4. PROSPECTS OF URBANITY:
NEW CULTURAL IDENTITIES?
4.1 • Landscapes of Power in Amsterdam?

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The Theme

There has recently been much debate in the Netherlands, about the future “spatial design” of the country. These discussions have in part been stimulated by the national government, which for the fifth time since the end of the 1950s is preparing a policy document outlining the future shape of land use in the country. But they have also been fostered by the increasing media coverage in recent years of the new North American metropolitan landscape. This landscape is characterized by (1) an increasing deconcentration of urban residents and businesses into the hinterland of the old core cities; (2) an increasing differentiation between amenity clusters, leisure districts and employment zones, both within and outside the old core cities; (3) an increasing economic and geographical polarization within these expanding “urban fields,” between flourishing office centers and luxury residential areas at one end of the scale and decayed industrial areas and slums at the other; (4) an increasing tendency toward the formation of “enclaves” in the form of protected, socially-profiled local residential communities and amenity clusters and; (5) the increasing importance of design in the configuration of new residential areas and centers (Zukin 1991, 1995; Knox 1992; Soja 2000). In this respect, Zukin talks about a trend towards a polarized configuration of “landscapes of power,” characterized by increasing disparities in economic capacity and a matching cultural “packaging” between winning and losing clusters of land use (Zukin 1991). For the majority of Dutch observers, this trend presents such a frightening picture that government intervention is being demanded to prevent something of a similar nature occurring here. A minority, however, does believe that there are attractive aspects to this development – for example, a greater geographical diversity which has been sadly lacking in Dutch planning in the past.

The above in essence describes the theme of this paper. Amsterdam, or rather the Amsterdam region, is part of the Netherlands. To what extent is it conceivable that over the next few decades – for example, between now and 2030 – this region will evolve into a constellation of “landscapes of power,” both at the macro level through the creation of a polarized and internally economically powerful urban region and at the micro level through the formation of fortified, socially-profiled neighborhoods and
amenity centers within that region? In answering this question, two matters will be addressed in turn:

1. First, there will be a brief examination of the types of landscape found in the Amsterdam region in 2000, with specific comparisons between them and the North American landscapes of power. Although until recently it almost went without saying that differences in land-use structures between countries could be ascribed to the differences in their economic structures (Pred 1977), today it no longer seems useful to primarily attribute the singularity of the metropolitan land-use structure in the United States – when compared with the Netherlands, for example – to its particular domestic economic relationships. Over the past 30 years, the nature of economic developments in the post-industrial world has been far too international, and even global, at that. As a consequence, there are no longer that many real differences in economic structure between the Netherlands and the United States. On the other hand, political and administrative relationships – and with them such matters as the readiness of the government to intervene in strategic urban planning matters – until now have been fundamentally different in the United States compared to, for example, the Netherlands. Because of this, the specific characteristics of landscape-relevant relationships in the Amsterdam region as of 2000 will in this paper first and foremost be associated with the features of the political administrative system which is particular to Amsterdam and the Netherlands.

2. This will be followed by an appraisal of the likely types of land use to be found in the Amsterdam region in the future. The appraisal will take the form of a policy-centered projection (WRR 1980, 1983) and shall thus be based upon a recognizable connection between the future land-use relationships within the region and the structures of relevant political administrative systems – that is, those of the Municipality of Amsterdam and of the Netherlands as a whole.

The concept of the “political administrative system” plays a major role in both parts of the discussion. Here, this concept is defined as the specific set of temporally and geographically applicable rules which regulate the production of social and material reality (Terhorst et al 1997). In developing the concept, this paper will of course concentrate upon those rules which pertain to land use in the region concerned.

A Typology of Political Administrative Systems

In order to understand the role of the Dutch political administrative system, at both the national level and the municipal one – in this case, specifically the City of Amsterdam – as far as land use and planning in the city and its surrounding region are concerned, reference is made to a series of studies conducted some years ago to explore possible policy influences over the future social and geographical structure of the Netherlands (WRR, 1980, 1983; Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars et al 1987). Carried out by or under the auspices of the Nederlandse Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy), these studies made use of a
classification of types of political administrative systems, which is based on two factors. The first is the so-called “three currents” structure which dominated Dutch politics throughout the 20th century. Those currents were: the “liberal,” in the economic sense with “the market” as key player; the “confessional,” a Christian-led school of thought in which organizations and groups in the “social midfield” play a leading part; and the “socialist,” with “the state” as the main actor. The second dimension is based on different views of the most desirable institutional and organizational structure for the system. This identifies two such positions, which often cut right across the currents just described: the “technocratic” view, with a strong emphasis on the state’s responsibilities, and the “sociocratic,” which prioritizes the citizen’s own responsibilities.

As far as the issues of land use in the Dutch metropolitan regions that are covered by this paper are concerned, these two dimensions can be profiled as follows.

From the “liberal” perspective, the region is primarily viewed as a field within which people and companies can conduct their producing and consuming activities. Mobility, both in the form of daily movements and of relocation and changes of destination, is an entirely accepted phenomenon. This dynamic is regarded as a natural consequence of free-market forces. This is certainly true when it comes to planning strategy, and so the government should act with great caution. And if it does intervene, the main reason should be to support market forces.

From this point of view, there is little objection to the differentiation of land use by socio-economic level. A great emphasis is placed on the freedom of individual companies and households to act in accordance with their own needs and abilities when acquiring and using land and premises. As long as the market is respected, the evolution of specific business zones and amenity centers is quite acceptable. This means that even in rural areas it is relatively easy for new nodes of urban activity to appear. The same applies to the development of new residential environments, both in high-density urban form and more suburban in nature. A continuing increase in the use of land for urban purposes is therefore inevitable. After all, there is an ever-increasing demand for specific living, working, and recreation space for each resident, customer, or professional. Moreover, the continued growth in room for mobility must be assumed, due in part to the increased use of personal modes of transport.

Finally, in this vision there is little objection to the growing tendency by residents and entrepreneurs to create their own “domains” at the local level – that is, in the individual neighborhood, retail cluster, or leisure complex. This involves the social profiling of resident or visitor categories by such means as buyer screening, security measures to regulate physical access, and specific aspects of design. For example, the number of government-imposed rules concerning building methods and techniques are kept to a minimum.

The “confessional” viewpoint regards the region first and foremost as the geographical framework for organizing the daily existence of the Dutch population. In this re-
spect, it has a reasonable amount of confidence in market mechanisms, viewing them in principle as an efficient means of allocating resources. But because households and businesses find it difficult to calculate the full repercussions of their actions, there remains a significant role for mediating bodies. Nevertheless, supporters of this vision see little benefit in a government with dirigiste tendencies. Instead, the tensions between economic market interests and protecting types of land use deemed valuable for cultural and social purposes are primarily addressed by a wide range of consultative bodies established specifically to deal with them.

In this view, differentiation at the socio-economic level has both benefits and drawbacks. Naturally, unbridled intervention is not desired in matters which are primarily the responsibility of the various parties directly involved in the land, property, and housing markets. But at the same time those entities, communities, and networks which have long proven so culturally and socially beneficial in Dutch life – the church, the family, the small business, the agrarian class, the old class of tradespeople, the deep-rooted local community, and so on – must be protected against pressures upon their physical space. This means that the market as a system of distribution has to be “corrected.” One example of this is the protection of rural land against an “invasion” of urban categories of land use. Maintaining the social, cultural, and, more recently, ecological, qualities of the countryside takes precedence. This respectively means preserving family farming as a way of life, the rural landscape as a thing of cultural value and nature as a gift of God managed by the farmer. A second example is keeping suburbanization under control, both to protect the small craft-based and service-providing family businesses in the city and to preserve the abundance of monuments in the old city centers.

In this perspective there are strong objections to the growing pressure to transform residential neighborhoods or amenity clusters into protected and socially-profiled domains. Such clustering could lead to individualization, a concentration upon the interest of one’s own group, a disregard for others, and an unwillingness to achieve balanced political decisions through dialogue. This means that a preference exists for balanced local communities in respect to socio-economic level, lifestyle and function, and for amenity centers which are attractive and accessible to all.

In the “socialist” vision, as well, the region is primarily regarded as a framework within which actual social relationships are played out at the level of everyday life. Within this regional framework, the fundamental equality of all participants in the social network must be advanced. This requires political intervention in order to obtain public control over crucial factors such as land, housing, public transport, educational facilities, and so on, at the expense of ownership rights.

From this perspective, spatial differentiation at the socio-economic level is out of place. In particular, free-market mechanisms have no part to play in the allocation and geographical distribution of homes and associated provisions. Intervention comes first through the even distribution of all day-to-day facilities across neighborhoods and in local residential nuclei. Secondly comes the concentration of workplaces and
various specialist, non-everyday facilities in centers which are easily reachable by and accessible to all. And a third essential strategy is the organization of residential areas in compact, densely-populated concentrations so that there is sufficient demand for all the facilities provided and those using them have to travel the shortest possible distance. As a corollary to this, the rural land around the cities must be kept as intact as possible, both to provide outdoor recreational areas which are accessible to all and to preserve scarce nature and protect the cultural landscape of the countryside.

Finally, in this view there is little or no scope for transforming residential neighborhoods, retail clusters or leisure complexes into protected or socially-profiled domains. This would inevitably lead to the exclusion of underprivileged residents and low-capital businesses – something which must be avoided at any cost. Neighborhoods with a balanced composition in terms of the social and economic position of their residents are, in this view, a precondition for an acceptable “spatial order.” Otherwise, equality in the sense of availability and access to basic amenities and contacts cannot be achieved (WRR 1980, 1983; Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars et al 1987).

The second distinction, that of the one between a “technocratic” and a “sociocratic” position with regard to the institutional design of the political administrative system, can be specified as follows in respect of land-use structures in the Netherlands.

The “technocratic” position is based on the notion that the government should play a directive role in social relationships. The political and economic vision is that of an active state positioned at the heart of society. Administrative tasks should be carried out as ably, as rationally, and as systematically as possible. The managerial and operational functions of the state are the center of attention. Its executive power comes first, complete with an extensive civil-service apparatus – particularly at the national level. Local authorities are primarily concerned with the implementation of national policy. Taxes are for the most part collected at the national level and then distributed to lower levels of government, such as local authorities, through specific grants and subsidies. In this technocratic vision, the creation of new local authorities by splitting off is virtually unthinkable. On the other hand, local-authority mergers designed to create more efficient executive bodies for state instructions are a frequent phenomenon.

By contrast, the “sociocratic” position is not based primarily upon planned management and emphatic action by the government. Instead, its role is seen more as a mediating one than a directing one. When problems need to be solved, trust is placed first and foremost in the self-regulating abilities of society itself. The government is expected to foster relationships which give full voice to all interests and outlooks, even minority ones. Consequently, this position is far more sympathetic than the technocratic to both the privatization of social tasks and the devolution of state duties to lower levels of government like the local authority. This kind of decentralization is also seen in the tax system, making local autonomy much greater than in the technocratic model. And the creation of new local authorities is quite conceivable, whereas mergers are highly unlikely (WRR 1983; Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars et al 1987; Terhorst et al 1997).
Combining all the options under each dimension – the three main currents in Dutch politics and the two contrasting positions with regard to the institutional design of the political administrative system – produces a total of six potential classifications for the political administrative systems in place in the Netherlands, both at the national level and at the subordinate municipal level in Amsterdam. Considering the typological sketch just drawn, two immediate observations can be made. First, the current political system in the United States – at both the national and municipal level and in terms of both its vision and its organization – best corresponds by far with what in Dutch terms would be defined as the “liberal-sociocratic” model. And, following on directly from that, it can be suggested that the question posed in the introduction to this paper about the potential evolution of Amsterdam’s “landscapes of power” – complete with protected and socially-profiled residential and amenity domains – in the Netherlands of 2030 could equally be interpreted as asking what the chances are of a liberal-sociocratic political and administrative system existing in Amsterdam and nationally by the year 2030.

The Current Amsterdam Landscape: Characteristics and History

The period 1865-1914 was the first since the Golden Age of the 17th century in which the Netherlands and Amsterdam experienced systematic growth, both economic and demographic. Apart from the belated development of Dutch industry, this growth resulted in the revival of the West Netherlands delta as a seaport region. During this period, both the City of Amsterdam and the country as a whole were predominantly governed by economic liberals. Moreover, the political administrative system could be characterized as sociocratic. This was due both to the generally extremely detached attitude adopted by governments of the time regarding central management and to the still high degree of autonomy enjoyed by local authorities in raising and spending their own revenues. This was therefore a liberal-sociocratic period as far as the political system was concerned.

However, the years before 1900 can be described as much more liberal-sociocratic than the latter part of this period. Towards the end of the 19th century, even economic liberals began to call for local and national governments to play a more active role. Moreover, as a result of electoral reform, from 1900 onward they had to respond more than ever before to the demands of new political movements. At the national level, the most important of these was the confessionalist current. At the municipal level it was the socialists who set the tone. At both levels this shift was marked by a series of “social” laws and measures. Particularly worthy of mention nationally is the 1901 Woning-wet (Housing Act), which introduced state-subsidized public housing. In Amsterdam, there were also such measures as the introduction of the municipal leasehold system in 1896, which was designed to tighten public control over the market for land, and the transformation between 1895 and 1900 of the city’s privately-owned gas, water, telephone and tram companies into municipal corporations. Nevertheless, even in Amsterdam the political administrative system remained essentially liberal during the
early years of the 20th century. For example, although the leasehold system would later be used mainly to stimulate the construction of social housing, at this stage it was employed solely as a means of “safeguarding development gains for the local treasury” (Terhorst et al 1997: 258; see also Van der Valk et al 1985; Van der Valk 1989; Wagenaar 1990).

How did this liberal-sociocratic system influence the shape of Amsterdam between 1875 and 1914? Were landscapes of power created during this period? The literature shows that the formation of such landscapes around 1900 would mainly result from (a) intensified central business district (CBD) formation, mainly at the expense of old mixed residential-workshop neighborhoods; and, (b) intensive processes of congregation and segregation in housing construction, resulting in sharp socio-spatial polarization by district with extremes of “goldcoasts” and slums. Both of these processes did indeed seem to occur in Amsterdam, albeit only to a moderate extent. For example, a CBD did form in the old inner city. But the intensity of this transformation was limited. For example, the old luxury houses along the city’s famous central canals continued to be used as homes by a section of the old Amsterdam mercantile patrician class. And even where CBD formation did occur, the demand for office space was clearly so limited that the old, pre-industrial low-rise skyline dominated by churchtowers virtually was not changed anywhere in the inner city. The small scale of the existing building stock was also largely maintained. This calm in development seems striking. After all, Amsterdam has traditionally been the financial and commercial center of the Netherlands. But a cause can be identified for this weak tendency towards CBD formation. According to the literature, it is mainly attributable to the low rate of industrialization in the Netherlands (Wagenaar 1990; Terhorst et al 1997).

