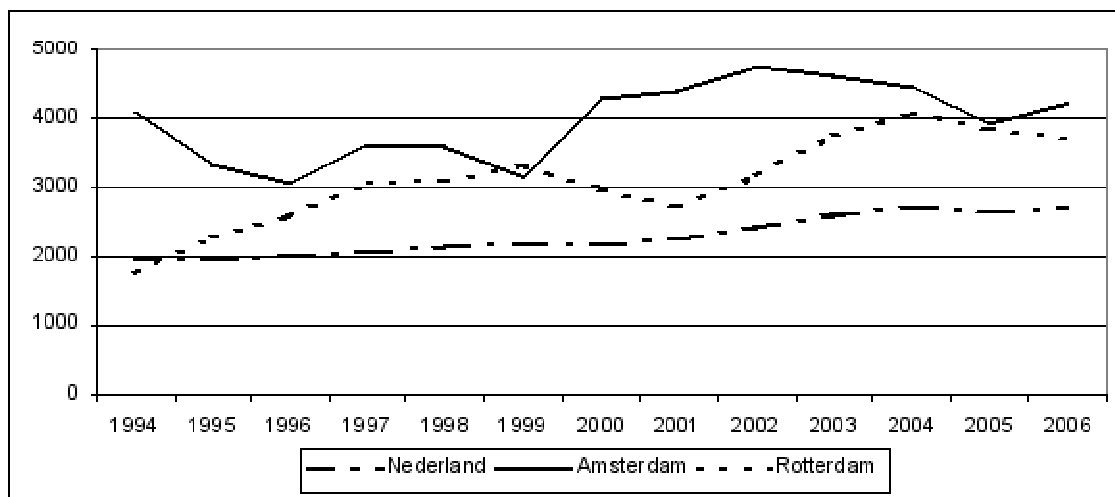
Figure 2 shows that in many Rotterdam districts the proportion of minorities has increased considerably since the early 1990s. In the Tarwewijk in Rotterdam South – locally well-known as a problematic neighbourhood – the proportion has more than doubled (from over 30 percent in 1991 to 65 percent in 2004). Local residents perceive such a rapid population shift as threatening because it is the visible sign of a fundamental change in the social and economic structure of the city and its neighbourhoods. Moreover, in practice ethnic concentrations are often accompanied by social problems. The neighbourhoods with the most minorities are also the neighbourhoods with the highest unemployment, greatest number of poor households, and relatively high crime rates.

### *Nuisance and crime*

Lack of safety is often perceived – at least in public and political debate – as the most urgent problem in urban areas. In towns and cities, breaches of law and order are heavily concentrated in deprived and segregated neighbourhoods. Figure 3 shows that the number of offences reported to the police in Amsterdam and Rotterdam is almost double the national average. What is alarming is that the number of people suspected of relatively serious

offences, such as violence, is almost twice as high in Rotterdam as the national average. Despite the policies put in place, this figure has not declined in recent years; it has in fact increased (information not in figure 3). The rise in the number of crime suspects is partly due to general trends in criminal law enforcement and registration: between 1999 and 2002 the police forces expanded considerably.<sup>3</sup> Wittebrood and Nieuwbeerta (2006) demonstrated that the Dutch police became more active in recording crimes in this period. Second, the increase might be due to the police giving higher priority to detecting and/or recording minor offences. However, that there is a general rise in crime is supported by several victimisation surveys.

**Figure 3 Number of suspects per 100,000 residents (between 12 and 79 years) in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Netherlands (1994-2006)**



Source: Statistics Netherlands, Statline (own computation)

Many observers have put forward the idea that Rotterdam has ‘outsized’ social and economic problems.<sup>4</sup> As the former Rotterdam mayor Ivo Opstelten said shortly after his inauguration in 1999, Rotterdam heads the ‘wrong lists’.<sup>5</sup> Rotterdam has the highest number of unemployed persons and benefit claimants, the middle classes are leaving the city, the neighbourhoods in Rotterdam are suffering from physical decay and social deterioration. But above all, Rotterdam is considered an unsafe city. This perception of Rotterdam has an objective dimension (rising crime rates, including violence and drug trafficking), but also a subjective one. Many people feel threatened and unsafe not because their property or personal safety is at risk, but because they are afraid of the changing social order and the changing informal social control mechanisms in their working-class neighbourhoods (Burgers and Engbersen 1994; Melossi 2003). This process is not typical of Rotterdam, but is happening in all traditional working-class neighbourhoods in Europe’s industrial cities. Furthermore, people are troubled by the use of public space by young first and second-generation migrants. For



local residents, these groups are often anonymous. They do not know who these young people (mostly male) hanging around on street corners actually are, but they nevertheless feel vaguely threatened by them. In reality, these groups are quite heterogeneous. Most youngsters are irritating at most, although some of them may be participating in criminal behaviour. The social classification of Rotterdam as a very unsafe city paved the way for the rise of Pim Fortuyn in Rotterdam local politics.

