“ALL OF MY MEMORIES WILL BE GONE”

Dimensions of urban issues and conflicts experienced by people in vulnerable positions in a changing neighborhood in Amsterdam

Keywords: urban renewal, gentrification, dependency, neighborhood participation, public art, sense of belonging, social cohesion, micro-aggression

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Introduction

Change always has winners and losers and improvement is in the eye of the beholder. Towards the edge of the city of Amsterdam, there is a neighborhood that tells a story of both challenge and hope. Built in the 1950s-1960s, the Neighborhood[1] was designed with open spaces, plenty of light, and lots of green areas. Today, it is home to about 5,000 people from over 75 different nationalities. This mix of cultures brings color and energy to the area. At the same time, the neighborhood faces serious problems like poverty, crime, and a lack of trust in the government. Current renewal efforts emphasize co-creation with residents, transforming public spaces to enhance green areas and biodiversity while fostering social cohesion. Large apartment buildings with plain, gray walls sit next to small green parks where children play.

Besides the positive aspects, not everything is peace and quiet in the Neighborhood; garbage and old furniture lie on the sidewalks, and a persistent problem with rats demonstrate signs of struggles. In the evenings, older residents walk slowly, talking softly about how the Neighborhood used to feel safer. Children play in the streets, while parents watch carefully. Amid these challenges, change is happening. People from the community come together to clean up neglected spaces and turn them into colorful playgrounds and lush gardens. You might see a group planting greens. The smell of fresh soil and paint fills the air, showing the Neighborhood's determination to improve. Meetings are held where residents share their ideas over cups of strong coffee, planning a brighter future together. Building trust is not easy, but progress is visible. The sound of laughter, the sight of new greenery, and the hum of conversations in different languages show the spirit of community. Slowly, the Neighborhood is changing. With its focus on including everyone, the area is becoming greener, stronger, and more connected, step by step. However, we are not there yet. Fear amongst residents is also there, not knowing what the future will bring to their environment and their current houses.

Housing and public space, photograph by Roxane Kroon

[1]The neighborhood where the research is conducted is home to a diversity of people who live in it for their whole life, since many years or for a shorter time. It is a changing neighborhood that is subject to many points of view, opinions and perspectives. Out of respect for the residents, who find themselves subject of discussions and narratives that are not necessarily theirs, the researchers decided to not mention the name of the place, to prevent appropriating their respondents stories. Therefore, we chose to call it 'the Neighborhood' and to tell a story that could represent many changing neighborhoods in which its residents are facing insecure times.

This case focuses on interventions in urban issues. Key challenges include housing shortages, group and cultural differences and tensions, unemployment, and lack of access to social services. Key stakeholders are affected residents, the local government, housing corporations and a creative agency.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Urban challenges in the Neighborhood in Amsterdam expose significant socio-economic and cultural disparities. The voices of vulnerable populations, including low-income families, elderly residents, and marginalized cultural groups are often not heard in shaping their environment. Efforts to renew the neighborhood must contend with issues such as gentrification, social exclusion, and microaggressions, all while fostering equity and trust among residents.

Context: the Neighborhood

To understand the dynamics, present in a changing neighborhood, it is necessary to dive into the specific context. Processes like urban renewal and gentrification can be theorized in general steps and aspects. However, those very processes are utmost contextual at the same time, and we need contextual insights in order to understand experiences and perspective of different stakeholders.

The Neighborhood and its housing stock have been functioning well for decades. But living conditions have evolved over the years. An example is that back in the days, people took a bath once a week. Since in current times most people take a shower once a day, the moist balance in houses has changed, and old houses are generally not appropriate for that. So, in that respect the housing stock is rather outdated. According to a manager from the biggest housing corporation in the neighborhood, who you will meet later on in this chapter, the housing is homogeneous: 95% of the area consists of social housing. The housing corporation plans to change that, by introducing mid-income rent and home ownership. You will find out that these plans are not appreciated by everyone around.