A comparable development occurred in housing. Of the three luxury housing projects organized as private initiatives during this period – the Plantage development on the eastern edge of the inner city, the Sarphati Plan on its southeastern side and construction around the Vondelpark to its southwest – the first two failed almost completely due to a lack of demand. Only the third succeeded, but merely in reduced form. The demand for housing in the city during this period amongst the haute bourgeoisie appears to have been not strong enough. This resulted in most of the luxury houses originally planned for each project never actually being built. It is generally assumed that this lack of demand for luxury homes in the city was due in part to the fact that similar estates were being built in the sandy-soiled, wooded countryside around Amsterdam at the same time as these three projects, at much more reasonable prices and in considerably more attractive liberal-sociocratic conditions – in terms of both lower local taxation levels and the absence of nuisances like nearby stinking factories. It may also have been significant that, compared with some earlier cities, Amsterdam was not booming in economic terms and so did not have to accommodate a powerful and growing elite. Be that as it may, whilst Amsterdam did – like comparable, liberally governed cities elsewhere in Western Europe and in North America – develop a luxury-to-slum housing curve reflecting market conditions (Wagenaar 1990), because there was no
large-scale construction of new luxury mansions or villas, the contrasts in wealth visible on that curve in terms of landscapes of power remained relatively limited. Geographically, though, there is a recognizable landscape pattern. The luxury homes were virtually all concentrated in the southern part of the city, from the “Golden Bend” in the canal belt just to the south of the old inner city – and far removed from the stinking port – to the new villa neighborhoods around the Vondelpark. On the other hand, the city’s poorer residents were almost all concentrated in districts directly adjoining port and industrial zones – that is, those parts of East, West, and North Amsterdam on either side of the city docklands. Apart from the Vondelpark project, though, the really imposing luxury landscapes of power in the Amsterdam region were located at some distance from the city itself in the wealthy satellite suburbs, in the form of leafy neighborhoods of substantial houses. And, like the Vondelpark project, many of these already appeared to feature the characteristics typical of protected residential “domains”: private developers, screened and socially-profiled residents, partial physical protection of the neighborhood and its adjacent parkland, and regulations governing acceptable building methods and architecture (Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars 1980; Wagenaar 1990, 1998).

After the First World War (1914-1918), the political administrative system in the Netherlands was fundamentally changed. Due in part to the introduction of universal suffrage, the economic liberals entirely lost their political power. New political currents, some confessional in their outlook, others with a socialist viewpoint, assumed power. At the national level, it was the confessional tendency which had the upper hand. Every Dutch government between 1918 and 1995 included ministers representing Catholic or Protestant political parties. At the municipal level, it was the socialists who largely held the reins after 1918. Ever since then, virtually every City Executive in Amsterdam has been dominated by the Left, albeit always in coalition with others. This transition was accompanied by a gradual process of technocratization, in terms of both the growing range of activities brought into the public sector by administrations at both levels and the increasing centralization of the whole system of government. For example, strategic planning policy with regard to the major Dutch cities and their surrounding regions has been explicitly subject to national government guidance and coordination since the late 1950s. In short, the period between 1918 and 1995 – when the confessional parties found themselves unrepresented in a Dutch government for the first time since the end of the First World War, making way for the novelty of a socialist-liberal coalition and so also providing a convenient end date for this historical review – was one which can be characterized as increasingly “technocratic-confessional” at the national level and “technocratic-socialist” in Amsterdam. That period can also be subdivided into three phases, which are examined in turn below.

1. 1918-1940: municipal housing policy; implementation of Berlage’s “Plan for South Amsterdam.”

2. 1945-1970: postwar reconstruction; implementation of the “General Expansion Plan” (AUP).

During the first two of these phases, land-use planning in the city largely remained an autonomous local-authority task. From the 1960s onward, however, this was no longer the case and municipal responsibility was increasingly confined to implementing national policy.

In urban-planning terms, the years 1918-1940 represented an entirely new beginning. Not only was it a period of rent control and tenant protection against eviction, it was also one in which the city government started to exert strong control over virtually every aspect of town planning – technical, functional, and aesthetic alike. But there was only very intermittent attention to the economic aspects of land-use developments, such as the growing number of offices in Amsterdam. Councillors did on several occasions discuss the increasing number of conflicts in the city center between the slow but steady process of CBD formation – accompanied by rapidly growing traffic flows to, from, and within the area – and the vulnerable historic monuments there. But this was not a systematic or fundamental debate. The problem was viewed largely as one of traffic bottlenecks, and a solution was sought by filling in a number of canals (Nouwens et al 1985). Vastly greater was the amount of attention given in words and in deeds to housing in the city. As a result, the residential “1920-1940 Belt” features a number of characteristics which were given little or no consideration in earlier development. Firstly, the buildings have been kept deliberately compact. One of the reasons for this is to ensure a solid demand base for public transport. A system of enclosed blocks of flats is adhered to virtually throughout, with very few individual houses being built. Secondly, the belt is designed entirely on the principal that amenities should be located as near-by as possible for the residents. In other words, they are distributed evenly across all its neighborhoods rather than concentrated in one or more city centers. Thirdly, the zone is a good example of what is meant by a “socially-balanced” living environment. Right down to the level of individual neighborhoods, an attempt has been made to achieve as thorough a social integration as possible. A varied population is encouraged by alternating cheaper and more expensive rented housing complexes. Finally, the 1920-1940 Belt is an outstanding example of what design at the district level is capable of.

In this respect, one plan deserves particular mention – and indeed enjoys international fame. It is the “Plan for South Amsterdam” designed by Hendrik Petrus Berlage, which is also known as the “Berlage Plan” or “Plan Zuid.” This, in fact, originally dates from the time of the earlier, more liberal system. However, it was worked on over many years. An initial version was discussed and eventually rejected in 1906. It was followed by a period of intense discussion between politicians, town planners, architects, and other proponents of better living conditions in the city. But it was not until 1915 that a second Berlage Plan was tabled, and only in 1917 was it finally adopted. Evidently, the political climate had only now become ripe for the acceptance of such a plan so suited
to the aims of the Housing Act (Van der Valk et al 1985; Van der Valk 1989; Wagenaar 1990; Terhorst et al 1997). The Plan Zuid was implemented during the 1920s and 1930s, albeit in modified form here and there. All the practical characteristics of the resulting 1920-1940 Belt mentioned above can be found in the original plans. But on top of that it is an exceptionally fine design. The Amsterdam South developed during this period remains a superb architectural and planning whole, monumental in its overall execution and expressive in its detail. Moreover, it gives the district another important quality. Right from the earliest planning stages, and even more so in the version finally built, the Plan Zuid acknowledged the existing luxury housing in the southern part of the city. This district was in effect extended even further southwards. It was no longer in the same exact form, with villas surrounded by park-like grounds, but with residential blocks which – although not dissimilar architecturally to the blocks of cheaper rented flats built elsewhere under Plan Zuid – nevertheless contained more spacious homes. In short, whilst the existing “landscapes of power” from around the turn of the century are not actually enlarged, one specific aspect of them is copied with loving care in part from the more democratically-tinged corporatist urban landscape formed between 1918 and 1940: the living conditions of the wealthy South Amsterdam bourgeoisie. One reason for this was the local authority’s constant fear that prosperous townspeople would depart for the suburbs (Wagenaar 1990; Terhorst et al 1997).

Apart from restoring the damage caused by the Second World War to buildings and infrastructure in and around the city, the planning agenda was dominated by two issues between 1945 and 1970: (a) preparing Amsterdam for a new future as a center of industrial and service activity; and (b) implementing the Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan Amsterdam (General Expansion Plan for Amsterdam) in order to satisfy the growing need for new housing in the city, caused partly by the increased consumption of space per resident. Both objectives still seemed to be achievable within Amsterdam’s existing geographical boundaries, yet the local authority’s need for more space did begin to increase.

The first need arose out of a necessity which many experts thought applied to the Netherlands as a whole: that the nation would refocus itself economically. The two traditional pillars of the Dutch economy, agriculture and trade, could no longer prevent the country from sliding into impending stagnation. To overcome this, there were rapidly intensifying calls for Amsterdam to reorient itself around its seaport, as a focal point for capital-intensive industries with a connection to maritime commerce. By the end of the 1960s it was being claimed that an area of 40 square kilometers would be required to accommodate all the region’s port-based activities. (De Hen 1986; Terhorst et al 1997). In other words, for the first time in many years there appeared to be a clear urban-planning need based primarily upon economic factors. It must be remembered, though, that this was first and foremost a political need formulated by the government and largely derived from national economic forecasts formulated by state institutions. The first physical manifestation of this policy was the rapidly-constructed Western Docklands to the south of the North Sea Canal. Due to an almost total lack of
demand for land from port-based industries, however, in 1970 much of this area remained a vast wasteland.

In the same period, several specific planning reports covering the inner city and its developing CBD (Gemeenteblad Amsterdam 1955; Gemeenteblad Amsterdam 1968) were finally published. The gist of their analysis is much the same as that expressed, albeit in a more perfunctory way, in City Council meetings during the 1930s: that there was a growing clash between the inner city’s expanding role as a CBD, including the consequent growth in traffic, and the historical quality of its existing buildings. The difference now was that the balance of power had shifted. During the 1960s a powerful citizens’ lobby developed to protect the historic inner city. At the same time a movement of young students and artists, known as Provo, emerged with a strong political objection to the creation of a CBD and to the reduced quality of life in the inner city being caused by motor traffic. Very soon the viewpoints adopted by these new participants in the debate were now seldom if ever being contradicted in the press, and in the city a general mood developed which made it impossible to carry out any large-scale development in the old core (Nouwens et al 1985; Wagenaar 1990; Mamadouh 1992; Terhorst et al 1997; Rooijendijk 2000). The provisional compromise reached in this conflict had already become clear by the end of the 1960s. The inner city would remain more or less untouched, with new CBD functions being concentrated in new “central districts” just outside it – for example, to the southeast along the Wibautstraat. Unrestrained city development in the old inner city seems to have been definitively struck from the agenda at this time. There has been hardly any there since the late 1960s (Nouwens et al 1985; Rooijendijk 2000).

During the same period, however, implementation of the General Expansion Plan – which had been drawn up and approved in the late 1930s but then was delayed by the Second World War – continued apace. The characteristics of this construction project, concentrating mainly on urban expansion zones on the western, northern, and southern edges of the city, are in general terms much the same as those of the Plan Zuid: (a) as compact an urbanization as possible, albeit less dense than found in the Plan Zuid as a response to the increased need for space per person; (b) distribution of amenities and employment zones throughout the new districts and neighborhoods; (c) creation of a social mix in each district and neighborhood, in terms of both the socio-economic level and household composition; and (d) a clear attempt at harmonized design at district and neighborhood level, but this time in a functional and modernist style. In another respect, too, this belt of 1950s and 1960s development is the same as those from earlier periods. Once again the new housing and commercial districts to the south of the city are more spacious and luxurious than those to the west and north. And, as before, this echo of the landscapes of power created in around 1900 was defended by pointing to the need of providing homes in the city for the well-off in order to prevent suburbanization (AUP 1934a, 1934b).

Between 1970 and 1995, the State largely took over responsibility for coordinating the design of the metropolitan regions in the Netherlands. Its regional urban policy was
increasingly concentrated around four objectives. Economically, efforts were made to stimulate growth – particularly in the form of job creation – even in places where this would not occur naturally. Socially, planning efforts concentrated upon avoiding the creation of deprived residential areas characterized by poor living conditions, a lack of amenities and low social participation. Ecologically, the ideal was to keep built-up areas as compact as possible so as to protect nature and biodiversity in the surrounding areas and to promote the use of public transport. And culturally the aim was to maintain landscapes of cultural and historic value, be these city monuments or countryside, so as to preserve the identity of the region. In short, Dutch land-use planning at the regional level has been dominated for more than 30 years by efforts to achieve both “balance” in the distribution of population groups and activities across different parts of the environment and “modesty,” particularly in respect of restricting urban encroachment into rural areas. These values have become so embedded in Dutch planning culture that they are regarded by some researchers as symbolizing the existence of a “planning doctrine” here (Faludi et al 1990, 1994; Dieleman et al 1992).

The motivation behind the State’s regional approach is easily summarized. Little by little, urban land use was tending towards deconcentration to such an extent that a policy was required which encompassed both the cities themselves and their hinterlands. This both responded to the fact that those regions were gradually beginning to interact as a single metropolitan system and provided an effective way to try to draw a line between urban and rural land use where necessary. Largely outlined in the second and third Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening (Reports on Land Use in the Netherlands) (Tweede Nota 1966; Derde Nota 1976, 1977, 1978), during the 1970s and 1980s the resulting policy focused on channelling an unstoppable exodus of city dwellers and city-based companies into officially-designated “new towns.” Six of these were identified around Amsterdam, all about 20 to 30 kilometers from the city. For this reason, the policy of the time has been called “clustered deconcentration” (Tweede Nota 1966; Faludi et al 1990; Dieleman et al 1992). In the 1990s, a Fourth Report (Vierde Nota 1988, 1989, 1990) introduced an even stricter version of the same policy. This envisaged the relocation of urban households and businesses seeking more space to new developments either adjacent to the city proper or in any case to new towns no more than 10 to 15 kilometers from it. This strategy is therefore known nowadays as the “compact cities” policy. In the Amsterdam region there were no “detached” developments at all: the new zones were all located on the edge of the city. During both periods described above, the principal policy objective was to prevent fragmented deconcentration of metropolitan land use encroaching upon the surrounding countryside (Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars et al 1996).

The regional new towns strategy of the past 30 years has been accompanied within the cities themselves by a policy of regeneration. In the 1970s and 1980s, this was known as “urban renewal policy” and featured programs focusing mainly upon renovating the building stock in “downgraded” neighborhoods. These were mainly cheaply-built late 19th-century districts constructed during the liberal-sociocratic period. As far as their populations were concerned, the objective was to keep them in situ. “Build-
ing for the community” was therefore a widely-used slogan for renewal operations (Yap 1981; Schuiling 1985). But at the end of the 1980s, another policy made its entrance. Under the slogan “urban revitalisation,” the aim now became to introduce more expensive new owner-occupier housing into downgraded districts – this time neighborhoods in the more recent residential belts as well – so as to attract wealthier residents and thus achieve a better local social mix. Amsterdam participated extensively in both strategies (Van der Cammen et al 1996; Ministerie van VROM 1997; VROMraad 1999).

What sort of landscape do we encounter in and around Amsterdam today as a result of all these strategies implemented since the end of the 19th century? Four characteristics can be defined.

1. Bearing in mind the physical and morphological differentiation between its residential and commercial areas – the variations between areas in terms of building density, of housing and construction quality and of architecture, as well as those between the form of ownership and pricing level of the built environment – there actually are no real “landscapes of power” in the Amsterdam region, and certainly not in the city itself. That is to say, the parties involved in building housing and commercial premises were not allowed to achieve differentiation between them – which inevitably means economic polarization – based upon market relationships: the physical separation of well-located, spacious, attractively-designed and hence pricey property clusters from poorly-situated, more cramped, badly-designed and thus cheap ones. The cultural, ecological and above all social principles followed by the government since 1918 have had much too far-reaching an effect upon land-use planning in the region for that. Only a few leading economic institutions regarded by the government as essential to the city and the region – the Bank of the Netherlands, the head office of the ABN/AMRO Bank – have in recent decades managed to use that economic power to force their way into a prestigious Amsterdam location. In the 1960s, for example, the Bank of the Netherlands succeeded in establishing a high-rise banking complex on an attractive square in the inner city – the only office tower in the area. From a morphological point of view, the region can thus be described more as having a modest, balanced corporatist landscape derived from a mix of economic, social, ecological and cultural priorities than being a constellation of “landscapes of power” which vary widely in terms of prices, building quality, and architectural richness.

2. But as far as the actual functional and social use made of the homes and other buildings in the region is concerned, this – arguably “democratic” – order is far less evident. Despite all the good intentions of their providers, the majority of those who actually use the property constructed for them have long succeeded very ably in magnifying the differences in quality which do exist into a “league table” of desirable versus undesirable areas and hence creating more or less deprived districts. Variations in distance from the city, in dwelling type – flats or houses – and in the accessibility of city centers have led to recent new towns like Lelystad, urban expan-
sion zones like Bijlmermeer and urban renewal areas like the Indische Buurt being transformed, despite a large proportion of new development for the region, into “cumulative problem zones” complete with the high percentages of unemployment, ethnic minority residents with language problems, and unwaged households which that definition entails. In other words, despite the lack of any clear physical-morphological differentiation in architectural quality, a socio-economic curve can be observed within the region separating more and less successful neighborhoods in terms of the careers, prosperity, and status of their populations. Since this differentiation is unintended, however, it seems unjust to use the term “landscapes of power” to define it.