However, we should emphasise that it was not politicians and policymakers, but low-income local residents who were the first to signal social and public safety problems in the city. As early as the mid-1990s, residents of Rotterdam's most deprived districts, such as Spangen, were protesting about the nuisance caused by drug addicts and drugs traffickers in their neighbourhood (Burgers and Engbersen 1994). In 1999, protesting residents temporarily occupied Rotterdam City Hall: they demanded firm action against antisocial behaviour and crime in their neighbourhood and wanted to 'see results'. Eighteen months later, in 2001, little had changed. Rotterdam community organisations presented Mayor Opstelten with a new petition that sharply criticised the failure of local policies in Rotterdam:

"The public-safety situation in Rotterdam is bad; residents feel threatened and local businesses are also concerned. With their current strength and methods, the police are unable to ensure an acceptable level of public safety (...). The municipality is passive and reacts to pressing appeals with the language of appeasement, conveying impotence and resignation." (cited: Tops 2007: 42, 43).

According to this petition the Rotterdam local authorities should stop using 'the language of appeasement' and should produce 'visible results'. This is exactly the terminology Pim Fortuyn's political party, *Leefbaar Rotterdam* (Liveable Rotterdam), used during and after the 2002 local election campaign.

### **3 The rise of Pim Fortuyn in Rotterdam: local politics in Rotterdam (2002-2007)**

2002 was a dramatic year in recent Dutch history. For eight years, a government of social democrats and liberals had governed the Netherlands. In the major Dutch cities social democrats had been in power for decades. Economically, the Netherlands was very successful in this period. Visser & Hemerijck (1996) spoke of a 'Dutch miracle', but the Dutch

population was becoming increasingly discontented about a range of unsolved social problems: traffic congestion, long waiting lists in health care, dangerous cities and increasing immigration. Some authors have argued that this collective discontent was the result of the economic prosperity of the 1990s leading to rising expectations, followed by feelings of frustration when these expectations were not immediately fulfilled (Engbersen et al. 2002). Others acknowledged that there were ‘real’ social problems (in particular public safety, the integration of immigrants and the deterioration of pre-war and post-war neighbourhoods) that had been ignored by traditional politics (Scheffer 2007, Van den Brink 2006; Argioliu 2008). The irritation caused by these issues was put into uncompromising words by Pim Fortuyn, who appeared in the Dutch media almost daily in the months before the elections. Fortuyn (2002) berated the social democrat-liberal coalition for the ‘mess’ it had created. Although Fortuyn actually wanted to win the national elections to become the Netherlands’ next prime minister, he saw participation in the Rotterdam local elections of March 2002 as an ideal test case.

In Rotterdam, Fortuyn led a new local party, ‘Liveable Rotterdam’, which sharply criticised the ruling social-democratic establishment. Although Liveable Rotterdam was founded only a few months before the local elections in March 2002, and Pim Fortuyn had only been involved in the party since January 2002 (Oosthoek 2005), Fortuyn and Liveable Rotterdam won a landslide victory. The social democrats who had dominated local politics in Rotterdam for decades lost the elections. Pim Fortuyn’s Liveable Rotterdam came from nothing to win 17 out of the 45 seats, and became the largest party in the Rotterdam city council.