And there are more issues. According to statistics available, in comparison to different neighborhoods in Amsterdam the area is not doing well. A fairly big number of residents lacks education, there is a lot of school drop-out, illiteracy, health issues, financials debts, criminality and domestic violence. The neighborhood is often negatively represented in the media. Nuisance caused by youngsters has been intense for a number of years, with fireworks and windows being smashed. That is also the reason that the theme of youth is important in the restructuring plans. Another big issue in the Neighborhood is poverty. The housing corporation manager states:

"I always say: it is also a list that determines whether you can be happy in life. Because if you have problems with that, it can look bleak. You know, then maybe that new house will help, but then it will still be that very poorly scoring neighborhood. Or maybe a little less, because those statistics show a different picture. Then we still haven't solved anything." (Dirk)

You will learn that the abovementioned characteristics of the Neighborhood are experienced in a different way by different people. This can be considered typical for a so-called 'deprived neighborhood'. Outsiders see negative statics and possible solutions, whereas mainly beauty is perceived and valued by its inhabitants. Moreover, the story is even more nuanced.

Outline of the case and introduction of characters

In this case study we discuss the dynamics of a changing neighborhood, based on interviews[2] with residents and several stakeholders. The case study is structured in four observed tensions: '**identity and sense of home**', '**changes in the neighborhood**', '**social and cultural contradictions**' and '**division and need for unity**'. We will describe every tension by presenting the story of fictional characters who were created in reference to interviews with various stakeholders that we encountered in our research. They will illustrate the different perceptions and allow us to emphasize multi-perspectivity as a significant lens to understand changes in neighborhoods. We will first introduce the characters in this case.

Meet **Dirk**, who is a project manager at a housing corporation, where he has worked for over thirty years. He has witnessed the different ways in which housing corporations pick up their roles when it comes to neighborhood development. He is rather positive about the way his organization positions itself in the Neighborhood: located at a central spot, in a low-threshold, welcoming space. Members of the local community can easily come in to ask questions they have regarding the restructuring plans. This is all quite different from how they worked years ago, in a fancy, corporate office, far away from the people they are working for. These days, the focus is on guiding residents in the changes they have to deal with or even engaging them in development processes. An outreach team and accessible information brochures are all means to comfort people and have them on board in revitalizing the block they are living in.

Arzu came to the Netherlands in the 1970s from a small town in Anatolia, Turkey. Back then she came with her mother and siblings to be with their father who arrived five years prior to that. Amsterdam was the place her father went to for work. There were many possibilities to earn money in a country where everything was modern, where her father and many other

[2]In the timespan of eight months, three focus group discussions and six interviews with one or two respondents were conducted. All of these data collection activities were held in the neighborhood the case study took place. In some cases they took place in community spaces or in offices, in some cases walking through the neighborhood. The data have been analyzed with MAXQDA and form the basis of the persona descriptions as presented in this case study. All names are fictitious.

Turkish men were welcomed with open arms and where their salaries where worth every discomfort they had to go through in the first years after their arrival. The initial plan was to return home, but the new life was settling in. Opportunities for work kept coming and Arzu's father, together with most of his companions, started to be convinced that life in the Netherlands was permanently better. So, women and children followed. Now, almost 50 years later, Arzu finds herself still living in the neighborhood where she arrived decades ago, the Neighborhood. Arzu is hesitant and afraid of the changes. For Arzu it feels like they have to start a completely different life, meaning that the changes come with feelings of nostalgia and occasionally loss:

"Even though it is the same neighborhood, it will be another neighborhood. Right there we had a bench, two years ago. It's all gone. We would sit there all summer. It was so cosy".

She is classified as a first-generation migrant. As the eldest daughter she helped her mother a lot, who must have suffered from the new life that was improving on the one hand, and on the other hand felt alienating. Her mother went back to Turkey, to live the last years of her life. Arzu worked hard in several jobs and had three children. Her children are doing well, they are now in their twenties, and all have found their way in education and the job market in the Netherlands. The well-being of her children is what mainly gives her peace.

A good friend of Arzu is **Nezaket**. Nezaket also lives in the Neighborhood and shares many aspects of her identity and social life with Arzu. Both are considered first generation Turkish migrants and their families are even from the same region in Turkey. Nezaket appreciates her life in the area a lot and also for her, the restructuring plans come with fear. She is scared to lose her social life and even though she is aware that the displacement is temporary, she fears to come back to a completely different place: "it's temporary, but I find it a shame that all of my memories will be gone" she mentions often. When Nezaket arrived in the neighborhood, she got to know all her new, Dutch neighbors. She has good memories of those times; sharing food with them, especially when the weather was nice. She weekly welcomes the grand child of a Dutch neighbor, to play with her own granddaughter. Nezaket thinks that the food she cooks is a big connecting factor in the intercultural encounters, which she appreciates.