3. All this does not mean, though, that there are no deliberately-created “landscapes of power” at all to be found in the region. There most certainly are, albeit fragmentary ones. To begin with, for example, there are several “relics” from earlier periods which can quite unreservedly be called landscapes of power. Good examples are the luxury residential areas mentioned earlier, those built in and around the city in about 1900. Both the villas and mansions erected around the Vondelpark and the suburban parkland estates in places like Bloemendaal and Blaricum, some distance from Amsterdam, remain to this day extremely prestigious places to live and work, and are protected by public and private law as true “power-full” residential enclaves (Ostendorf 1988; De Haan 1990). Their residents and users thus seem to have succeeded consistently for a century now in resisting encroachment by other forms of land use and intervention by the government.

4. A second phenomenon which could be defined as a “landscape of power” should be regarded as a product of Dutch legislative loopholes. Luxurious environments again provide the best examples. In the city these are found in a number of centrally-situated, small-scale and until recently entirely run-down inner-city neighborhoods which have now been taken over by individual “gentrifiers” who themselves take on the physical renovation and improvement of their own homes and living environment. The exact equivalent in the rural hinterland is a series of what were until recently small poor villages lying in the peat-bog area between the main agglomerations of the western Dutch “Randstad” but have now been taken over by wealthy newcomers, most of them city dwellers in search of a romantic dream home in the countryside. Again, they have themselves restored or replaced their newly-acquired ruin and “gentrified” the locality. In both cases, entirely against original expectations and often in defiance of government intentions, these developments have resulted in attractive new living environments with clear “enclave” traits. They can thus be classified as new “landscapes of power” (De Wijs-Mulkens 1999).

Amsterdam’s Future Landscape: Opportunities and Threats

Down through the years, only one trend has consistently been regarded in Dutch land-use planning circles as a threat to the quality of life in the cities: the exodus of urban residents and activities to the suburban hinterland, in search of more room than the city
has to offer. Until recently this urge to deconcentration in urban land use was the only question planners needed to address. Recently, however, attention has also turned to a second development with potential consequences for the metropolitan relationships in the Netherlands: there has been a growing realization amongst Dutch planners that fundamental processes of urban concentration and sprawl are taking place, particularly at the international level. These are resulting in some countries and regions evolving into international concentration zones for urban land uses, whilst others decline in this respect. Not that such processes are anything new. They occurred in the Europe of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries as a repercussion of the increasing scale of long-distance international commerce. Northern Italy and the coastal regions of the Low Countries increasingly began to function as international trading hubs during that period, and as a result became urban concentration zones at the European level. And this international interaction has certainly not ended since. On the contrary, in the long run it is only expanding. Nevertheless, it was not until well into the 1980s that Dutch state planners began to look at these processes of urbanization on an international scale. It was only in the *Fourth Report on Land Use* in the Netherlands that a policy was introduced to reinforce the position of the western Dutch “mainports” – the Port of Rotterdam and Schiphol Airport – in the international distribution system for goods and people. In subsequent years, the globalization of economic traffic became a prominent topic in international literature, mainly because of the major impact of this development upon the chances of individual cities “upgrading” or “downgrading.” For this reason, the rest of this section will examine the opportunities and threats facing the future landscape of Amsterdam based upon two themes: (a) the increasing international integration of economic traffic and its potential consequences for the character and structure of the Amsterdam landscape; and (b) the ongoing deconcentration of urban land use and the possible repercussions for that same landscape.

The global exchange of goods, services, knowledge and capital is being deregulated at a rapid pace. Partly as a result of various technological developments in, for example, telecommunications and partly in the wake of a series of far-reaching institutional transformations – such as the continuing evolution of the common market within the European Union – the organizational scale of business activity is growing rapidly. In this context, the “footloose” nature of all kinds of economic activity is constantly increasing, international commerce is swelling dramatically, and the division of labor between nations and continents is growing. As a result, the competition between urban regions to attract new economic activity is more and more being conducted on the international stage. And there is an increasing use of international “league tables” to assess those regions on their quality as a location, based on everything from educational facilities to cultural provision.

Almost all recent studies into the potential of and opportunities facing different metropolitan regions on the international playing field home in on concepts like “urban network” or “metropolitan development zone.” Such phrases refer to the existence of collections of cities, with their surrounding regions, characterized by a specif-
ic economic-activity profile and a particular degree of success as measured using such
criteria as employment growth rates. Such development zones are usually broken
down into so-called “hubs,” “nodes” or “centers”, denoting the traditionally important
cores cities, and “corridors” along the routes connecting them. This is often where new
forms of economic activity develop. The geographical extent of these development
zones is certainly not unlimited. Places which are beyond easy reach of the core cities
and their connecting corridors generally play little or no part in a zone’s dynamic. It is
important for the purposes of this paper that plenty of studies have now appeared
which, in attempting to classify the metropolitan regions within Europe in terms of
their membership of and position within certain development zones, enable a reason-
ably reliable picture of where the Dutch metropolitan regions stand in Europe to be
given here.

So what is their position? A large number of studies have concluded that a series of
urban regions in the Netherlands, some in the “Randstad” and some in the east and
south of the country, form part of Europe’s leading metropolitan core zone in terms of
economic importance and growth: the so-called “Central Megalopolis,” also known as
the “Blue Banana.” This stretches from southeast England through the Benelux and
along the Rhine into Switzerland and then northern Italy. It contains both important
decision-making and service centers, so-called “brainports” – including London, Am-
derdam, Brussels, Cologne, Frankfurt, Munich, Zurich, and Milan – and major hubs in
the distribution of goods and people, “mainports”: London and Frankfurt again, plus
Rotterdam, Antwerp, and others. Characteristic of this core zone are the large number
of multinational company and bank headquarters, the extent of ICT activity, the pro-
liferation of universities and research institutes, the range of cultural and communi-
cations amenities and the number of international airports (Musterd et al 1992;

What opportunities and threats does this situation present for the Amsterdam re-
gion over the coming decades? Two possible developments merit particular considera-
tion. First, there is a constant danger of the Amsterdam cluster being spatially margin-
alized as a “mainport” region as a result of shifts in the flows of goods and people – for
example, because a faster-growing economy elsewhere in Europe brings more traffic to
airports other than Schiphol. Secondly, globalization is likely to be a growing threat to
Amsterdam as a “brainport.” This development tends to encourage top-level central ac-
tivities to congregate in fewer and fewer “supercenters” or “global cities,” with their
concomitant decline in smaller cities.

Considering the position of the large cities, the creation in both Europe and North
America of urban networks based on daily interaction and with a constantly expand-
ing regional coverage represents the result of a process of deconcentration from the
cities into the surrounding countryside which has been growing steadily in intensity
for the past 100 years. Influenced particularly by constantly increasing prosperity
since the 1950s and 1960s, the needs of residents for their own space keeps growing. At
the same time, their dependence upon external facilities located close to home has
gradually fallen as they have become more and more mobile. As a result, the not-yet fully built-up rural hinterland of the cities has become more attractive as a living environment, particularly for families: there they find or can create the spacious home and garden they crave, whilst the potentially greater distances from work and the loss of certain amenities caused by a move out of the city are not regarded as an obstacle. This deconcentration meant that by 1970 the Netherlands could already be regarded as being divided into “daily urban systems,” supralocal in size, with work and amenities primarily concentrated in the core of the central cities and with the population increasingly settling outside those urban cores or even outside the cities themselves.

In hindsight, however, the formation of these monocentrically-structured urban regions during the 1960s simply seems to have been a “snapshot” in an ongoing process of deconcentration regarding the location of all types of urban land use in relation to the old city cores, and in the physical rearrangement of the increasing numbers of household and business types relative to one another. The deconcentration processes – which, after 1970, increasingly involved businesses and amenities as well as people – brought about the current evolution of employment nodes and amenity centers both at the edge of the city and in its suburban hinterland, whilst at the same time the old city cores are beginning to lose part of their scope and function. Meanwhile, “sorting” processes have resulted in this deconcentration being accompanied more and more by geographical congregation and segregation. The displacement systems in the areas concerned have also become less monocentrically organized and more complex. Moreover, the rise of new centers and nodes on the edges of cities or in their surrounding areas have meant that such movements are by no means any longer confined to clear regional boundaries. To put it another way, the monocentrically-structured regional daily urban systems which could be identified in various European countries as well as in North America during the late 1960s since appear to have become more and more intertwined into “urban fields” – that is, metropolitan agglomerations organized around many nodes, both old city centers and new focal points at city edges and in the suburbs, and many times greater in size than the former monocentric daily urban systems. In the Netherlands, these processes have thus far been fought fiercely by the government. Nevertheless, a tendency towards urban-field formation can be seen in many parts of the country. This is particularly the case in and around Amsterdam. It is particularly symptomized by the growing number of centers and hubs in the region (Musterd et al 1992; Boomkens et al 1997).

All this has presented planners in the Netherlands with a difficult choice. The majority believe that unconditional acceptance of the trend towards urban-field formation is fraught with danger. Objections to it are therefore coming from many angles. First, there is the threatening impact upon various forms of rural land use, with all the ecological and cultural objections that raises. Secondly, unchecked deconcentration of metropolitan land use would seem to undermine the ability to maintain a public-transport system. And thirdly, uncontrolled deconcentration of land users away from the big cities can lead to social decline within them – in part because it reduces the demand for all kinds of urban amenities which eventually would decrease, and in part,
because the deconcentration mainly involves the wealthier users of land and hence leads to urban impoverishment. Many believe that warding off the dangers of decline, in particular, requires the development of a creative land-use policy at the urban level over the coming years.

The purpose of this paper is to answer the question of whether it is conceivable that by about the year 2030 the Amsterdam region will have evolved into a constellation of “landscapes of power.” It is fair to say that the city authorities are faced with a tough choice in this respect. After all, the socialist- and confessionalist-led technocratic metropolitan land-use policy in place in the Netherlands since the 1920s has resulted in the almost total disappearance of landscapes of power in and around Amsterdam, at least in terms of their physical manifestation in the urban landscape. Only a few fragments of such landscapes remain, remnants of an earlier period and mainly outside the city in the “leafy suburbs.” In fact, the current urban landscape in the Netherlands is better described as modest, balanced and corporatist, one in which the continual enforcement of social, cultural, and ecological quality standards has very effectively checked the physical expression of economic power.

On the other hand, the developments which will shape the Dutch city in the near future are primarily economic in nature. The spatial marginalization of that city will have to be avoided by improving airports and building high-speed rail links. Leading global economic organizations will only be retained or attracted by the development within or around these cities of top locations, for them and their employees, and by the creation of high-quality education and cultural provision. Impoverishment and decline in the cities are combated by making their living and business climate more attractive. In other words, it seems virtually inevitable that any policy designed to overcome the impending economic threats to quality of life in the cities will be accompanied by the development of landscapes of power. That is the dilemma facing the Dutch state and, in particular, the Municipality of Amsterdam.

In fact, there will hardly be any question of a choice on this matter in the Netherlands. The country’s current technocratic land-use policy, which very much considers social, cultural, and ecological quality criteria as well as economic factors, is broadly supported by a majority of the politicians, officials, and land-use planning professionals involved in it. The course of the debate thus far on the latest *Fifth Report on Land Use* clearly demonstrates that. Even with the Report still in production, the vast majority of Dutch parliamentarians – socialists, confessionalists, and social liberals alike – have made it clear that they believe physical compactness and sociospatial balance achieved by central government management should characterize the future organization of land use in this country. It is therefore assumed in this paper that the urban landscape of the Netherlands will, over the next few decades, continue to be shaped first and foremost by partly by socialists and partly by confessionalists inspired government-led technocratic policy, based to a large extent on social, cultural, and ecological principles.

Seen in the right, this study into the likelihood of landscapes of power existing in
and around the Amsterdam of 2030 can only conclude by presenting variants of the current Dutch government vision of urban and regional planning as forecasts for the Amsterdam regional landscape in 30 years time. Two such variants have been chosen. One is based on a “precise” version of the planning doctrine currently prevalent – that is, a corporatist landscape shaped entirely by compactness and by functional and social balance. The other envisages a more “pliable” version of that doctrine. This model varies from the first one in two significant ways. Firstly, as well as compact districts it also features the development of urban living and working districts with suburban densities, albeit as far as possible adjacent to existing settlements and only “clustered” within specified corridor-like metropolitan development zones in order to facilitate an effective public-transport system. The other difference in the second model is that it accepts the appearance of socio-economically and culturally profiled living and working environments, subject to the strict condition that no ghetto-like neighborhoods or clusters can be created. In both cases, these modifications to the “precise” model are intended to protect the competitive position of the Dutch metropolitan regions, and in particular that of Amsterdam, as locations for top-level activities within an ever more integrating European Union, both political and economic. As far as the scope of this paper is concerned, the most important point is that these two distinct models clearly differ in how conceivable they make the existence of landscapes of power in and around the Amsterdam of 2030, and what form those landscapes take. There is a greater likelihood of more or less “protected” living and amenity enclaves being created for specific groups of residents, companies or visitors under the “pliable” model than there is under the “precise” model. That compact, balanced vision allows hardly any opportunity for selective migration. This means that, considering both the physical form taken by urbanization and the socio-functional use to which the land is put, expressions of power differences – an accepted, moderate version of landscapes of power – are to be expected if the “pliable” model is implemented. The current plans for Amsterdam’s “Southern Axis” can be regarded as a harbinger of such a moderate power landscape. Things would be different under the “precise” model. It would simply not tolerate any landscapes of power. But even if that model were to be applied, especially at the two extremes of the wealth-poverty spectrum there would occur “avoidance behavior” towards the range of accommodation opportunities offered by the government. At the “rich” end of that spectrum, one example of such behavior might be constant invasions by wealthy homebuyers of physically and socially impoverished villages or city neighborhoods and their transformation by those private owner-occupiers into wealthy enclaves. At the other end of the scale, potential manifestations include the appearance of concentrations of houseboats in or around the city or the conversion of allotment sheds into housing.

To put it another way, even under this “precise” scenario unofficial, informal and fragmentary landscapes of power will appear – like a sort of frayed edge. And this is all the more likely given that, despite all the policies of the welfare state to encourage compactness, balance, and equalization, socio-economic and cultural differentiation in the Netherlands continues to grow.
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4.2 • Mixed Embeddedness and Post-Industrial Opportunity Structures

Trajectories of Migrant Entrepreneurship in Amsterdam

Robert Kloosterman

Introduction

The ubiquitous process of globalization involves not just the cross-border integration of markets (products, inputs, capital, etc.), but also the long-distance movements of people. International migration is very much part and parcel of the emerging global mosaic of regional economies. Highly-skilled immigrants from developed economies move to places abroad where they can make the most of their specialized skills. Migrants from less-developed countries, many of them relatively lacking in educational qualifications, also flock to the advanced metropolitan areas that make up these regional economies. They have an impact on labor, housing, and product markets in these advanced urban economies. But they also affect these metropolitan areas in a more direct way by initiating economic activities as entrepreneurs. Last year, the American magazine, Business Week, devoted the cover article “Unsung Heroes” to the contribution these immigrant entrepreneurs from less-developed countries make to Western European economies by “creating thriving businesses and thousands of jobs” (Business Week 2000). Two of these unsung heroes in Business Week are based in Amsterdam: Rahma El Mouden, a Moroccan immigrant who started working as a housekeeper and now owns her own thriving firm, Multicultural Amsterdam Cleaners, which employs 75 workers, and Michael Frackers, the son of Indonesian immigrants who has started a software firm in Amsterdam.