Because of the exceptionally rapid rise of Liveable Rotterdam, the party did not have a real electoral programme. However, in their public appearances Fortuyn and other Liveable Rotterdam politicians stressed three points. First, they criticised the ‘old politics’ in which party elites have all the power and ‘ordinary citizens’ have little to say. Second, they consistently framed public safety as the first and central priority and demanded ‘firm law enforcement’ (Oosthoek 2005: 44, 80). Rotterdam was to become a safer place. Third, although Liveable Rotterdam’s electoral programme did not explicitly criticise ethnic minorities or Rotterdam as a multicultural city, the party accused the leftist political elites (often called the ‘leftist church’) of being too tolerant. All the same, blaming migrants and the multicultural society played a crucial role in the 2002 election campaign, particularly because of public statements made by Fortuyn such as: “We admit too many foreign people. In this way we get a large underclass of people that are unable to contribute economically or

culturally”. Or: “I see Islam as an extraordinary threat, as a hostile society” (cited Oosthoek 2005: 25). As post-electoral analysis showed, this criticism of migrants and the multicultural society was for many the main reason to vote for Pim Fortuyn (Van de Brug 2003; Wansink 2005).

A new municipal executive was formed in Rotterdam before Fortuyn’s assassination on 6 May 2002. Liveable Rotterdam demanded a leading position in that executive. Although leftist parties (social democrats, green party) were unacceptable to Fortuyn, Liveable Rotterdam formed a coalition with two other exponents of ‘old politics’, the Christian Democrats (CDA) and liberals (VVD). Together the three parties held 26 of the 45 seats in the Rotterdam city council (Oosthoek 2005: 101). The three parties came together in a new ‘law and order’ discourse that advocated low tolerance and strict law enforcement. As the three parties’ coalition agreement stated:

“The electoral results show that lack of safety, large-scale immigration, discontent, and unrest in the city has corroded the social bonds between residents. This requires a debate about common norms and values. It implies the will to take cognisance of different opinions and cultures.”<sup>6</sup>

The 2002 coalition agreement contained two main objectives. Public safety became the absolute priority of new local policies: a strict approach to antisocial behaviour and lack of safety in the city came first. The second objective was to restore and strengthen social cohesion in the city. Furthermore, the agreement proclaimed a new policy style strongly emphasising implementation and policy results. The time for comprehensive policy programmes was over; it was time to implement such programmes and to achieve concrete (i.e. measurable) results (Tops 2007: 68). A good example of the new approach to urban policy was the clearing of the main square in front of Rotterdam’s main station, where drug users and traffickers had caused considerable nuisance for many years (at least, this was how the new executive saw it). However, the policy of toleration pursued up till then meant that the authorities had not intervened. Through vigorous policing, the new municipal executive managed to clear the square within a few months. Liveable Rotterdam regarded these operations as an illustration of its new style of urban policy-making: tackling problems instead of talking, producing visible results. The new approach to urban policy in Rotterdam and the accent on public safety issues was not just a change in the political wind after Liveable Rotterdam’s surprising electoral victory. As Tops (2007) emphasises in his analysis

of recent local policies in Rotterdam, the new accent on local public safety issues had already been perceptible when the social democrats were still in power (partly as a response to the actions of local residents' organisations in deprived Rotterdam districts such as Spangen). Moreover, the stress on public safety was not just an issue for rightist political parties such as Liveable Rotterdam and its coalition partners (CDA, VVD). According to Tops it was a more fundamental 'regime change' or paradigm shift in Rotterdam's local politics. All parties, from the left to the right, now agreed that an overly tolerant approach to urban policy could not solve the current acute urban problems (concentrated poverty and unemployment, unsafe neighbourhoods, delinquent juveniles, etc.). What is characteristic of a more fundamental regime change in local politics, Tops emphasises, is the fact that it transcends political differences. This also applies to Rotterdam. After Liveable Rotterdam lost the 2006 local elections – in part due to the overwhelming minority vote against the party – and the social democrats came to power again, a substantial proportion of Liveable Rotterdam's political agenda was adopted by the new leaders (Tops 2007: 310). Liveable Rotterdam became the major opposition party. They received 30% of the vote in 2006 against 37% for the social democrats.

#### **4 A new urban policy paradigm: the social reconquest of the city**

In the previous sections we described the major urban problems in Rotterdam and the change in the political balance in the city in the years following the Millennium. These urban problems resulted in a range of new urban policies and intervention projects (not just in Rotterdam but in other Dutch cities like Amsterdam) designed to improve liveability and public safety in urban neighbourhoods, alter and improve the housing stock in deprived districts, tackle educational deficiencies and school dropout, and reduce unemployment and social benefit dependency. In a previous study we described this wide range of new urban projects and initiatives in Rotterdam and Amsterdam and posited that, despite the differences between the cities and the specific districts under examination, there was a general similarity in their approach to urban problems (surprising, in that in Amsterdam the social democrats – thus 'old politics' in the terminology of Liveable Rotterdam – were still in power) that we would describe ironically as 'social reconquest' because of the widespread use of warlike metaphors in this policy approach.