A well-known and welcomed person is **Herman**, a white Dutch man in his late eighties. He has lived for decades in the Neighborhood and spends a good amount of his old days taking walks in the area. He is known and appreciated by many neighbors as a familiar face around. As someone from the church expresses: "*I am happy with Herman, because throughout his life, as long as he has lived in the area, he has done his best to connect people and link different people to each other.*" Herman himself enjoys taking his daily strolls. He values the Neighborhood, especially the fact that it is green. Also, the social network is a positive thing for him, although he states that he never had real friends in his block, rather acquaintances. As he says visually: "*I know all the*

stories in the village". A neighbor would surely confirm this: "*I have yet to meet anyone in the area who doesn't know Herman!*" Although Herman has a rather introverted way of communicating and does not show off with the big social circle he has, he mentions that he twice received a 'certificate from the police for good contacts'.

Nina works for a creative agency that is active in the Neighborhood. Together with her partner, she performs transdisciplinary art and social design. They use art to engage in conversations with people and to involve them in processes of thinking and creating. They call this politicizing action, from a critical and activist perspective. Nina and her partner facilitate a place for residents to codesign public spaces, from the vision that things can be different, more equal, and better than they are now. Nina observes that a lot is being decided about people, not with them, a structure she and her partner challenge in their practice.

Karin is a white Dutch woman in her seventies. She is retired after a hardworking life. She lives in the Neighborhood and has her own second-hand shop in the middle of the neighborhood, where she gets to connect to neighbors and earns some money for her old days. Like many residents, Karin is concerned about the redevelopment, the forced displacements and rising living costs make her insecure about her future. Besides that, the change in demographics also concerns her. Even though she gets along with many of the people around her, she senses the area she lives in is losing its Dutch identity, causing her to feel less and less at home.

Sandy is a dedicated policy officer committed to urban renewal. She works in this neighborhood with a high number of social housing units, where residents have been waiting for renovations for years. Despite the poor housing conditions, many people enjoy living there. She strives to keep them well-informed and involved in the plans, but she finds that this can sometimes be challenging. As a starting point, Sandy fully supports the renewal plans, as she focuses on all of the aspects that need improvement for proper living.

The last person you meet is **Hicham**. Hicham is in his mid-thirties and grew up in a place close to the Neighborhood, where he moved to about ten years ago, and lives with his wife and young children in a rented apartment. He can be classified as third generation Moroccan-Dutch citizen. Hicham comes across as a dedicated ambassador of the Neighborhood, who knows it inside out, values all aspects of it and is ready to protect its value. He works as a social entrepreneur, with a focus on coaching the neighborhood youngsters and connecting people together. He is strongly aware of the attraction of areas like these to outside policy makers, project agencies and others, who often lack inside knowledge and do not treat the place and the residents with the respect they deserve.

IDENTITY AND SENSE OF HOME

One of the key dimensions of conflict which we observed is 'identity and sense of home'. The Neighborhood has its challenges and is statistically deprived. However, many residents feel at home in the area and are reluctant to move. Despite all the efforts of connecting to the residents' needs, project manager Dirk realizes that the renewal plans have a strong impact on them. Every resident has to move, and although on paper there is an option for people to return, it puts existing networks and communities under great pressure. Such a return option is intended to ensure that those networks are maintained if possible. However, many residents still feel that the fact they need to move puts a lot of stress on their lives, as Nezaket illustrates: "Sometimes it feels like... Imagine this: my house has burned down, everything is gone.". Nezaket uses the depiction of her house burning down to illustrate the feelings of loss when she thinks about her moving to another neighborhood. For her, and many other residents, it feels like the end of the life she has built in this area, although she has the option to return. There are all kinds of priority arrangements for people to be able to continue living in their own neighborhood. For example, within renovation blocks, moving to a home that suits residents better.