Below, I take a closer look at these unsung heroes and others who have migrated from less-developed countries to the Netherlands and started businesses in Amsterdam. I will examine the relationship between immigrant entrepreneurship and trajectories of incorporation in the Dutch capital. To put it bluntly, is starting a business a viable step on the road towards upward social mobility for these immigrants from, for instance, Turkey, Surinam, and Morocco? This fairly straightforward question entails a whole series of other queries that highlight all kinds of aspects related to the resources and preferences of the immigrant entrepreneurs, and also necessitates complex investigations into the wider context where these entrepreneurs have to operate. The creation of firms is – as Patricia Thornton (1999, 20) has argued – “a context-de-
dependent, social and economic process.” Context obviously matters, not just the resources the nascent immigrant entrepreneurs have at their disposal (Razin and Light 1998).

The concept “mixed embeddedness” was specifically devised to deal with both sides of the equation – the supply side consisting of the would-be entrepreneurs and the demand side or the set of opportunities for starting a business – and their subsequent matching (Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath 1999). On the supply side, it is clearly relevant to explore how actors are embedded in all kinds of largely “ethnic” social networks. By exploring this relational embeddedness (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), one can get a grip on how these entrepreneurs can use social capital to add significantly to their other resources. Moreover, one can also investigate how their particular embeddedness helps shape their preferences and hence influence their careers as entrepreneurs. There is, however, a world beyond that of these primary social relations. Entrepreneurs and their firms operate in markets. Immigrant entrepreneurs as actors have to deal with the time- and place-specific logic of these markets.

These markets themselves are neither self-evident nor suspended in a vacuum, but are created, shaped, and continually remolded by the wider politico-institutional and socio-economic framework (Rath 2000a; Kloosterman and Rath 2001). Concrete (“real”) markets are also embedded, albeit in a much more abstract sense than the relational embeddedness of the individual entrepreneurs (Engelen 2001; Kloosterman and Rath 2001). Trajectories of incorporation through entrepreneurship are, we contend, linked to the specific mixes of embeddedness on the relational and the market level. Therefore, it will not suffice to only look at the relational embeddedness, or to put it differently, to only focus on the actors that make up the supply side of the entrepreneurial market. We have to include the demand side or opportunity structure as well. Especially if one engages in comparative research, differences in opportunity structure have to be brought to the fore.

In this contribution – which is an integral part of the Mixed Embeddedness project – I focus on the opportunity structure in Amsterdam and how this local context affects immigrant entrepreneurs. In other words, this chapter deals with the more abstract part of mixed embeddedness: the opportunity structure and the openings in markets in Amsterdam. My aim is to show what the landscape of opportunities the actors face in the largest Dutch city looks like, how it is generated and how this affects their choices on the aggregate level of Amsterdam. Here, an attempt is made to come to grips with “macro-processes that are presumed to have an impact over and above the effects of any individual-level variables that are operating” (Blalock, quoted in Thornton 1999: 36) in a city. As such, this contribution is part of an ongoing, ambitious research project.

The very general question about the impact of the opportunity structure is made more specific here by linking it to the rise of a post-industrial economy in Amsterdam, an urban economy clearly dominated by producer and consumer services. The secular downward trend of non-agricultural self-employment in the advanced economies came to an end in 1970 (cf. Piore and Sabel 1984; Light and Rosenstein 1995). Changes on the demand side (e.g. fragmenting consumer markets, emphasis on innovation),
supply side (e.g. the rapid decreasing costs of computing power, trends of individualization, and entrepreneurship as self-expression) and changes in the regulatory framework (the ambitious program of deregulation) evidently favored small, flexible firms. Therefore, the main question here is: to what extent has this general shift also contributed to the rise in immigrant entrepreneurship in Amsterdam? Or are these immigrant entrepreneurs more dependent on opportunities created by other processes?

I start with a concise analytical framework of how opportunities may arise for immigrant entrepreneurs (Section 2). This is followed in Section 3 by a more general quantitative overview of immigrant entrepreneurship in the Netherlands and more specifically in Amsterdam since 1985. To put the case of Amsterdam into perspective, I also present data on the three other relatively large Randstad cities, namely Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. In Section 4, I give a more detailed analysis of the trends in four selected sectors – two representing the expanding post-industrial part of the urban economy, and two representing activities where immigrant entrepreneurs traditionally have set up shop. I conclude with some implications of the findings for the near future of immigrant entrepreneurship in Amsterdam (Section 6).

How Opportunities Arise for Immigrant Entrepreneurs

To explore the question how openings for immigrant entrepreneurs come about from an analytical point of view, I will make two assumptions regarding the supply side of the immigrant entrepreneurs from less-developed countries. The first is that these nascent entrepreneurs will have only limited access to financial resources (even more limited than the indigenous population). They are, hence, dependent on openings in markets that require relatively little seed money. Secondly, I expect that, generally speaking, entrepreneurs from less-developed economies will also be lacking (or deemed to be lacking) in educational qualifications. This latter assumption is becoming less tenable with, firstly, the increases in the number of years of schooling of immigrants who were born outside the Netherlands and came with their parents at a young age to this country (the “one-and-a-half generation”). Secondly, the last two decades of the twentieth century saw a significant increase in the number of highly educated immigrants (asylum seekers) from such countries as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. The assumption of, on average, a modest level of educational qualifications will be relaxed at a later stage. However, generally speaking, it still applies and many immigrant entrepreneurs cannot get access to opportunities for businesses that require substantial educational qualifications (e.g. accountancy or consultancy). Given these assumptions, I can theorize on how opportunities for immigrants who want to start a small firm may arise.

The first way is through structural changes in the economy. These changes can be captured under the general heading of the emergence of post-industrial societies (Sassen 1991; Scott 1998; Esping-Andersen 1999). This trajectory of the creation of openings is, of course, not limited to immigrant entrepreneurs but affects, in principle, all entrepreneurs and can be seen as the main force behind the end of the secular
decline of self-employment in advanced economies (OECD 2000). The continuing rise of the service sector – partly driven by processes of outsourcing by both firms and consumers – has created more openings for small businesses. Furthermore, shifts in advanced modes of production have contributed significantly to increasing the number of openings for small firms. These shifts in the direction of more flexible, network ways of production to cope with increasingly volatile markets are interrelated with a whole array of other changes. Technological changes (e.g. the rapid decline in the costs of computing power), trends towards fragmentation of consumer markets and neo-liberal changes to the regulatory framework (especially deregulation and privatization regarding business start-ups) have also enhanced the opportunities for small firms.

This increase in the number of such openings is also related to the increasing importance of innovation. With intensifying competition, it is becoming very attractive for firms to position themselves in the first phase of the product life cycle. Innovation thus becomes crucial and small firms tend to be better at this. Combined, these interrelated changes in advanced economies have helped to erode the importance of economies of scale in specific economic activities. The demand sides of the entrepreneurial markets of these economic activities segments have, accordingly, become more accessible to nascent entrepreneurs who can command only limited financial resources (Kloosterman and Rath 2001). The opportunity structure in advanced economies, in other words, became more open to the self-employed and their small firms in the closing decades of the twentieth century in a very general sense.

The second way in which opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs may arise is not, analytically, directly linked to the post-industrial transition and the general revival of self-employment, and affects more specifically immigrant entrepreneurs or nascent immigrant entrepreneurs. One important, more specific way in which opportunities may arise for immigrant entrepreneurs is the emergence of “ethnic markets.” Demand in these markets is for specific ethnic products that are in one way or another linked to the region of origin (foodstuffs and perfumes, and also videotapes and audio cassettes from that area). These markets mostly arise from the articulation of “ethnic demand” as a consequence of the migration of sufficiently large numbers of specific groups of immigrants. The formation of spatially concentrated settlement of (mainly first-generation) immigrants in urban areas strongly contributes to the articulation of this demand. Immigrant entrepreneurs are usually much better positioned to benefit from these opportunities as they tend to have the required knowledge of products, suppliers and consumers. They have, moreover, the credibility to cater to these niche markets of co-ethnics. The selling of roti (a kind of unleavened bread) to a discerning Surinamese clientele in Amsterdam simply requires a Surinamese entrepreneur, as other people just cannot be trusted to make this delicate Surinamese staple food.

If these local ethnic markets dominated by a specific group (as entrepreneurs, employees and customers) become intertwined and cover more sectors (including parts of supply chains and the supporting services), an ethnic economy may emerge (cf. Light and Gould 2000). In this particular case, a wider set of opportunities for nascent entre-
preneurs belonging to this specific group is created. They are, however, also con-
strained as in the case of any “ethnic market.” These markets are captive markets, but
captivity here is a double-edged sword. It attaches customers to the firms of their co-
ethnics and helps in the difficult first phase. However, at a later stage, these same en-
trepreneurs may run up against the limits of these very markets (Ram et al 2000).

The third way in which opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs can emerge is
also more specifically related to immigrant entrepreneurs, albeit less directly than
through the trajectory of ethnic markets. I am referring to vacancy chain mechanisms
whereby indigenous entrepreneurs (or already more established immigrant groups)
exit from existing, neither very promising nor very profitable markets and are re-
placed by newcomers from abroad. This process is analogous to the invasion-and-suc-
cession models devised by the Chicago School to describe the changes in residential
neighborhoods around the central business district. The vacancy chain trajectory, in
contrast to both the post-industrial and the ethnic market trajectory, does not neces-
sarily imply an expanding market. It can even happen within contracting markets as
long as the number of those indigenous entrepreneurs who exit exceeds the decline of
the number of openings in this specific market.5

These different trajectories of creation of opportunities for immigrant entrepre-
neurs require different sets of resources and different strategies. They also imply
rather distinct trajectories of incorporation and chances of upward social mobility.
The first trajectory – the post-industrial one – relies more on heterogeneous social cap-
it that enables the immigrant entrepreneur to link up with social networks of in-
digenous entrepreneurs (when starting a business in producer services) or with a
broad clientele (e.g. in personal services). Surviving in these markets depends on both
weak and strong ties with actors outside the entrepreneur’s own group. Strategies
have to be aimed at this heterogeneity in terms of product range, employees, market-
ing, etc. This in itself also presupposes a certain amount of human capital. The other
side of the coin is that these post-industrial markets are – by definition – structurally
expanding and – again by definition – linked to more customized products (both serv-
ices and goods). This implies that price competition can be relatively weak, because of
the expansion and because of the ease of niche formation. These markets are, hence,
very promising in terms of profits and chances to expand. Incorporation through en-
trepreneurship in these markets should, hence, be relatively attractive, but demand-
ing in the sense of being contingent on a strong embeddedness in indigenous social
networks.

Ethnic markets may also expand as a result of a continuous influx of these immi-
grants in combination with sticking to a distinct group identity that underpins these
markets. They are, however, in principle more bounded than openings that emerge un-
der the post-industrial trajectory. They also require a much more homogeneous social
capital and this will, in the long run, impact on their particular path of incorporation.
The entrepreneurs are, however, to some extent sheltered from competition, as other
groups cannot easily enter these specific markets or niches.

The third trajectory – that of vacancy chains – requires not so much human or fi-
nancial as physical capital to be able to survive these highly price-competitive markets where almost anyone can enter and niches are hard to carve out. To survive the cutthroat competition that characterizes these low-threshold markets, they can apply social capital to deploy informal economic strategies, such as employing informal labor or evading taxes (e.g. undocumented workers). As long as entrepreneurs stay in these stagnating markets, their chances of upward mobility are very limited and they may become part of a lumpen bourgeoisie.

However, the boundaries between the different trajectories, though analytically clearly distinct, are certainly not watertight and not always easily distinguishable in concrete cases. They are evidently permeable and strategies for breaking out to new markets as described by Trevor Jones and colleagues (2000) and Ewald Engelen (2001) involve just that: switching from one, apparently less-promising trajectory to another. A Turkish baker in Amsterdam, for instance, may have bought his shop from a retiring indigenous baker (vacancy chain). At first, he will probably sell to mainly Turkish customers (ethnic niche). If, however, he is able to attract a wider clientele by broadening his range of bread and pastries (while maintaining his “exotic” outlook), he is attuning more to an expanding, typically post-industrial fragmented consumer market. Breaking-out in our view implies moving from one type of mixed embeddedness to another, including not just entering other markets but also a related shift to different forms of relational embeddedness.

The leading question here is to what extent each of these three trajectories of the creation opportunities have affected immigrant entrepreneurs in Amsterdam. More specifically, are they benefiting from the structural shift to a post-industrial society and, if so, how? Below, only a very preliminary answer can be given, as this question itself involves a multilevel analysis and this contribution is focused on data gathered on a national and one-digit sectoral level.

General Trends in Self-Employment in the Netherlands and in the Four Largest Cities

By the late nineteenth century, the minimum efficient scale of firms had already started to increase, especially in the United States. Economies of scale (and scope) benefited ever-larger firms. This trend continued throughout much of the twentieth century and the number (and the share) of small firms and, concomitantly, self-employment declined in advanced economies. This secular downward trend in self-employment was, however, punctuated by brief rises when the economy went into a recession and workers could not find jobs and chose to set up their own firms. Self-employment, consequently, served as a kind of last-resort option, only chosen if one could not get a “proper” job. Self-employment and unemployment thus became positively related: when unemployment went up, so did self-employment. From this economic perspective, immigrant entrepreneurs could be seen as a special case of this relationship, as immigrants faced more or less permanent obstacles on the labor market because of their relatively limited formal education, because they lacked links with indigenous
social networks, and because they were the victims of outright discrimination. They were, in this view, strongly pushed towards self-employment.

Self-employment is, evidently, not just a matter of a push in a narrow economic sense (cf. Light and Rosenstein 1995). Specific immigrant groups – such as the Chinese and the Jews – have a particularly strong proclivity towards entrepreneurship and are highly likely to start a business anyway. If the composition of the immigrant population – the supply side – stays the same and the economic context did not matter, immigrant entrepreneurship would stay at the same level. If the opportunity structure at a specific place and time almost only presents openings for marginal, dead-end businesses, not many immigrants with a somewhat lower proclivity towards self-employment will be tempted unless the alternatives get even worse. If, however, better openings arise because of changes in the opportunity structure, then other immigrants will be encouraged to start a business as well. The proclivity towards entrepreneurship can certainly not be used to explain the changes in the level of self-employment of that particular group. The demand side of the entrepreneurial market should not be seen as the sole explanation for immigrant entrepreneurship, although shifts in the opportunity structure may certainly account for changes in both its level and its sectoral distribution. As Froschauer (2001) has shown, Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs who owned manufacturing businesses in Taiwan and moved to Canada intending to continue in this line of business, discovered that the actual opportunity structure in their country of settlement did not offer much scope for manufacturing. They stuck to their self-employment strategies but moved to the greener pastures of new lines of business.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, the secular downward trend came to an end when economies of scale lost some of their clout in particular activities and gave way to economies of scope. Flexible, innovative small firms proved to be quite successful in, for instance, high-value added small-batch production as in the case of designer goods or such services as Internet publishing. In many advanced economies, the share of non-agricultural self-employed workers stabilized and in some countries (e.g. the UK and the Netherlands) it even rose. In the UK, it rose from 10.6 percent of the civilian employment in 1985 to 12.4 in 1994, and in the Netherlands from 8.4 percent in 1985 to 9.4 in 1994 (OECD 2000: 45).