Social reconquest not only refers to repressive police operations in vulnerable neighbourhoods, but to the whole range of social and physical interventions developed in

order to change the social structure of neighbourhoods. Social reconquest refers to all social and physical interventions aimed at (1) greater liveability and safety in the public space of neighbourhoods (stricter law enforcement, zero tolerance, but also community policing); (2) a more balanced composition of the population (urban restructuring, social mixing of the housing stock and selective settlement policies); and (3) the formulation of shared norms and behavioural standards that facilitate daily interactions between local residents (community development, integration courses for migrants) (Engbersen et al. 2005). Social reconquest targets those urban districts where a ‘critical limit’ has been passed and where the usual policies appear to be unsuccessful. In this context, restoring public safety is often the first precondition for further neighbourhood improvement. In determining this critical limit, a role is played both by *objective* factors (public safety, benefit dependency, educational disadvantage and a high dropout rate) and *subjective* factors associated with controversial incidents and the ability of local communities and politicians to place neighbourhood-specific problems in a prominent position on the political agenda.

The strategy of social reconquest can be summarised in five points. Social reconquest is firstly characterised by the use of new, warlike metaphors. “Urban policy is war”, so it seems (to paraphrase a once famous Dutch football coach Rinus Michels). Rotterdam is by now familiar with *city marines* (antisocial behaviour officers, see Box 1), *intervention teams*, *hot-spot areas*, *taskforces* and *frontline workers*.

A second characteristic is the emphasis on ‘rediscovering’ ordinary urban problems. In the past illegal and informal practices have developed and been tolerated in deprived urban districts. These vary from unauthorised residence (undocumented residence, illegal subtenancy) through social benefit fraud to drug trafficking and illegal cannabis cultivation in the attics of private homes. Local authorities and public-sector professionals lost sight of the ‘neue Unübersichtlichkeit’ of the modern metropolis or actually ignored it. However, there has been a shift in a sense that the city and district authorities, the police, housing corporations, welfare departments and other urban services have adopted new approaches to establishing what is actually going on in urban districts, on the streets and even in people’s homes. Police officers and other public officials in particular are trying to re-establish contact with local communities. Public-sector professionals are more present in the neighbourhoods and on the streets, sometimes even ‘look behind the front door’ of private homes, are in contact with residents and know what goes on in the neighbourhood.

A third characteristic of social reconquest is that the rediscovery of the city goes hand in hand with very intrusive policy measures. The new urban policy approach is (1) repressive,

(2) moralistic, and (3) intervenes in people's private lives. The new approach emphasises law enforcement and acknowledges that urban policy used to be overly tolerant of deviant behaviour. It is also moralistic in the sense that police and other agencies have clear assumptions about the norms and behavioural standards necessary to facilitate daily interaction in the neighbourhood. And they consider it necessary to enforce these moral codes, even if that entails an intrusion into an individual's private life (and thus a violation of privacy rights). A good example is the 'intervention team': multidisciplinary teams including representatives of the municipality, social welfare department, police, housing corporations and sometimes other service providers such as the local energy company (that monitors whether electricity is being illegally tapped for growing cannabis privately). The intervention team pay unannounced visits to premises and/or persons that are known to cause disturbances in the area. They begin mostly with the 'notorious complaint premises', where irregularities and abuse can be expected, but after that other premises in the building or neighbourhood are also visited. Characteristic of the Rotterdam intervention team is the combination of supervision and social care. On the one hand there is intensive checking for irregularities: illegal residence, overcrowding, social benefits fraud, tax debts or illegal practices such as drug trafficking. On the other hand the teams offer support for families in need and can refer individuals or households with problems to the appropriate social services department. The unannounced house visits have been heavily criticised, because of the violation of privacy rules. The privacy protection agencies argue that private premises ought to be a 'government-free sphere'. The authorities may knock on doors offering social support, but not to check on households. It is argued that the intervention teams take residents by surprise and put pressure on them to get access to the premises. Once the intervention team is allowed into a residence, many more things are assessed and monitored than was initially agreed to or understood by the resident (the Rotterdam ombudsman speaks of a 'trawling procedure' that leads to numerous 'extra observations'). Lastly, severe sanctions such as people being expelled from their homes and placing a steel door to close off the premises have allegedly been implemented without sufficient cause.<sup>7</sup> The intervention teams respond by asserting that in over ten thousand house visits there were only a few cases where formal complaints were made (Tops 2007: 219).