> *"We are looking at how the elderly can live in the neighborhood as pleasantly as possible, also with the support facilities and meeting places. We try to make it as attractive as possible to continue living in the neighborhood on all sides." (Dirk, 2024)*

This is where tensions can be observed; Dirk states that the place would become stronger with the arrival of different groups of people: "It is now very much a pile-up of vulnerable people. In our opinion, that is not good for the people themselves, but also not to make a difference. These are often difficult challenges." So, on the one hand the local government and housing corporation have identified the need for sustainable living places that meet the needs of the current residents, on the other hand the idea of mixing the demographic representation is identified as an important element of making the area more attractive to live. This shows that the way the renewal process is designed, by moving all residents, is questionable in relation to the need to create and sustain strong networks and sense of community.

Housing blocks and community garden, photograph by Roxane

When it comes to involving residents in the renewal processes, according to Dirk it consists of communication and participation. He believes that their ways of communication generally work well, and people find them rather approachable. Concerning participation, it is more complicated. Residents reasonably hope their contribution will lead to tangible results, but in reality, many of the renewal plans are set in stone already. Arzu for example, has a small, but strong network of women who find themselves in similar situations: they all live in the same area, some with their husbands, some divorced, and as much as possible they foster their community bonds to make the most out of life in the Neighborhood. Learning the Dutch language has been a struggle for most of them. With little education, learning an unrelatable language like Dutch had seemed a mission impossible. The small communities they are living in right now provide recognition and comfort. Therefore, the visible changes in the neighborhoods they live in, and the even bigger announced plans for change are a big factor of fear. The place where most of their lives takes place and the communication around it leads to confusion and stress:

"We have our homes here. Then suddenly I hear; we will demolish this place and it will take a long time. They said that to us. Your street will be up for 2023. Now they say 2025, it's shifting every month. Everything is messy. When you don't understand the language very well, it's even harder."

The fact that the area is changing is one thing, the fact that Arzu and her friends have very little idea about what the plans entail is a big cause of anxiety and influences their own perceived identity in relation to the place they live. The possibilities of moving elsewhere, even though temporarily, are under great pressure with so much anxiety felt about 'their' beloved neighborhood. This can go as far as wondering if they are even able to move back when the renewal is finished. One of the major influences in this anxiety and change in sense of belonging is related to their ability of mastering the Dutch language. Arzu and her friend Nezaket's level of Dutch is not sufficient to understand the official communication. *"We don't understand Dutch very well. We speak Dutch, but more the everyday language."* (Arzu).

Although by now the communication concerning renewal plans is provided in several languages, for a long-time official communication from the municipality and corporate corporations was initially only in Dutch, which was not understandable for all residents. This is especially the case for people like Arzu and Nezaket, leading to limited access to information and ultimately to exclusion of those who are not fluent in Dutch. She still remembers the information meeting two years ago, from which she hardly understood anything, exacerbating feelings of anxiety: *"Everything is unknown. Where will we go to? Which house will we get?"* (Nezaket). Especially for residents such as Arzu and Nezaket the need to renovate and renew the area is not so much present. On the contrary, the current residents see a lot of beauty in the Neighborhood as it is. Moreover, for them it is a place of home, of recognition, of memories and of stories, as Nezaket demonstrates all the places she has loving memories about: the square where her daughter got married, her children and grandchildren who played at the same playground over the years, and so on.

Herman is also not too optimistic about the renewal plans in the Neighborhood. He is very content with its current state with so many places that facilitate encounter, like the community garden and different places for coffee. He sees the commitment of the residents here, for instance with the uprising caused by the arrival of a cannabis shop next to a playground, or the Moroccan women who took care of the mischievous youngsters. He praises the social cohesion he sees around him and he is aware that the networks are at risk with all the changes happening. He also fears that the positioning of the low houses, amidst the green public space, will not remain the same, with the arrival of seven-stories apartment blocks: "*the houses here can obviously forget about the sun.*". Ultimately Herman has a big heart for the place, which he expresses is his authentic, critical yet positive way: "*all the misery is also talked into you. It is not nearly as bad!*".