The emergence of post-industrial ways of production has affected the opportunity structure with respect to two important dimensions, for indigenous and immigrant entrepreneurs alike. First, it has increased small firms’ access to markets. Secondly, it has increased the growth potential. The erosion of the importance of economies of scale has opened up opportunities for an entire array of small businesses catering to expanding volatile, fragmented markets. This structural change in the opportunity structure implies that the general inverse – counter-cyclical – relationship between entrepreneurship and the economic cycle has come to an end. Instead of being a road one would only take if one could not get a job, self-employment has, in principle, become an attractive option in itself. On an aggregate level, we can nowadays observe a rise of both employment and self-employment. Not only has self-employment in a post-industrial era become more accessible, but – thanks to its increasing growth potential – it al-
so offers the promise of higher rewards than being employed, and setting up one’s own business has become more attractive (cf. Piore and Sabel 1984; Scott 1998; Odake and Sawai 1999). In other words, the importance of the push towards self-employment because of unemployment has on an aggregate level significantly declined. Nowadays, the pull of self-employment has, generally speaking, become more important as nascent entrepreneurs can easily get a job and they will only opt for self-employment if this offers a promise of at least reasonable (and growing) profits.

Below, I will explore the relationship between self-employment, unemployment, and employment on a national level also, more specifically, for each of the four individual cities of the Mixed Embeddedness project. Before going into this investigation, I have to make some caveats with respect to the data. In the real world, data are never perfect, and the case presented below is certainly no exception to this. We have to confine ourselves to a breakdown on a one-digit level. In addition, we still lack data that combine specific immigrant groups and sectoral distribution. Furthermore, we do not have these quantitative data on second-generation immigrants as these are data provided by the chambers of commerce and they only register the country of birth. This also implies that the fit between the data on entrepreneurs with those on the relevant labor force in the cities concerned is not completely correct. The latter include second-generation immigrants and, consequently, the share of immigrant entrepreneurs of the relevant labor force (e.g. Moroccans) is an underestimation, as second-generation entrepreneurs are not included. Moreover, consistent time series are in many cases not feasible as the data are incomplete or the way specific data are collected has changed. Still, the data presented below offer useful information on the trends and patterns of immigrant entrepreneurship in the four largest cities.

Table 1 presents data on both unemployment – the indicator of the economic push – and on self-employment, broken down for the four largest groups of immigrants from less-developed countries. The “Dutch miracle” really did deliver in the 1990s. Without a serious dismantling of the Dutch welfare state, the Netherlands entered a phase of high rates of economic growth combined with strong job growth. This job growth even brought down the unemployment rates among the immigrant population. In a corporatist welfare state, as Esping-Andersen (1999) has argued, the crucial social divide is between those in the formal labor market and those outside it. Among these outsiders, immigrants from less-developed countries are clearly prominent. Their rates of unemployment in the second half of the 1980s were staggering (see Table 1). In 1997, the rates of unemployment among the four largest immigrant groups from less-developed countries were still considerably higher than those among the indigenous population, but – apart from the Antilleans – they had halved in about a decade. Although they were still way above that of the indigenous population, the decline was very significant. The Dutch miracle certainly affected the outsider population.

At the same time, the share of entrepreneurship rose among the indigenous and among the four largest groups of immigrants from less-developed countries. This rise in self-employment across the board coincided, therefore, with the substantial fall in unemployment. In other words, at a time when the main economic push to opt for self-
employment clearly subsided, many immigrants (and indigenous persons) started a business.

Table 1. Self-employment and unemployment by population group in the Netherlands, 1986/7, 1992, and 1997 as a percentage of the relevant labor force *

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moroccans</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surinamese</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antilleans</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed **</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* The data on the self-employment of migrants are based on country of birth and, therefore, exclude those with immigrant parent(s) who were born here but who are nonetheless part of the minority groups as defined in official social policies.

** These data on self-employment do not distinguish between immigrants and the indigenous population. As the impact of including immigrant self-employed on the total self-employment is, although rising, still quite small, I have opted for the total figure.


The data presented above refer to the national level. We also have data on Amsterdam and the three other large cities. Figure 1 shows the trends in the self-employment of immigrants in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. These numbers refer to all immigrants from less-developed countries, that is, not just Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans, but also for instance Chinese, Africans, Eastern Europeans, and Latin Americans. They also include self-employed from Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and the former Yugoslavia. This inclusion is a legacy from the times when these people from the western part of the Mediterranean came to the Netherlands as guest workers. Each of the four cities shows a near doubling of the absolute number of immigrant entrepreneurs between 1989 and 1997, the years when unemployment among immigrants sharply decreased. Amsterdam clearly stands out with a comparatively high number of self-employed immigrants. In 1997, the number of self-employed immigrants in Amsterdam was almost twice as high as in Rotterdam, whereas the total
labor force of immigrants from less-developed countries was only about 50 percent larger (CBS 2001).8

We still lack the data for longer time series that show the trends in self-employment and labor force by city by group. In Table 2, however, we have calculated a first, brief overview of the trends in self-employment, unemployment and net participation rates for immigrants from less-developed countries. We also do not at this time possess data on each of the four specific groups. Table 2 shows that the trends at the individual city level suggest a more refined view of the relationship between self-employment and the urban labor market for immigrants. Self-employment clearly rose in these years. Amsterdam, again, clearly leads in terms of the share of self-employed compared to the other three cities, and almost one in ten of the total immigrant population of Amsterdam is self-employed.

The trends in unemployment are somewhat ambiguous as they peaked in 1994, right after the brief recession of 1993. The decline in unemployment after that, however, was quite strong, but nonetheless there was no continuous decline in unemployment in this short period. The rate of net labor participation for immigrants from less-developed countries increased in this period (except for Rotterdam and Utrecht between 1992 and 1994). The fact that the rise in self-employment between 1992 and 1994, when unemployment rose, was stronger than in the following two years, seems

to indicate that the push factor of unemployment even reared its head in the 1990s. This may apply more to some groups than to others. Data on unemployment among the Surinamese in Amsterdam show a strong decline throughout the 1990s, while at the same time the number of self-employed strongly increased (cf. Kloosterman 2000b). For Turks and Moroccans, who face much higher barriers on the Dutch labor market, the push factor may still be important in driving them towards self-employment. These differences should eventually show up in diverging forms of mixed embeddedness.

Notwithstanding these important caveats, the long-term national trends clearly indicate the diminishing overall importance of the lack of employment opportunities. The general trends in the unemployment rates and in the net participation rates

Table 2. Self-employment, unemployment, and the net participation rate for immigrants from less-developed countries in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, 1992, 1994 and 1996 as a percentage of the relevant labor force*

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of self-employed</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of unemployment</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net rate of labor participation</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotterdam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of self-employed</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of unemployment</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net rate of labor participation</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hague</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of self-employed</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of unemployment</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net rate of labor participation</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utrecht</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of self-employed</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of unemployment</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net rate of labor participation</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


obviously fall short of accounting for the observed continued rises in self-employment on both a national and a city level. In addition, each of the four largest groups of immigrants from less-developed countries showed marked increases in the number of the self-employed and they are responsible for the largest part of the general rise in self-employment among immigrants.\textsuperscript{9} The increase, hence, cannot be traced back to the arrival on the scene of groups who showed a strong proclivity towards self-employment. These observations shift the focus from push factors to pull factors. In the next section, we will have a closer look at the shifts on the demand side of the entrepreneurial market.

**A Closer Look at Four Sectors**

If immigrant entrepreneurs are not so much pushed as pulled towards self-employment, we would expect them to set up shop in markets that are characterized not only by low thresholds but also by a strong growth potential. In addition, we can expect that these immigrant entrepreneurs are less inclined to start businesses in stagnating markets where vacancy chain openings occur, given the fact that setting up shop there requires long hours of hard labor with the prospect of only meager profits, if any. Our data – as yet – do not allow a breakdown below the one-digit level, nor do they provide information on the sectoral distribution of the specific groups. So, what I can offer here is no more than a first indication of the extent to which the sectoral distribution has indeed shifted towards sectors with an obvious growth potential. This preliminary analysis will at a later stage be augmented with in-depth research on relevant trends in markets at a much finer level of aggregation. These market templates will bridge the gap between this more general overview and the actor-centered research of the Mixed Embeddedness project (cf. Van der Leun and Rusinovic 2001).

At this one-digit level of aggregation, two sectors stand out for their strong expansion in the Netherlands. These sectors are clearly linked to the more structural changes that constitute defining components of the emerging post-industrial profile in advanced economies: producer services and personal services. They are, moreover, very prominent in Amsterdam’s economy (Van de Vegt et al 2001). The two more traditional sectors that we will take a look at are retailing, and restaurants and catering.

The first expanding sector is that of producer services. Outsourcing by firms is growing for various reasons. The process of production itself has become more complex and firms are increasingly relying on producer services in uncertain and highly competitive environments. These producer services can be found at the higher end of the market (in terms of added value) – e.g. consultancy and marketing – as well as at the lower end, for instance, catering and cleaning. Economies of scale are important but opportunities for small firms may arise at both ends of the distribution in young, innovative markets and in specific niche markets. Employment in this sector rose rapidly in advanced economies in the last two decades of the twentieth century, and here the Netherlands is certainly no exception.
Figure 2 shows the trends in absolute numbers of the self-employed from less-developed economies. In each of the four cities a strong, steady rise has occurred. Again Amsterdam clearly leads the pack in absolute numbers. Immigrants have obviously seized the opportunities this particular urban economy offered them when this sector was expanding at a rapid pace in the 1990s. Here we should expect either the post-industrial trajectory or, in the case of an emerging ethnic economy, specific ethnic niches where firms cater to the needs of other firms of co-ethnics. This latter trajectory is less likely than the former, as full-blown ethnic economies are hard to find in the Netherlands (although the Turks may constitute an exception). However, we should be aware that the rise of immigrant entrepreneurship may also generate a demand for specific producer services from co-ethnics.

Figure 3 shows the trends in another quintessential post-industrial sector, namely that of personal services. Not only firms but also households have increasingly opted for outsourcing. Two-earner households – which are now the rule rather than the exception in the Netherlands – have relatively little time and, given their financial resources, tend to commodify their social reproduction. In other words, they “buy” time by hiring cleaners, dog walkers, gardeners, and handy-persons. This sector is booming and, again, immigrants from less-developed countries are clearly benefiting from the
opportunities offered there. The growth potential of markets in this sector attracts them and the generally low thresholds of these markets make it possible for nascent entrepreneurs to start a business. Amsterdam particularly shows a strong growth in personal services. The explanation for this probably lies in the relatively high share of two-earner households in Amsterdam.

Immigrants are, hence, clearly becoming prominent in expanding sectors that can be linked to the emerging new urban economy in Amsterdam. However, immigrant businesses are traditionally found in such sectors as retailing, wholesaling, and restaurants and catering. The first of these sectors – retailing – has not undergone as strong an strong expansion as the two post-industrial services. Figure 4 shows the trends for self-employed immigrants, in retailing. In this sector, overall employment has stagnated in each of the four cities. This is where we would expect vacancy chain openings to occur at the lower end of the markets. In times of strong push, these openings will be tempting to those who cannot find proper employment. If jobs become much easier to get, then these kinds of markets will not exert much pull. Figure 4 seems to confirm these general expectations. The development of the number of immigrant self-employed in retailing in Amsterdam is a case in point: it rises until 1994, when unemployment really starts to go down among immigrants, and then falls. The other cities do not show such a clear pattern, although we do find a gradual deceleration of the growth in numbers of immigrant self-employed in retailing.
Restaurants and catering is another sector often known for its high share of immigrant entrepreneurs. In this sense, restaurants and catering comprise – just like retailing – a kind of “gateway sector” where immigrants can easily set up shop, partly by catering to co-ethnic customers. In this case, we are notably hampered by the limits of the one-digit breakdown. Part of this sector is very post-industrial in the sense that it serves the increasing demand of both firms and private households – in some cases at the very high end of the market. Part of this sector, however, is at the opposite end and consists of either vacancy chain businesses (e.g. snack bars and pizzerias) or confined ethnic niches (e.g. Turkish coffee houses). Data at this level do not allow us to distinguish between these two rather different kinds of markets. It is, however, safe to assume that most of the businesses of immigrant entrepreneurs from less-developed countries do not fall under the heading of the most luxurious businesses. Figure 5 shows the developments in this sector in the four largest cities.

Although the restaurant sector as a whole has been expanding, certain segments have been shrinking. This applies especially at the lower end where immigrants are prominent. The trends here indicate saturated markets. The growth – which was not very spectacular in the first place – has been stagnant in the four cities since 1994 when the pace of economic growth (especially in Amsterdam) strongly accelerated. It resembles, hence, the other traditional immigrant sector retailing in this respect. Just like retailing, openings in this sector seem to have been generated by vacancy chain processes.
This more general quantitative investigation of the complex terrain of immigrant entrepreneurship has brought some salient patterns to the fore with significant differences between sectors and, moreover, also between cities. I will now turn to the wider implications of these findings.

Conclusion

Advanced urban economies around the world are becoming more global in the sense of an intensification of economic and financial links, in the sense of the range of products hailing from almost anywhere, and also in their demographic make-up. This aspect of globalization concerns immigrants from other developed economies as well as newcomers from Third World countries looking for a better life. Amsterdam is no exception to this rule – as a tram ride or a walk down one of its shopping streets will demonstrate. Notwithstanding this obvious change with respect to only two decades ago, immigration is anything but a new phenomenon, especially in Amsterdam.

As in earlier centuries, many immigrants in Amsterdam try to take control of their own destiny by becoming entrepreneurs. In the 1980s, when unemployment rose rapidly among erstwhile guest workers and immigrants from former Dutch colonies, an increasing number of immigrants set up shop. The prolonged recession and its aftermath hit newcomers comparatively hard. The urban economy of Amsterdam, more-
over, was doing particularly badly (Kloosterman 1994). Immigrants were to a large extent pushed towards self-employment as they lacked access to jobs. The emphasis of the explanation fell on the supply side of the entrepreneurial market.

The “Dutch miracle” with its combination of strong economic and employment growth and the preservation of the welfare state changed this picture rather drastically. Amsterdam, with its historic orientation towards services, especially benefited from this resurgence, and its economy grew faster than the national average. At long last, the number of unemployed immigrants began to decrease. This diminished the push towards self-employment. Rates of self-employment among immigrants from less-developed countries, however, continually rose in the 1990s. This notable rise has to be explained by taking into account the shifts in the opportunity structure or demand side of the entrepreneurial market in Amsterdam and, to a lesser extent, also in Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht.

The recent growth of immigrant entrepreneurship in Amsterdam and the three other large cities is strongly concentrated in the post-industrial sectors of producer and personal services. The traditional mainstays of immigrant entrepreneurship – restaurants and retailing, where both vacancy chain openings and ethnic niches are the predominant drivers – are lagging behind. Since 1994, growth in these sectors has stagnated or even reversed at a time when the Dutch economy (including the four cities) was growing at a very rapid pace and labor shortages started to creep up everywhere. In other words, when the economic push of unemployment dwindled, these traditional sectors seemed to lose much of their attractiveness and nascent immigrants entrepreneurs were lured by the growth potential of the expanding services. These kinds of post-industrial markets, however, differ not just in their growth potential but also, I hypothesize, in their requirements with respect to their relational embeddedness – i.e. the kind of necessary social capital (more heterogeneous) and the strategies vis-à-vis suppliers and customers. This still has to be investigated at a much lower level than this quantitative overview.

The observed shift in the sectoral composition of immigrant entrepreneurs suggests that they are becoming more integrated into the urban economies and also that they are increasingly making a significant contribution with respect to employment and economic growth in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. With, on the one hand, new groups of immigrants coming in, and, on the other, the continuing creation of openings for small-scale businesses in post-industrial Amsterdam it is perhaps only fair to begin to sing some praise for these unsung heroes.