A fourth characteristic of the new urban interventions is the integral approach to solving urban problems. In the past, bureaucratic differences and disputed competences too often impeded effective problem-solving in deprived urban neighbourhoods. Too often, police interventions ran counter to the actions of social workers and vice-versa. 'Multidisciplinary

coordination' is therefore the new buzzword in urban policies. The introduction of 'city marines' and other 'street-level bureaucrats' (neighbourhood wardens, street managers, police officers as 'neighbourhood directors', etc.) is also interesting for another reason. These new officials imply a certain de-bureaucratization of urban policy-making, and the phenomenon of 'frontline steering' is a radical example of this trend. Frontline steering means that the implementation of social programmes (on the city's 'front line') takes priority. Complex policy processes in deprived urban districts have their own dynamic that does not lend itself to being directed from above. Urban policies are therefore developed and directed by policy implementers 'in the thick of it'. In Rotterdam this new approach has taken concrete form in the 'Bureau Frontline', and it implies a new policy logic. Traditionally, policy starts with a policy design that is determined in advance and is fleshed out in policy implementation ('design logic'). The problem is, however, that the policy designers are often at too great a distance from actual policy practice. In frontline steering, the intervention arises in and from actual policy practice ('action logic') (Hartman & Tops 2005).

**Box 1: *City marines***

An example of the new integral approach to urban policy is the introduction in Rotterdam and later in Amsterdam of antisocial behaviour officers, called 'city marines'. The idea is to have the best public servants in the worst neighbourhoods, not in city hall. City marines are appointed to tackle urgent public safety problems in specific neighbourhoods or linked to specific population categories (such as drug addicts). City marines function both as 'lubricating oil' and as 'crowbars'. On the one hand, they are skilful process managers who induce all parties involved in local policies (municipal services, the police and justice department, social services, etc.) to cooperate. On the other hand, they have the power (for instance, because of their direct line to the Rotterdam municipal council) to call uncooperative institutions and officials to order. Furthermore, the city marines have their own budget (up to €3 million) that they are reasonably free to dispose of. This, of course, makes them attractive to the other parties involved (Tops 2007: 194, 209).

A final characteristic of social reconquest is that urban problem-solving requires policy interventions at different levels of governance. For some social problems (for example lack of public safety), the street or neighbourhood are the relevant level of intervention. However, many problems can not be solved in the neighbourhood. Unemployment, for instance, requires social and economic interventions at city or regional level. Too often urban policy-makers waste their time trying to bring employment to the neighbourhood (with so-called 'neighbourhood economy' initiatives). This may be a sensible in very large cities (for instance in the US), but not in relatively small cities in the Netherlands where the distance between homes and workplaces can never be insurmountable. Other issues require public policy interventions at national (or even supra-national) level. National policy interventions may be

necessary when local policy practices that are meant to tackle outsized urban problems are incompatible with existing legislation.

**Box 2: The 'Rotterdam Act' (2005)**

An example of national policy interventions to facilitate local urban policies is the introduction of the Major Cities (Exceptional Measures ) Act (also referred to as the 'Rotterdam Act') in 2005. The Act came about following remarks made in the media by Dominic Schrijer, then member of the borough executive in Charlois, one of Rotterdam's most deprived areas. Schrijer (2003), a leading social democrat, argued that Charlois could not accommodate any more vulnerable residents. Although Schrijer deliberately spoke of unemployed people, social benefit recipients, and illegal aliens without any formal means of existence, rather than of 'migrants' or 'minorities', his outburst started off a local debate about a 'migrant halt'. Marco Pastors, member of the executive representing Liveable Rotterdam, demanded a 'complete halt' to the influx of low-income immigrants into Rotterdam; local media labelled this 'a fence around the city'. Although Rotterdam municipal executive distanced itself from Pastors' anti-immigrant position, it did announce a 'stricter settlement policy' in certain Rotterdam boroughs. In its policy paper *Rotterdam zet door* [Rotterdam sees it through] (2003), it says that the city wants to control the 'influx of deprived groups into the region, city and borough'. Anyone wishing to settle in certain problematic parts of the city has to apply for a 'settlement permit'. Eligibility for such a permit is based on income from formal employment.<sup>8</sup> This requirement does not apply to Rotterdam residents, but only to individuals and families who want to move into these neighbourhoods from outside Rotterdam. This formulation of the selective settlement policy carefully avoided mentioning ethnic origin as the criterion for admittance to the city, because that would be discriminatory. Nevertheless, Rotterdam's selective settlement policy was incompatible with existing Dutch legislation. The city therefore asked the Dutch government to change the law. In December 2005, the Dutch government announced a new Act that would increase the legal scope available to municipalities to deal with urgent urban problems. The Act enabled municipalities to restrict the influx of new vulnerable residents into problem-ridden urban areas (Engbersen et al. 2005: 20-21)