CHANGES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

'Change as progression'. That is the unexpressed assumption in a fast changing city. Housing that is being improved, streets that will be cleaner, public space that will be more attractive and a mix of social housing, private rental, and owner-occupied homes is introduced. This is also the believe of many of the people behind the renewal plans: municipal officials who are planning future living areas that are better equipped for modern life, professionals at housing corporations who are deeply located in the neighborhood to guide all the plans for those areas.

Perspectives of change agents

Dirk and his team work in the middle of a renewal area, where many homes are being demolished, homes are being added or renovated. The role is to understand the impact of these renewal processes on residents and offer support:

"The question that we find relevant is simple: A good roof over your head is the bare minimum, but what else is needed? We think that more is needed than just the built environment. That also concerns facilities concerning livability in the neighborhood, people participating, entrepreneurship, having care in the neighborhood, being able to meet each other, that kind of thing. How do we make it easier for people? We are very much in system worlds, especially as a corporation. They are often very inaccessible. Certainly, for people who live here. Put yourself more in the living and thinking world of people. What does that mean for your efforts?" (Dirk)

Dirk claims that the housing corporation tries to help the residents in many ways but also acknowledges that there are residents for whom it is not enough yet. They introduced ‘moving buddies’, for those people who need support with all sorts of practicalities, such as arranging utilities or finding a moving company. This way the housing corporation professionals try to slightly break out of the system world they are consciously part of. They want to be visible and reliable in the neighborhood, do what they claim to do. Although this all sounds obvious, it is a huge task as Dirk states:

Construction works in the middle of the street, photograph by Roxane Kroon

“We didn't know exactly how yet, but we are open. This is where we are. You can come here with your questions. And if you have a repair request, we won't send you into the woods: just call the customer contact center. No, you can leave your request here. That is breaking away from your system world.” (Dirk)

Besides working from their easy-accessible location in the middle of the street, people from the housing corporation also do outreach work and visit people at their homes. They want to know who is living in ‘their’ social housing. By offering people help with the technical condition of their houses while waiting for their turn of renovation, the professionals nearly always find access. An example of understanding the living world of the resident is the multifunctional community center that is being planned in the middle of the Neighborhood. It will be a space where people can come in for a cup of coffee, and at the same time find a house doctor, social worker or debt counselor. This way, people will not be stigmatized by entering the building. On the contrary, there are also examples that demonstrate the lack of understanding the residential needs. One of these examples is the big amount of housing that will be added to the area. This can only be achieved by building high-rise apartment blocks. Residents wanted their neighborhood to remain ‘low’ but were not well informed that it had long been politically decided, leading to great disappointment and conflict. Residents had different expectations about their participation. In this regard, Nina observes the core mismatch in planning the renewal ostensible in consultation with its residents:

“There are very big assumptions about people who live in neighborhoods like we are in now, where all sorts of things can happen. Many assumptions about the people who live there and what they can do. I really think that it will be better if you let people participate and help decide. They are experts in their own lives and living environments, instead of us thinking about what is good for them.” (Nina).

Moreover, she observes that money and capital value are wrongly exchanged. The wealthy are making the decisions and get a lot more space than people with less wealth.

This dynamic does not serve society, according to her. She sees that the local government and housing corporation do not profit from genuine participation of residents, if they would the contrary would be the case:

"Many people feel powerless, then you feel frustrated and angry. If you can influence where you live, you are less powerless. I think everything will be better. It is important for people to understand how these kinds of processes work. A lot of the frustration is about things taking a long time: 'I give information, nothing comes back, I am not listened to'. If people go through a process where both sides are open about things. I think that helps. That people learn that there are real limitations to things." (Nina).

Nina and her partner stress the importance of paying residents for their participation in decision-making processes, otherwise it is not inclusive. People need to be compensated for their efforts and the time they invest in their environment, time they cannot spend on other things. Only then, a variety of people have the possibility to participate. At least participation can be accessible to more people than is currently the case. The way Nina and her partner work is by designing facilities with residents, as a collective. They claim that from an artistic standpoint, a lot is possible to meet the people in their needs. They have the time to connect with people and develop understanding for their daily struggles:

"I have known Arzu for a while now and she is starting to talk. Since the conversations trust has grown. That we have the patience to listen. She is used to dealing with people who do not have the patience to listen to someone who does not speak Dutch well." (Nina).