NOTES

1. This article is based on research undertaken in the framework of the research project Mixed Embeddedness. This multidisciplinary project is a collaboration between the University of Amsterdam (Department of Geography and Planning and the IMES) and the Erasmus University Rotterdam (Department of Sociology). I should
like to express my thanks to Tom Elfring, Ewald Engelen, Joanne van der Leun, Jan Rath and Katja Rusinovic, all of whom are members of the Mixed Embeddedness research team. I especially owe thanks to Harry Kloosterman and Michiel Wolf for their help in gathering the data.

This research project is partly funded by the Dutch Foundation for Scientific Research (NWO).

2. Another study, which is also part of the Mixed Embeddedness project, explores how these choices are made on the level of the individual actors themselves. In this study, Joanne van der Leun and Katja Rusinovic examined immigrant entrepreneurs in the producer services or B2B sector in Rotterdam and Utrecht focusing on the actors themselves in a specific sector based on extensive interviews.

3. In 2001, only 18 percent of the jobs were found in “goods-handling” sectors (construction, manufacturing, wholesale, and transport) and no less than 52 percent were found in producer and consumer services (Van de Vegt et al. 2001, 69).

4. Cf. Manuel Castells (1996: 221): “...as networking and flexibility become characteristic of the new industrial organization, and as new technologies make it possible for small businesses to find market niches, we are witnessing a resurgence of self-employment and mixed employment status.”

5. See also Kloosterman 1996; Kloosterman and Van der Leun 1999 (forthcoming) and Kloosterman and Rath, 2001 for disentangling these trajectories.

6. The data on immigrant entrepreneurs were compiled by H. van den Tillaart, and E. Poutsma (1998) in their report to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Een factor van betekenis; Zelfstandig ondernemerschap van allochtonen in Nederland. The calculations presented here were undertaken on the basis of the data published in their report.

7. Because of a lack of data, more complete time series are not feasible.

8. These inter-urban differences will be investigated at a later stage in the Mixed Embeddedness project.


REFERENCES


4.3 • Identity and Legitimacy in the Amsterdam Region

Gertjan Dijkink and Virginie Mamadouh

Introduction

In the 1990s, certain critical voices on the relation between citizen and government started to sound alarmed. Taking low turnouts for the elections as their main starting point, they insisted on either “reinventing” government, decentralizing government, revitalizing political parties, changing the subject or system of elections, or simply “educating” the citizen. Although the problem concerns all administrative levels and divisions, the alarm is particularly prompted by the condition of the big cities, which indeed show lower levels of electoral participation than smaller cities or rural areas. One of the arguments was that some cities are too large for the provision of proper service standards and for the effective identification of the citizenry. This argument ignores the great social and ethnic variety in urban society and the special conditions leading to social exclusion. With respect to identification, Amsterdam nevertheless has put on some singular displays of attachment. In a referendum held in 1995 on a new metropolitan administrative structure, Amsterdam’s citizens voted vehemently against the idea of “their” city being broken up into a number of boroughs. Despite official reassurance, the proposed structure was perceived as an unacceptable loss of identity.

In this paper we will address the question of how important the city (the municipality) or any alternative territory is for the identity of local citizens and the legitimacy of diverse public authorities. One of the obvious instruments is assessment of turnouts at the elections for different administrative levels in the course of time. Elections, however, are not the only events that get people involved in public decision making in an area. Belief in the relevance of political parties for future decision making is dwindling, whereas interest in or anxiety about urban change remains undiminished or is even increasing. Action groups, schools, sports clubs, housing corporations, and neighborhood centers urge the citizen to participate, and the significance of the urban territory for various forms of recreation (boating, angling, fun shopping, allotments) integrate the citizen in varying ways with his/her environment. The ownership of cars has increased the range of action, but daunting traffic jams in the region (outside the city proper) also stimulate the interest in local resources. New meanings of the urban environment and possibilities for participation are constantly emerging.
What we emphasized above is primarily an action perspective on identification. It assumes that physical experiences and social contacts in a bounded area produce identification with that area. However, this approach overlooks two other important aspects: the symbolic and the institutional setting. Symbolic questions concern how easily we meet the city in language and images. Is Amsterdam a name that is threatened by a host of competitive linguistic distinctions appealing to the people? Are the images transmitted by the media meaningfully related to a recognizable spatial entity called Amsterdam? Are its citizens proud to use the name in presenting themselves to the world outside? Symbolic environments narrowly fit institutional environments. The Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi has stated that “territory-building” is essentially a matter of “institutionalization of regions.” Power-holding actors representing the territory (or similar units outside the territory) define and symbolize the spatial and social limits of membership, and create discourses and practices for inclusion and exclusion (Paasi 1997: 42-43). The presence of a discourse on the city and the coverage of a certain area in pictures will be substantially aided by the existence of a local TV station and press. But institutions also have a distinctive influence of their own in that they represent a certain authority or something that (in spite of the fashionable habit to denote them as “services”) produces obligations for the citizen. One needs a local authority to get married; one cannot live without the provision of such utilities as gas, water, and electricity; one has to pay local taxes, etc. Many of these institutions regularly write letters to citizens and in doing so they articulate a certain territorial authority and construct their identity.

Activity spaces, symbolic environments and institutions constitute a territorial unit and give it an emotional and political significance. Their change or lack of mutual reinforcement may create a legitimacy problem for local government (Meyer and Scott 1985) but their confluence does not necessarily warrant political legitimacy. On the other hand, we should not relapse into the historical fallacy of assuming that all current change implies disengagement from a previously sacred unity. In former centuries, the activity space of the wealthy Amsterdam merchants already encompassed the regional (second homes) and global scales (trade). They left the legacy of a cosmopolitan symbolic ambience, which, together with local patriotism, survived their decay. At the same time local communities challenged higher authorities particularly in the seventeenth-century working-class area, the Jordaan. This area – which is famous for its former passionate, almost Italian public life – experienced violent riots in 1886 and 1934. The neighborhood is now populated (gentrified) by many exponents of the young generation that in the 1960s rallied to the call of anarchist resistance against the state. Although it would be far-fetched to postulate a mechanism reproducing rebellion in Amsterdam through the ages, the absence of national government offices and consequently the absence of a large group of civil “servants” may have caused some overrepresentation in this city of those mildly skeptical about “the state.” The presence of many students and teachers at centers for higher education is of course another factor. Perhaps this all helped to stir up resistance in 1995 against “them” playing a trick on “us” by abolishing “our” city.
Of course it is impossible to put all of citizens’ opinions in one box. Big cities are socially heterogeneous and it is quite probable that feelings of legitimacy and identification with a wider territory vary among neighborhoods or ethnic groups. In this chapter, however, we will not dwell extensively on differences between neighborhoods, but look at the conditions and institutions that are supposed to express and reinforce the citizen’s involvement with the city. First, we will discuss turnouts at elections in Amsterdam for different government levels during the past decades. Do they reveal any special local problems with political legitimacy or deficiencies in involvement? We will then see what kind of new representative mechanisms have been introduced in Amsterdam (new administrative units and opinion polling instruments). Did they solve any of the problems found in answering the previous question? Thirdly, we will explore other aspects of civil society that maintain the political health of communities without them necessarily converging with the formal political organization of society.

There is a leitmotiv in this account: the question of a new regional level of government. Tampering with the structure of government, as advocates of metropolitan government do, may be quite defensible from the point of view of new functional economic relations in society, but does not necessarily reflect social experiences and needs for identification. Space as defined by the institutions, activities and symbols that penetrate the lifeworld of the citizen may be quite at variance with the more functional conception of space as used by planners, politicians and bureaucrats. This is what the rejection of the administrative reform of Amsterdam by its citizens revealed in such an embarrassing way.

The Legitimacy Crisis of Representative Democracy

Since the abolition of compulsory voting in 1970, electoral participation has been on the decrease in the Netherlands. This applies especially to urban voters, like those in Amsterdam. Figures 1a and 1b present the turnout for the four main types of elections, measured as valid votes as a percentage of the registered electors. The erosion of interest in the political system is observable for all directly elected bodies.

The immediate decrease in participation after the abolition of compulsory voting was followed by a stable period during the 1970s, but since 1989, turnout has dropped continuously (see Figure 1a). Participation depends on the type of elections: it is the highest for national elections (73-88 percent), and the lowest for European elections (30-58 percent). However, the ranking of the provincial and the municipal elections changes over time. Provincial elections had a higher turnout than local ones up to 1982, but since the mid-1980s municipal elections have had a higher turnout. Another difference between types of elections is that the decrease of participation in the European and the provincial elections has been continuous since the end of the 1970s, whereas participation in national and municipal elections fluctuates, with 1986 and 1994, respectively, scoring better than the preceding election. Finally the differences in turnout between the different types of elections are increasing over time, even if European elections and their dramatically low participation (less than 30 percent in
1999) are disregarded. The time graph of electoral participation in Amsterdam (Figure 1b) is very similar, with the noticeable distinction that the turnout is lower in Amsterdam than the national average and that the decrease is sharper, especially for the provincial elections.

Another indicator of the erosion of representative democracy is the diminishing involvement of citizens in political parties. Only a very limited number of Dutch citizens (less than 2 percent of the population) hold a party membership. Party membership increased in the 1950s (from 635,000 in 1950 to 731,000 in 1960), halved during the 1960s (to 393,000 in 1970), and has gone up and down ever since (430,000 in 1980, 343,000 in 1990, and 294,000 now) (NRC Handelsblad 27 January 2000, Themabijlage Politieke Partijen). Politicians and political scientists alike have perceived the decrease of political partic-
ipation as an indicator of the political system’s loss of legitimacy. The waning interest in electoral politics is, however, better explained as an ideological turn away from the grand ideologies of the beginning of the twentieth century and their ambitious program to control and design society. It coexists with a rise in grassroots mobilizations in new social movements, suggesting that citizens have not lost interest in politics but that the heyday of mass party politics is over.

Whether or not decreasing turnout is justly perceived as an expression of a lack of legitimacy and representativeness of the existing political institutions, it has led to institutional reforms aimed at restoring higher levels of political participation. In Amsterdam, several administrative and political reforms have been proposed and partly carried out for that purpose. We want to discuss three types of “innovation.” First, administrative reforms creating new political entities above and below the municipal level (e.g. devolution and metropolitan government); secondly, referenda; and thirdly, new procedures to enhance the participation of citizens in the decision-making process. We will then turn to other channels of participation and identification.

Institutional Answers: New Political and Administrative Entities

Sub-Municipal Government

Devolution was carried out throughout the 1980s. The municipality was divided into boroughs (stadsdelen, literally “city portions”) initially with two large, clearly identifiable areas, Noord and Osdorp, in 1981. In 1990, 18 districts were established (see Figure 2). Sixteen of these were boroughs. The other two are governed directly by the city council: the inner city (Binnenstad) and the hardly populated harbor area (first known as het havengebied, now Westpoort). In April 2002, the inner city will become an autonomous borough with its own elected body.

Figure 2. Devolution in Amsterdam, 1990
The devolution was both political and administrative: departments were decentralized and each borough is now governed by a directly elected borough council (stadsdeel-raad). As such, the Amsterdam choice differs from the situation in the other large cities in the Netherlands: in Rotterdam there are borough councils but the administrative agencies remain centralized, and in The Hague administrative decentralization has been introduced without political devolution.

Boroughs are not equally identifiable as meaningful entities. Some of them clearly correspond to portions of the city with their own identity: Amsterdam-Noord encompasses the part of the city north of the IJ river, and Zuidoost the enclave in the southeast of the municipality separated from the rest of its territory by the municipalities of Ouder-Amstel and Diemen. This exclave was annexed in the 1960s and consists almost entirely of recent land developments. Other entities are clearly identified in the urban structure, such as the Binnenstad, or planned neighborhoods, such as Osdorp (the post-war extension to the west) and Buitenveldert (ditto to the south). Yet most of the other boroughs are much less clearly defined in terms of either their identity or their territory.

The naming of the city boroughs generally followed the existing usage by the population and urban services (such as the research and statistics department). Sometimes a borough did not get a proper name but was just labeled by the combination of two neighborhoods, for example Indische Buurt/Havengebied, which has since been renamed Zeeburg, a new denomination also created to underline the redevelopment of the former harbor into a residential area. Following the mergers of 1998, each consisting of the merger of two boroughs, three new boroughs emerged. One combined the names of the disappearing boroughs (Oost/Watergraafsmeer) while the other two chose a new name. For the merger of Zuid and De Pijp, the name Amsterdam Oud Zuid was chosen, while the merged Buitenveldert and Rivierenbuurt boroughs was called Zuideramstel, a new name with connotations of the former municipality annexed by Amsterdam in 1921, Nieuwer Amstel (compare also with the existing neighboring municipality Ouder-Amstel).

It is difficult to assess the importance of boroughs as political entities for the identity of Amsterdammers. Boroughs have different ways of promoting their identity. Apart from names, logos are very important. Most boroughs distribute a newsletter and have their own website. Each of these websites has its own style, and some also put a strong emphasis on the borough as entity. Typically their URL is <www.boroughxxx.amsterdam.nl>, but two have their own domain name: <www.zeeburg.nl> and <www.oost-watergraafsmeer.nl>.

Another way of assessing the importance of boroughs is to look at the participation in borough elections. Do electors turn out to elect borough councilors? Borough elections were held in 1990 in most boroughs on the same day as the municipal elections, except for three boroughs (Watergraafsmeer, Buitenveldert, and Zuidoost) where they were held in 1991 together with the provincial elections. Subsequent elections were held together with the municipal elections in 1994 and in 1998.

Differences in turnout for borough elections cannot easily be interpreted as differ-
ences in legitimacy, because other factors influence electoral participation on this level. Nevertheless, the relative turnout, when compared to that at municipal elections on the same day, can give us some indication of the importance of the borough to its inhabitants, as compared to the municipality. The turnout for borough elections was higher than 90 percent of the turnout for municipal elections in each borough, except for the three borough elections held separately from the municipal elections. In 1998 this percentage was the highest: 98 percent in Westerpark and Oud-West, 99 percent in most other boroughs, 100 percent in Zeeburg, and even slightly higher for the borough elections than for the municipal elections in Bos en Lommer and Amsterdam-Noord.

The evolution of electoral participation in borough elections suggests that this new form of local government is firmly institutionalized. However, the future of certain boroughs, especially the smaller ones in the western part of the city (Westerpark, Oud-West, De Baarsjes and Bos en Lommer) is still uncertain, and further mergers are anticipated. Also, the establishment of a borough for the inner city was for a long time a much-debated topic. At the beginning of 2000, the municipality started an institutionalized public debate. Proponents argued for the autonomy of the district by pointing to the need for providing the inhabitants of the inner city with an equal opportunity to participate politically, while opponents referred to the specific functions and meaning of the inner city for the whole city to justify the direct control of the municipal council. The municipal council finally decided to establish a borough, a decision unsuccessfully challenged in a referendum in April 2001 and finally implemented in April 2002.

Regional Government

Another important reform of the political and administrative make-up of the Amsterdam region was the attempt in the mid-1990s to establish a metropolitan government. Although it failed (or perhaps because it failed), it is an important episode in the history of the city. The debate about metropolitan government discloses key aspects of the importance of the city for its inhabitants.

Over the last century, the municipality of Amsterdam has incorporated parts of the urbanized region into the central municipality, and therefore considerably increased its area through a series of much disputed annexations (Van der Veer 1997). The last one was the annexation of the Bijlmermeer polder for new housing estates in 1966 (the enclave now known as Amsterdam Zuidoost). Because further annexations were deemed unacceptable to the adjacent municipalities, alternatives had to be sought to agglomeration government. In 1982, a memo for a city province was published, followed by a long process of negotiation in the 1980s both with the municipalities in the region and the state, which has to pass a law to make a city province possible. The central government was also considering other cases especially in the Rotterdam region and was a driving force in that regard (see the white papers Bestuur op niveau, BON 1, BON 2 and BON 3) (see Dijkink 1995).