## 5 Discussion

In this article we have argued that a new urban policy paradigm has arisen in Rotterdam and other Dutch cities, one that we called 'social reconquest'. In this concluding section we would like to compare current urban policy practices in the Netherlands with notions such as 'urban revanchism' in American urban sociology literature. Are the new Rotterdam urban policy practices another example of urban revanchism, as others (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008) have previously argued? Or is 'social reconquest' in the Netherlands profoundly different from 'urban revanchism'? At first sight, the obvious similarities between both concepts and the underlying policy practices are striking. Urban policy, both in the Netherlands and in the US, has taken an undeniably repressive turn. The period in which deviant or even illicit behaviour in cities was tolerated seems to be over. Even the famous Dutch 'coffee shops' that openly sell soft drugs, though still widely present in cities like Rotterdam and Amsterdam, are under fire nowadays. On the other hand, the fact that 'coffee shops' are still present and



tolerated by local authorities clearly illustrates huge differences in the public policy climate in the Netherlands and the US. If Dutch urban policy has become less tolerant and more repressive in recent years, it is at least on a different level from in the US.

We have nevertheless seen many examples of a more repressive urban policy approach in Rotterdam (and Amsterdam; cf. Engbersen et al. 2005). The repressive aspects of the new urban policy paradigm can be summed up as: more surveillance, better targeting and tougher interventions. Several policy initiatives we described here are aimed at improved monitoring of what happens in the city: observing local residents' behaviour, keeping tags on youth street gangs, camera surveillance (not yet mentioned, but widely present in Rotterdam), even 'looking behind the front door' and randomly stopping passers-by to carry out 'preventive body searches'. Finally, recent urban policy in the Netherlands has become more repressive in a sense that tough measures (including intrusions into the private lives of citizens) are no longer avoided. Such measures range from evicting undocumented migrants, illegal tenants or local residents that turn their attics into a cannabis factory from their homes and barricading them with steel doors, to removing hundreds of individuals that cause the most nuisance in Rotterdam 'from the streets'.

All of this seems to fit perfectly with Smith's notion of urban revanchism. However, there are at least three crucial differences between current Dutch urban policy practices and Smith's notion of urban revanchism. Firstly, in Smith's neo-Marxist perspective urban revanchism is a strategy conducted by state institutions on behalf of capital and the middle classes that aims to reconquer the city. The Rotterdam experience is different. The demand for tougher police action in Rotterdam's deprived neighbourhoods originally came from local residents' organisations. The call for more repressive action became much louder after the rise of Pim Fortuyn and Liveable Rotterdam. Whatever one might say about Fortuyn and Liveable Rotterdam, their political support came from low-income groups rather than from the middle classes. Rotterdam also wanted to attract middle-class families back into the city, but this is certainly not the only reason for the more repressive approach adopted. The first and foremost reason was to create more public safety and improve the quality of life, particularly in Rotterdam's most deprived areas.