They create spaces where people can participate, without any pressure, as opposed to social work organizations where people have to deal with expectations. They perceive the local government and housing corporations as parties who do not always value the residents living in the areas, they are active. Moreover, they seem to claim residents for their own participation projects, by stating that not too much can be asked from them. Nina interprets this critically: *"the system is not set up for more meaningful participation"*.

On the contrary, Dirk states that the participation rate is particularly low, because even though there are many people who are doing well, there is also a big share of residents who do not have the luxury position to participate in their neighborhood. In order to reach as many residents as possible, the housing corporation not only organizes resident meetings, but also participate in a street market organized by a creative agency. Dirk is reflective about the position of the housing corporation:

Slides at renewal sites, photograph by Roxane Kroon

“Look, a real Amsterdammer hates his landlord. That has always been the case and that will never change. We are an institution, whatever we will do.”

He observes a kind of natural distrust towards them and partly blames themselves. After all, they are the one who have to tell people they have to leave their house. Residents also claim they do not hear anything, but Dirk interprets this in a different way: *“it usually means: I have heard it, but I do not like it”*.

In summary, from Dirk we learned that even though the housing corporation is making efforts to guide the residents through the phases of renewal, they are reflective and realistic about their guiding role. Despite their efforts, we learned that for many residents, including Arzu and Nezaket, the guiding role primarily led to feelings of insecurity and anxiety. The many changes in the neighborhood viewed from different perspectives come in conflict when one is operating from the position of ‘a project one works on’, and the position of ‘a home one build in, lives in’. Along with the variety of perspectives and lived experiences within the group of residents, the challenge remains to address collectivity. Then, the question becomes: do different stakeholders ‘speak’ the same language? And how do contradictions play out?

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS

The Neighborhood is a superdiverse neighborhood, home to many cultural minorities sharing housing blocks and public spaces. It is superdiverse in the sense that even within communities you can find diversity, when it comes to age, class and other identity dimensions. The neighborhood is a so-called arrival city, a place where many first generation labor migrants, mainly from Morocco and Turkey, settled down with their families after arriving in the Netherlands.

Divisions persist between white and non-white Dutch residents, highlighting challenges in fostering inclusivity. More specifically, there are clear differences between people with a migration background and white Dutch residents. Stigmatization, exclusion, and mutual assumptions are prominent, expressed in xenophobic remarks and conflicts between different cultural groups. Subtle, unintentional discriminatory behaviors reinforce divisions and mistrust among people. Interactions are often colored by "us vs. them" dynamics, rooted in social identity theory, where ingroups and outgroups struggle to bridge psychological distances. Here you meet someone who arrived decades ago from abroad, and someone who came even earlier, and who sees her environment changing.

Perspectives of migration

Nezaket sees a lot of cultural differences between her community and the Dutch people around her: "*Dutch elderly people often go to a restaurant or on vacation. We don't have that, we never go*". At the same time, she sees her Dutch neighbors leaving more and more which she finds unfortunate: "*We find it a shame that less Dutch people are living here."* (Nezaket).

Also, Herman points out differences in cultural values and identity that sometimes can lead to discussion and feelings of hurt. Back in the days, he sometimes witnessed a mismatch in cultural values and identity.

"When the first Moroccans came here, they came straight out of the bush, so to speak. They would slaughter a sheep now and then and cook food in the bedroom on a fire, that sort of thing. And the neighbors who lived above them were not foreigners at that time anyway, because they were not there yet. They left in no time, because they could not stand it."

Herman's retelling of the 'old days' is sometimes expressed in a discriminatory way that can be heard more often when white Dutch residents talk about their neighbors with migrant backgrounds. Yet, with the situation he describes it is not hard to imagine that conflict has occurred over ways of living together as neighbors.

Herman has seen big changes in the neighborhood that he proudly calls his home. Despite of being Dutch, white and old, it seems like he blends into the diversity around him. He weekly visits a church, attends Bible studies at another church and he gets his hair cut at the mosque. He exchanged keys with the Moroccan-Dutch neighbors next door. They even have an agreement that they check on him when they notice his shoes are standing at the door for the whole day. On the contrary not all residents feel like they can blend into the diversity in the neighborhood and sometime long to the old days.