In 1986, an instrument for regional consultation was established: the Regionaal Overleg Amsterdam. The participating municipalities agreed in 1991 to devolve more
tasks to the Regionaal Overleg Amsterdam (the so-called Almere Agreement) and on 30 June 1992, the platform was given a new name – Regionaal Orgaan Amsterdam (ROA) – to emphasize its institutionalization. In July 1994, the municipal council of Amsterdam agreed to divide the municipality into new municipalities and to form a city province. The new province was expected to be established at the beginning of 1998.

In administrative terms, the core idea of the project was the establishment of a new kind of agglomeration government under the label of regiobestuur (regional governance) or stadsprovincie (city province). It had three major consequences. The first was the radical shift of competencies between municipalities and province; the new agglomeration government was meant to be more powerful than the existing province. The new province would deal with transportation issues, regional economic interests, environmental policy, and housing. Consequently, the participating municipalities would become much weaker than the existing municipalities. Second, as a result of the establishment of the new city province, the existing province of North Holland would lose its economic and demographic heart. Third, to avoid extremely skewed relations between the core city and the suburban municipalities within the new city province, the municipality of Amsterdam would be split into 11 small municipalities. These municipalities were intended to correspond with boroughs (stadsdelen) or mergers of such boroughs if they were considered too small to be a “vital” municipality. The dismantling of Amsterdam was seen as an expiatory sacrifice to reassure the other participating municipalities (15 in the autumn of 1994) that the new province would not be dominated by the municipality of Amsterdam and, in effect, a kind of clandestine annexation.

All of a sudden, the rather obscure and dull discussion about administrative reform became much livelier as Amsterdammers realized that their municipality was going to disappear. In the autumn of 1994, members of the section of the left wing party D66 (Democrats ’66) in borough Zuid, including one municipal civil servant working at the PR department of City Hall (Bureau Bestuurscontact) took the initiative to organize a corrective referendum. The Committee “Should Amsterdam remain Amsterdam???” (Comité “Moet Amsterdam Amsterdam blijven???”) was then established to collect the signatures required to hold a referendum. Eventually, the outcome of the referendum – which was held in May 1995 was unambiguous and is frequently referred to as an “Albanian victory” since 93 percent of the voters voted against the council’s decision.

The public debate related to the referendum campaign revealed the relation between city and identity. What is striking is the importance of the name as compared to the territorial dimension proper.

“To begin with, the name doesn’t fit.” “Change the name to Great Amsterdam,” was the advice of Amsterdam historian Richter Roegholt. ROA could be a soap, a football association or a soda, not a place one can identify with. Naming is a specific problem, because there is no name for the Amsterdam region. The few region names that are available are not suitable. The IJ river is a divide in that matter. The region called Waterland (presently a municipality) could include the part of the city north of the IJ, while the
region called Amstelland could include the part of city south of the IJ. IJmond (IJ Mouth) would be suitable to include the whole region, but it generally stands for IJmuiden and Beverwijk (which are on the North Sea). On the other hand, the Amsterdam region (regio Amsterdam, gewest Amsterdam) is not an established expression in Dutch. At the same time, the provincial identity is very weak. The province Noord-Holland adopted a provincial anthem at the end of February 2000, because all of the other provinces already had one. But the provincial feeling is non-existent in Amsterdam, although it may be more significant in the rural parts of the province (but then again not in the Gooi or on the island of Texel). Obviously the historical province of Holland, the Dutch core area, has a rich history but it is Dutch national history, not regional.

Amsterdam is primarily a feeling – Amsterdam is its inhabitants and they have ties with its name but also with its identity as a city. If the whole province were to be called Amsterdam, all the inhabitants of the province would become Amsterdammers and that would undermine the identification of the city dwellers. One would create different shades of Amsterdammer: full Amsterdammer in the inner city, half Amsterdammers in the former city, and provincial Amsterdammers (a contradiction in terms?). This brings us to another issue: which entity would be the successor to the Mu-
municipality of Amsterdam – the new province, or the new municipality in the inner city? Which would become the capital city of the Netherlands? Which would become the owner of Rembrandt’s Nachtwacht?

Most contributors to the public debate agreed that partition would mean the end of a 700-year-old city (journalist Geert Mak), thereby losing the soul of a city (Wibaut; see also Van Duijn 1996). This was vigorously opposed by means of lampooning the various features of partition, such as “dwarfing,” the balkanization of Amsterdam (political scientist Hans Daudt and human geographer Willem Heinemeijer in Het Parool 22 April 1995) or the de-suburbanization of Amsterdam (Geert Mak in NRC Handelsblad, 20 April 1995). The dismantlement of the city would deprive people of their identification with the place (sociologist Leon Deben). That the integrity of the city should be protected was also the main message of less influential contributors: “Amsterdam should stay,” “Just keep Amsterdam a city,” “I want to be and stay an Amsterdammer: I don’t want to live in a village!”, “Keep Amsterdam intact, dammit! When asked where I live, I don’t want to answer ‘in De Baarsjes’ or something similar!”

Interestingly enough, borough borders were also defended with the prospect that they were going to be affected by the partition project. The planned transfer of Hoofddorp pleinbuurt from Zuid to De Baarsjes was attacked, while the Wijkopbouworgaan Spaarndammer- en Zeeheldenbuurt agitated against the abolition of Stadsdeelraad Westerpark and its merger into a new municipality Oud-West and demanded a borough referendum about this. De Baarsjes also mobilized its inhabitants against the merger with Slotervaart/Overtoomse Veld.

In conclusion, the establishment of the city province was prevented because of the strong identification of Amsterdammers with their city and their municipality. Because the legitimacy of the reform was put to the vote in a referendum in Amsterdam, the new administrative layer did not get the opportunity to foster legitimacy and identification among Amsterdammers and other inhabitants of the region, so that we cannot assess whether it would have succeeded. Today the region still lacks political institutions able to do so. The ROA still exists as a regional body governed by the representatives of the 16 participating municipalities, but issues of legitimacy and identification remain unresolved (Kromhout 2001).

Institutional Answers: New Political Institutions

Other institutional answers to the legitimacy crisis consist of the introduction of new political institutions such as the referendum and the indirect election of the mayor. The referendum is an instrument quite foreign to the Dutch political culture. Its introduction was one of the major institutional reforms the Democrats ’66 (D66) party had been demanding since the party’s creation in 1966. A law proposal to make referenda possible was rejected by the Senate, almost causing the fall of the government coalition of the Labor Party (PvdA), the rightwing liberals (VVD) and the leftwing liberals (D66). At the local level, local regulations allowing for referenda were adopted dur-
ing the past decade in several municipalities. In Amsterdam, this innovation was a reaction of Amsterdam politicians to the dramatically low turnout for the 1990 municipal elections (just above 50 percent; see Figure 1b). A commission formed by the mayor and the leaders of the local parties thought of it as a tool to bring citizens closer to politics (or vice versa).

The first referendum was held in March 1992, allowing the electorate to choose between two policy orientations regarding the traffic policy for the inner city. Two options were put to the vote: option A consisted of limiting car traffic in the way agreed upon by the municipal government, and option B was a proposal to more radically limit car traffic in that part of the city. A slight majority voted for option B.

In January 1994, the municipal council adopted a new regulation introducing another type of referendum: the corrective one. According to the new referendum regulation, citizens of Amsterdam were to be empowered to initiate a referendum to reject a decision made by the municipal council under certain conditions. Two referenda were held in May 1995, two more in the spring of 1997 and one in the spring of 2001. Oddly enough, the first one was about something that would eventually be decided at the national level, as the establishment of city provinces in Amsterdam and Rotterdam necessitated the adoption of a special national law.

Table 1. Turnout for and results of Amsterdam referenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Referendum</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Verkeersbeleid binnenstad (traffic policy for the inner city)</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>option B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Stadsprovincie (city province)</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>decision rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Weilandje De Vrije Geer (housing project in a meadow)</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>decision rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>IJburg (neighborhood to be built on reclaimed land)</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>decision maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Noord Zuid lijn (underground metro line)</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>decision maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Stadsdeel Binnenstad (the inner city as a borough)</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>decision maintained</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Slot 1999 and O+S Amsterdam (<http://www.onstat.amsterdam.nl/>)

The turnout for the referenda has been much lower than for municipal elections (see Table 1). Referenda do not bring back the high level of electoral participation, but they certainly instigate a lively political debate about the issue put to the vote, as we have seen with the Stadsprovincie in the previous section, at least among the Amsterdammers who want to enter such a debate.

But the turnout differs greatly between the referenda, varying from 22 to 40 percent (see Table 1), which suggests that the issue put to the vote matters. Indeed the issues vary in terms of their locational relevance. Nonetheless, the turnout for a referendum about a small meadow in the west was high (probably because it was held on the same day as the one about the city province) while the one about the new underground
Turnout results are available for the boroughs. But for a valid comparison, we need to disregard the influence of other factors on participation. To do so we can compare the observed turnout for a referendum with the one expected on the basis of the turnout for the 1994 municipal elections. Turnouts for the four main referenda and the 1994 municipal elections strongly correlate with each other; this is especially true for the city province referendum and the 1994 municipal elections (with a correlation coefficient of .943). 18

Simple regression analyses reveal in which boroughs turnout is higher or lower than expected. Each time, voter turnout was higher than expected in the inner city and Oud-West, while lower than expected in Bos en Lommer, Zuidoost and Buitenveldert (later Zuideramstel). 19 Figures 2a-e show standardized residuals for the five main referenda. 20 The issue at stake matters a lot. Turnout was much higher than expected in the inner city and the adjacent boroughs for the traffic policy for the inner city; in Osdorp and Slotervaart/Overtoomse Veld and De Baarsjes 21 for the city province; in boroughs adjoining the location of the planned neighborhood, especially in Amsterdam-Noord, Zeeburg, Watergraafsmeer, and the inner city, for IJburg; in boroughs affected by the construction of the new metro line (especially De Pijp, Amsterdam-Noord, Rivierenbuurt, and Zuid) for the metro; and in the inner city and Westerpark for the inner city borough.

The lengthy discussion about electing mayors (another point that has been raised by D66 since the mid-1960s) has not yet led to reform, but the idea remains high on the agenda, for example, in Amsterdam at the time of the nomination of a new mayor for 2001. In 2000, the research department of the municipality of Amsterdam commissioned an opinion poll to survey citizens’ wishes concerning their new mayor. For most respondents, gender, ethnic background, and even party membership were not important. However, 56 percent of the respondents stated that the ideal candidate should be a “real” Amsterdammer. But this is still less important than looking great on TV (66 percent) and being an experienced politician or manager (82 percent). 22

A Brief Outline of Civil Society (Alternative Democracy) in Amsterdam

A Para-Political Framework of Interest Mediation

Elections and referenda are not the only politically meaningful moments in the life of a citizen. There are different and perhaps even more satisfactory ways of experiencing one’s membership of a community and contributing to a system of governance: supporting an interest or action group, writing a letter to the local newspaper, being a member of a school board, representing an ethnic minority on a municipal advisory council, etc. The definition of political participation can include such activities and one can judge communities according to the opportunities they offer their members to contribute in this way to governance. How rich is a community in terms of organizations and institutions that in some way influence its life and welfare? Does a local society facilitate the acquisition of the cognitive maps of the problems and issues at hand?
In conclusion, we can say that the readability of an environment, the possibility of recognizing oneself in the discourses generated by an environment, is one way to assess the quality of democratic representation.

Let us see to what degree this framework can be applied to the city and region of Amsterdam and what it discloses about its representational qualities. In order to develop an idea of the people and organizations involved in the production of discourse, we could start with a comparative study of urban renewal programs in Amsterdam and
The Hague (Ter Borg and Dijkink 1992, 1995). In this study, producers of discourse were identified on the basis of articles and arguments about Amsterdam’s waterfront project on the “IJ boards” published in the daily Het Parool (“Amsterdam’s” newspaper) between 1982 and 1990. The study revealed seven main groups in terms of number of arguments: representatives of political parties, action or interest groups, members of the municipal executive, business persons, experts, municipal advisory boards, and technical departments of the municipality. The analysis did not cover letters from
readers, so that most authors (or voices) are associated with some kind of professional function as is usual when people appear in newspapers as the author of an article or are quoted. Of course, this does not rule out that many of them (e.g. action groups or experts) were also involved with Amsterdam as citizens. The almost complete absence of voices from the region (province) and the central government is one remarkable fact, even if we account for the local distribution of *Het Parool*. Another interesting fact (particularly in comparison with The Hague) is the large proportion of authors representing either action groups or some field of specialized knowledge. This suggests an important production of knowledge and concepts that cannot be easily connected with views from established political ideologies (or parties). Finally one can detect the presence of voices from the municipal offices in this discussion, which testifies to the relative openness of opinion production around an important city project where civil servants are not politically censored (somewhat in contrast to the anxious ways in which politicians themselves handled the subject; see Ter Borg and Dijkink 1995). These discussions occurred in the pre-Internet era and one can easily imagine what positive effects the availability of a digital medium would have had in this space of representation. In the light of the abundance of civil voices that tend to rise in order to interfere with political decisions (particularly since the 1960s), it is no surprise that Amsterdam was the cradle (1994) of Europe’s first digital city, *De Digitale Stad*.

Levels of Corporatist Interest Mediation

If a local issue arouses a varied set of voices, the next question is how much this set can be explained as the product of a typical local infrastructure. To what extent is a bounded civil society or local political system capable of generating a rich variety of discourses? In the landscape of organizations that represent the citizen’s concern about the
world, some of the most penetrating actions and voices focus on environmental quality or conservation. The Amsterdam Center for the Environment (Amsterdams Milieucentrum), a kind of umbrella organization for such groups, lists hundreds of them. As shown in Figure 2, more than half (57 percent) owe their existence to the fight for a particular local object like a park, neighborhood, or water area, 22 percent identify with some city-wide problem (e.g. pedestrians or birds) and the majority of the remaining groups are national organizations or local branches of such organizations. Only three percent can be identified with a regional goal or issue. This emphasizes the importance of the local level – particularly the sub-municipal level – for the commitment to policy issues. The national function of Amsterdam as capital has further advanced the growth and establishment of social movements with nationwide or international goals (e.g. Greenpeace, Amnesty International, the gay movement, etc.). Amsterdam has more offices of “new” social movements than any other large city in the Netherlands (183 compared to 100 in Utrecht – the city ranking second – and 72 in The Hague, the seat of national government; Albregts 2001). The flourishing of these movements seems unmistakably related to the kind of ambience produced by the presence of students and workers in institutes of higher education, although the quoted research also suggests that such people are not the key figures in smoothly running social movements. This means that the countercultural features of local social and political life can no longer be identified with specific classes, but is a politicization that may manifest itself in the most diverse types of people (Kriesi 1988).

Figure 4. Environmental action groups (level of target)

All the more striking is the absence of a regional level of identification in these actions. This is again confirmed if we turn to the general list of organizations. The digital telephone directory lists more than 200 associations, firms, and organizations whose title includes the Dutch adjective “Amsterdams(e).” Unfortunately there is no single name to denote the region to which Amsterdam belongs; one might venture the opinion that this region therefore does not exist. Each of the only available options for territorial names – Amstelland and Waterland – occurs 20-odd times. The latter is partic-
ularly favored in Amsterdam-Noord because it emphasizes local identity. Obviously Amstel (a river) is the most popular surrogate for a regional name in the rest of the city. Including its derivatives (e.g. Amstelkring, Amstelland, Amstelzicht, but excluding Amstelveen – a suburban town – and surnames) it occurs about 180 times. The number of hits for the name IJ (also a river) is only 19. Local initiatives in Amsterdam or its surroundings rarely end up in something that is called “regional.” The adjective “regional” is applied to such “arranged” things as the employment office, the police, the ROA, psychiatric services, and broadcasting organizations. It is no accident that these are services or offices organized from the outside or resulting from nationwide arrangements. If we compare this to the toponymical scene of Rotterdam, we find that the availability of the label Rijnmond (Rhine Mouth), which was first used for an administrative body, is a godsend (more than 90 records in the telephone directory).