A second major difference is that repressive policies in Rotterdam go hand-in-hand with social care. In Smith's concept of urban revanchism this would be inconceivable, since the poor and other marginalised individuals are seen as essentially incorrigible (cf. Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008). In this perspective, the strategy for urban policymakers is: repression and punishment (Wacquant 2008) or driving them out (Smith 1996). The Rotterdam urban

policy practice is a more complex combination of three strategies: repression, social care, and prevention. The element of social care may have been less than fully explored thus far. However, when the Rotterdam local authorities try to remove hundreds of individuals causing the most nuisance in the city from the streets, this is not a purely repressive intervention. In fact, most of these individuals (homeless people, drug addicts, people with mental problems, etc.) are placed in a social programme trying to help them get their lives on track again. When the Rotterdam local authorities cleared prostitutes from certain areas, it offered social care and shelter to any (often addicted) woman participating in street prostitution (although it is unknown how many women accepted this assistance). The largest policy success is that Rotterdam has hardly any homeless people sleeping rough anymore. This is not because the homeless have been driven out of the city, as Smith would assume, but because Rotterdam – like several other Dutch cities – has invested in shelters for the homeless in several parts of the city. Of course, the Rotterdam homeless problem has not been solved. The greatest problem now is the limited throughput from the homeless shelters to supervised or regular housing, in addition to the new homeless people arriving in Rotterdam and other Dutch cities. The number of homeless people sleeping rough has nevertheless declined radically in recent years, demonstrating the success of the social care strategy in Rotterdam and other cities.

Thirdly, as Uitermark and Duyvendak (2008) also indicated, the objectives of urban policy in Rotterdam are different. Rotterdam urban policy is not aimed at exclusion or segregation, as authors like Smith and Davis see happening in the USA, but rather at disciplining and civilising marginal population categories. This is achieved in two ways. First through a policy based on repression and care (see point one) and second, through creating a mixed housing stock to ensure that the middle-classes remain in the city or return. This policy of social mixing is a key element of urban restructuring in Rotterdam. To what extent the policy will be fully implemented is however questionable. Positive evaluations of certain urban restructuring projects have been published, but there is also considerable criticism of the ‘mantra of the mix’ (Bolt and Van Kempen 2008). There is justified criticism of the assumption that the impact of a mixed neighbourhood to discipline or civilise. Research has shown, after all, that mixing between socioeconomic classes – in the sense of mutual contact – is limited. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that the policy of social reconquest in Rotterdam is a policy of segregation.

It is therefore these three elements: (1. the populist basis for social reconquest policy; 2. the combination of repression and care, and 3. the social mixing housing policy) that lead us to conclude that the concept of social revanchism does not apply to Rotterdam. There is

however a revanchist tone in the populist discourse on lack of safety and quality of life that is directed against migrants, particularly Muslims. It was therefore particularly interesting that in the 2006 local elections migrants flocked to the polling stations to wreak their 'revenge' on Liveable Rotterdam. The turnout increased strongly amongst people of Moroccan origin in particular: from 30 % in 2002 to 58 % in 2006 – equal to the overall turnout in the city (Tillie 2006: 22). These results make it clear that there are risks attached to a social reconquest policy. On the one hand, such a policy has strong support ( also among migrants), on the other it helps create a divided city.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures relating to 2002 from Kloosterman & Trip (2005: 44).

<sup>2</sup> Figures relating to 1986 from Engbersen et al. (2005: 26), figures relating to 2006 from COS, Rotterdam's municipal research centre ([www.cos.rotterdam.nl](http://www.cos.rotterdam.nl)). In Dutch statistics both first and second generation immigrants are usually counted as 'migrants' (though the word used is 'allochtonen'). This therefore includes both persons born outside the Netherlands and those born in the Netherlands of foreign-born parents. Their nationality is irrelevant. A distinction is then drawn between migrants from Western and/or industrialised nations (Europe, North America, Oceania, Japan, Israel and the former Dutch colony of Indonesia) and migrants from non-Western countries (Turkey, the entire continent of Africa, South America and Asia, except for the countries falling into the first category).

<sup>3</sup> The number of police officers increased from 40,000 to about 47,000 between 1999 and 2002 (Ministry of Justice, 2005, 127).

<sup>4</sup> Brinkman Commission (officially *Visitatiecommissie Grotestedenbeleid*), which investigated the problems and policy pursued in the major cities.

<sup>5</sup> Ivo Opstelten was appointed mayor of Rotterdam in 1999. The passage quoted comes from his first New Year's speech, at the beginning of 2000 (cited Tops 2007: 50).

<sup>6</sup> Rotterdamcoalition agreement (2002) *Het nieuwe élan voor Rotterdam* [The new élan for Rotterdam], p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Report issued by the Rotterdam ombudsman (2008).

<sup>8</sup> The criterion for eligibility for a settlement permit has changed in recent years: initially the condition was a household income of at least 120% of the minimum income, later it became income from employment (certain groups such as students and old age pension recipients being exempted).