A somewhat different picture emerges, however, if we look at local business associations. The Chamber of Commerce of Amsterdam covers the major part of the northern wing of the Randstad: Amsterdam, its southern neighbors (including airport Schiphol) and all municipalities along the North Sea Canal to the coast (including Haarlem and Ijmuiden) (see Map 3). So the adjective “regional” is appropriate here. This awareness of a regional interest among business people sharply diverges from the interest mediation and articulation among other citizen groupings of Amsterdam.
Advisory Boards and Participatory Democracy

The municipal government has established a wide variety of advisory councils (17 of them) comprised of elected representatives of social groups and experts from outside the local government. Some councils with a broad representative function are the Urban Planning Advisory Board (50 members from different disciplines connected with design and the control of public space), the Advisory Board for the Elderly (18 representatives of different organizations of the elderly and health care), the Sport Council (representatives of different sports), the Emancipation Advisory Board (eight women from different sectors of local society) and four advisory boards with representatives from particular ethnic groups. Although the members of these boards are not accountable to the community, they constitute a continuously changing group of about 150 persons with an independent position and attitude vis-à-vis the government.

Apart from the standard procedures by which people can lodge complaints against projects and new rules (usually enacted at the administrative level of the boroughs), the city has experimented with Future Prospects (Toekomstverkenningen Amsterdam) in which an attempt was made to start a public debate about particular urban problems that should be solved in order to achieve certain Utopian goals. It was concluded in 1999 by a congress attended by 2,000 people. Similar procedures were used to generate ideas for the renewal of the derelict shipyard areas along the IJ in Amsterdam North (Roobeek and Mandersloot 1999). Apparently, utopian and aesthetic images have been discovered as appealing charms that stimulate the participation of larger and varied groups of people in these new forms of democracy.

The Media and Digital Cities

Amsterdam has the good fortune of being served by a quality daily newspaper (Het Parool, since 1943) and by a local TV station (AT5, the leading local TV station in the Netherlands, since 1992); although the latter is commercial, it pays much attention to news as well as to political opinion in Amsterdam. For example, AT5 broadcasts a bi-weekly interview with the mayor of Amsterdam and special reports and debates about local politics. It aims at a regional audience (as far as inhabitants of the region are connected to the Amsterdam cable network) but its newflashes and discussions mainly cover the city. Further, a local public broadcasting organization (SALTO, with five radio channels and two TV channels) offers broadcasting time to organizations that have a message for the public (e.g. action groups, artists, migrants, etc.).

De Digitale Stad (<www.dds.nl>) (DDS), originally strongly inspired by events in and about Amsterdam, gradually lost its place-boundness and developed into an information and discussion site about a range of political and cultural subjects on the local and the international level. For a while, its logo was similar to the coat of arms of Amsterdam, the three crosses being substituted by the letters DDS. Different subjects were identified with “city squares,” and there were 30-odd sections about books, health, music, politics, elections and even the subject of death. A Freudian slip of the pen, which betrayed the origin of the site makers was “Governmental Square Regional,” which contained information on political issues in Amsterdam. DDS was obviously ge-
ographically located. But even apart from this fact, one could conclude – as our discussion about the referendum already revealed – that there is a natural resonance between local and national political issues in Amsterdam. DDS was therefore closely related to the city’s political identity. Recently, the site was sold to an Internet service provider who eliminated the last traces of the political ideals of the olden days. On the neighborhood level, one may find the DDS flavor in the private initiative <www.buurt-online.nl> that covers more than 600 neighborhood webpages all over the country, including almost 70 from Amsterdam.

In 1998 the municipality initiated The Glass City, a project involving spending €2,500,000 in the period 1998-2002 (including a newly established structural budget of €227,000 per year) in order to improve and integrate electronic information services, most of them accessible via <www.amsterdam.nl>. It involves an information system for the public with addresses, names of municipal organizations and the texts of local regulations (PIGA), a system with information on policymaking like minutes of the councils and decisions (BISA) and a digital city (the actual website) that offers links to other important organizations and allows the distribution of news, political debates, and the collection of public opinion. An example of collecting public opinion was the discussion regarding a municipal white paper on drugs policy in 1997 (Flos 1998). The alderwoman, Jikkie van der Giessen, wrote personal introductions accompanied by her picture for each of the main subjects for debate inviting the visitors to complete a questionnaire. Over the course of three weeks, 1,750 persons visited the site and 232 questionnaires were completed. Many of the visitors had first-hand knowledge about the use of drugs, as a user, social worker, or someone facing the consequences. The information received was deemed quite useful. One may agree that such cases of interactive policymaking have the potential to make the implementation of intended policy quite concrete for city managers and politicians.

As for the administrative level covered by these systems, we must say that they fit, and even reinforce, the municipality and the borough as relevant units of action. www.Amsterdam.nl has incorporated the websites of all the boroughs but we cannot (February 2002) find any link to regional organizations or the province of North Holland.

Conclusion: The Unbounded Community

The identity of Amsterdam is in one way or another important to a lot of people. One has to accept this in order to understand why Amsterdammers voted so vehemently against the idea of breaking “their” city up into a number of boroughs. Yet, this identification with the city is not expressed in a high level of involvement with policy issues that concern the entire city or with the elections for the municipal council. Such important issues as the development of a new residential area in IJburg, the construction of a new north-south metro line or traffic policy in the inner city arouse significantly greater interest in boroughs directly affected by such developments than in other parts of the city. One is inclined to conclude that it is identification with the local neighborhood or special project rather than the territory of the city as a whole that is
at stake in Amsterdam. A similar conclusion could be drawn about the range of environmental organizations (new social movements) operating in Amsterdam, most of which focus on problems occurring at a level lower than the municipal one.

This is not to say that there are no strong feelings about the city as a social and cultural sphere. Such feelings can even be provoked by local geography. An actress once expressed her feelings about crossing the municipal boundary in these words: “When I cross the Utrecht bridge [by car] and enter the Rijnstraat, I get that feeling of freedom.” (She certainly did not mean the Rijnstraat itself, a street so unassuming that it is hard to believe that it was ever designed as an access road to a national capital!) For many people, particularly those working in the artistic and intellectual fields, this quality of the city as a field of alternatives – or in the words of French psychiatrist Minkowski (1933), its ampleur de la vie (widthness of life) – is the most important characteristic of the city. For many groups, like immigrants from Surinam, Morocco and Turkey, the city provides the critical mass necessary to guarantee a viable subcultural way of life (provision of ethnic food, markets and cultural facilities). Since intellectuals, artists, immigrants, and those working in the financial sector strongly represent characteristics of the “unbounded community” (Scherzer 1992), the municipal government faces the challenge of facilitating ways of life that are significantly connected with the national and the transnational. It is the reality of Amsterdam as a location in a national and transnational space (a name in a network) that is more important in this perspective than the nature of the territory itself, although parts of it may have a strong symbolic value (inner city, Vondelpark, harbor area).

Activities are focused on the neighborhood level, but symbolic experiences seem to strengthen the image of the city as a whole. This is also the impression one is left with after “visiting” governments in the virtual world. On the Internet, Amsterdam emerges as a strong reality that seems to exist in a space that excludes all other administrative units. Only the boroughs are conspicuously present as extensions or limbs of the municipal body. Such symbolic encounters with the city are somewhat akin to institutional encounters in the real world. The main difference is that institutions have the power to impose themselves on the citizens either in reply to their requests or uninvited. In the twentieth century, one of the most penetrating institutional manifestations of the city of Amsterdam occurred via the urban planning office. Public housing projects sponsored by the city began to displace large groups of people from decaying inner-city areas (e.g. the Jordaan) to Betondorp (“Concrete village” in the newly acquired southeastern extensions) in the 1920s, from the decaying nineteenth-century working class areas to Slotermeer and Slotervaart (the new visionary extensions to the west of the city) in the 1950s, and from Amsterdam North to Osdorp (even more to the west) in the 1960s. Such movements extended the activity space of citizens and helped to psychologically appropriate new territory. But the large-scale activities of urban planners and housing corporations played their part by making the city very tangible as an institutional environment. This was perhaps one of the keys to the strong identification with the city during the first post-war decades.

Nowadays, letters received by Amsterdammers come from various, more ambigu-
ous levels. The municipality imposes itself by demanding a property tax. The borough issues letters about public works and regulations concerning public space. The provision of public utilities is a matter of private firms (NUON in Amsterdam) that have lost their former local identity altogether although the citizen can apply to a local office. The ROA (the proposed metropolitan authority) does not yet have any significant institution addressing the citizen. An exception may be the regional housing distribution system, which has been run since 2001 by the housing corporations in the ROA area and Almere. However, this development hardly alleviates the housing problems of the Amsterdam citizen although it might contribute to a stronger regional feeling in the other municipalities. So, it is no surprise after all, that the launching of a regional authority as a new political arena, did not immediately result in a love affair.

A simple summary of our statement about activities, institutions, and symbols and their relation with space is presented in Table 2. It shows the different levels of political organization (national, regional, municipal, borough) and the degree to which the territorial units become a reality for the citizen (low, medium, high) and trends via the mechanisms of activity, institutionalization, and symbolization.

Table 2. Sources of identification in Amsterdam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>L+</td>
<td>L=</td>
<td>M+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>L+</td>
<td>H=</td>
<td>H-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>M+</td>
<td>L=</td>
<td>L-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>M+</td>
<td>H+</td>
<td>H-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borough</td>
<td>H=</td>
<td>L=</td>
<td>M+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level: Low, Medium, High
Trend: + increase, = no change, - decrease

Only an average value can be given for boroughs because (as for the symbolic dimension) some boroughs can claim a clear territorial identity (e.g. Amsterdam North) whereas others are a product of administrative demarcation. As regression data on the referendum turnouts suggest, living in some neighborhoods (e.g. the inner city) induces a greater sensibility to changes elsewhere in the city than living in more peripheral boroughs (e.g. Buitenveldert) does. This may be connected with the inevitable impact of changes from almost anywhere in the city on inner city life (the impossibility of activity closure) or with the symbolic identification of the inner city with the entire city (lack of symbolic closure).

A final conclusion regarding Table 2 is that in the local state (all levels below the central government), the municipal level dominates the symbolic dimension. This is the background for all the protests against the planned abolition of the city of Amsterdam. People can accept diverse territorial scales as possible sources for identification, but not the evaporation of the only unit that offers them a suitable name. Addresses are important, especially in the ways of life that today constitute what has been called a
“space of flows.” This does not eliminate the willingness of urban dwellers to identify with a wider regional scale – the area associated with the names Amstel and Waterland – if it could be clearly perceived as the operational environment of a visionary agency aiming at the enhancement of the quality of life and the creation of a metropolitan identity for all inhabitants of the region (somewhat reminiscent of the planning for urban extensions in twentieth-century Amsterdam). Democratic control of such an agency would continue to be felt as a problem, particularly by suburbanites fearing the dominance of the central city. However, maintaining local identities does not necessarily interfere with regional visions. Moreover, firms in the region are eager to adopt or maintain an Amsterdam identity. The current low-profile ROA should therefore be transformed into an agency that is better able to evoke challenging metropolitan futures, preferably by accounting for or unleashing local processes of identity construction.

NOTES
1. In the Netherlands, everyone entitled to vote is automatically registered as an elector.
2. At the beginning of the year 2000, this was true of only four of them: Amsterdam-Noord, Amsterdam Oud Zuid, Oud-West, and Osdorp.
4. See the website maintained by the municipality for this public hearing at <http://www.stadsgesprek.amsterdam.nl>.
5. Note that the capital city of the province is Haarlem, not Amsterdam.
6. For a diary of the campaign, see Bles 1996.
7. Notwithstanding that the Albanian type of election always “re-elected” the incumbent rulers!
8. One event coordinated by Beurs TV involved exchanges on the Internet and debates on the local television channel. Most contributions were still accessible in the spring of 2000 on the website De Digitale Stad (at <http://www.dds.nl/>) including chronicles and selections of articles published in Het Parool and other newspapers, as well as speeches and a questions-and-answer section in which politicians (aldermen and councilors) and civil servants answered questions asked by the public. Unless otherwise mentioned, the contributions quoted below were found on this website. The website of the original De Digitale Stad has been erased by its commercial offshoot (same name, same URL).
9. Additional critiques dealt with the dysfunctioning of the agglomeration government, especially the increasing distance between citizen and government, the disenfranchisement of foreign residents, who have voting rights for municipal elections but not for provincial elections, and the competition between new municipalities.
10. Quotes refer to contributions to the debate on De Digitale Stad (see note 8) unless stated otherwise.
11. Indeed, inhabitants of Amsterdam-Noord are traditionally more oriented towards Purmerend and Zaandam than to the inner city (Donkers 1996).
12. Several contributions (see note 8).
13. The neighborhood is being upgraded. Zuid includes the most expensive residential locations in the city (the old Concertgebouwbuurt), while De Baarsjes is a decaying neighborhood with a high proportion of foreign residents.
15. The mayor is a civil servant installed by the Crown, although the position is political, and the municipal council is consulted during the nomination procedure.
16. Conditions pertain to the number of signatures necessary to hold a referendum as well as to the outcome of the referendum. Originally, the threshold was defined in terms of turnout (at least 60 percent of the valid votes at the previous municipal elections); in 1996, however, it was defined in terms of voters (a decision can be rejected if the number of voters against it amounts to at least 50 percent + 1 of the number of valid votes at the previous municipal elections).
17. Several initiatives to organize a referendum were unsuccessful for various reasons. These included referenda on the location of the tippelzone (an area where prostitutes meet their clients) on the Theemsweg, the privatization of the municipal cable network KTA, the traffic situation on Zeeburgerdijk in 1995, Ruigoord in 1996 and 1997, and parking policy in 2001.
18. The correlation coefficients between the turnout in the 17 boroughs (including the inner city) for the 1994 municipal elections and the other three referenda were .791 for IJburg, .744 for the underground metro line and .608 for the inner city traffic policy. The turnout for transport referenda correlates more with each other than with municipal elections (.746). The correlation coefficient between the turnout in the 14 boroughs (including the inner city) for the 1998 municipal elections and the 2001 referendum was .713.
19. The first two are the boroughs with very low turnout for municipal elections, while the third one has the highest participation rate in Amsterdam.
20. The class limits for the thematic maps are −.75, .75 and 1.
21. This is remarkable because the electorate of these boroughs has participated much less than expected in the other referenda.
23. The proper name “Amsterdam” occurs more than 1,500 times but is often used as an appendix to the name of an organization in order to indicate its Amsterdam branch and consequently is a sign of identification that differs from what we are aiming for in this context. However, a substantial number of these 1,500 records indeed represent the use of Amsterdam to indicate singularity (e.g. “Café Amsterdam”).
24. The score for the adjective “Rotterdams(e)” is 121 and for the proper name Rotterdam 1,080; see also the preceding footnote.

25. The ROA does not have a website yet. With some perseverance one may discover, hidden amidst information on housing in the city proper, that there is a regional housing distribution system (run by regionally cooperating housing corporations of the ROA area and Almere) about which information can be accessed on a site called woningnet. It is perhaps significant that (February 2002) the link on the Amsterdam website is to <www.woningnet.nl> (covering a much wider area, including Utrecht) rather than <roa.woningnet.nl>.

26. See the preceding note.

REFERENCES