Perspectives of a new minority

Not all white Dutch residents feel like they can keep up with the demographic changes in the Neighborhood. Take Karin, who does her utmost best to participate and tries to connect with people around her. An important place for Karin is the local market, which is big and said to be the cheapest in the Netherlands. Over the years, however, the food stalls have changed, and Karin became feeling unsure about cultural norms on her beloved market. She misses the stands selling traditional Dutch products that she is used to:

"That's what I mean, I don't tick on melons. There is not even one Dutch stand on the market, no cheese stand, no fish stand, nothing!"

The lack of a shared language makes it harder to communicate, resulting in misunderstandings. Karin does not intend to offend anyone, but the way she expresses herself comes across as micro aggressions towards her neighbors with migrant backgrounds. As visible during one of the focus groups, residents with a migrant background were identified as one big group with all the same shared values and ideas. Casted away as 'you people', residents with a Turkish and Moroccan background were held responsible by some of the white Dutch residents for their feelings of loss over disappearing Dutch identity in the neighborhood. Nina also recognizes the mismatch in cultural values and identity that is present between residents of different backgrounds, even though they live together since many years. She states there is hope in genuine participation: "*When people with different points of view start to see each other differently, you have to make them work towards a common goal that benefits them.*" (Nina). Despite efforts to promote inclusion, frictions arise over who is part of 'we'. Cultural tensions manifest through language barriers and feelings of loss over disappearing Dutch Identity.

DIVISION AND NEED FOR UNITY

Taking all the different perspectives together, the core conflicting value can be perceived as the one where the aforementioned values come together, namely: social cohesion and collective action. In an area where houses are being renovated and residents have to leave there homes, either temporarily or permanently, social cohesion is being challenged. Neighborhood ties are cut off or are at least being hindered, impacting especially those residents whose social network and social capital is strongly related to the district. Therefore, we can state that restructuring leads to division. Not only physically, but also in the sense of differences in how much impact changes have on different people. As you have read before, clear division exists within the community. At the same time, the changes ask for residents to unite themselves to make a stand for a neighborhood that changes for the better for its own residents, to prevent exclusion and claim space for their voices in decision-making processes. There is a strong desire to collectively *act*.

Sandy sees that social dynamics in the neighborhood are challenging, and that the living conditions also not meet the various living needs:

"The neighborhood is in need of renewal. The number of moldy homes is too high. There is a mismatch with residents who live in houses that are too small or people who live in houses that are too big." (Sandy).

Some residents are skeptical of municipal policies and do not fully trust the plans. She is not surprised, as renovations have been discussed for decades without any real action, people are waiting and waiting, and their lives are on hold. Therefore: some of the key values for Sandy and her colleagues are honesty and transparency, quite similar as to what we learned from Dirk from the housing corporation in the Neighborhood. But also, the local government faces limitations.

“You try to be as transparent as possible, but that’s not always feasible. If something hasn’t been decided internally yet, for example by the housing corporation, I can’t go out on the street and tell people what’s going to happen. That creates tension at times." (Sandy).

Sandy struggles with the balance between transparency and administrative processes. She wants to be honest to residents, but she cannot share everything at all times. Still, she thinks that residents deserve openness from their local government about future changes.

That brings us to the core connecting value, which is respect as a foundation. According to Sandy, this is especially important when different parties are not completely equal. Especially when equality is not entirely possible, she argues to approach matters “from a place of respect”. The collaboration with the housing corporation goes well, Sandy states, as they both have the goal to organize everything as good as possible for the residents. They find each other in a shared ambition: “it is a lot of human work, while it also involves stones”. Engaging residents in the processes is more challenging. She sees that many residents have different priorities, like work and family matters, and they do not come to the meetings they organize. That makes it difficult to get the full image of what is at stake at the residents. But she keeps making efforts: "here we try to reach out more to the people. Sometimes that works better than other times". Moreover, she reasonable acknowledges that different residents have different things they care about:

“There are people who think: I don't care what happens back there in those other streets. That youth center, I don't have any children, that youth center doesn't interest me. For most people it's still like: what's in it for me? Do I have a good home?”

Although the different priorities and means to participate in the efforts of the municipality and housing corporation to vocalize their needs, Hicham tells that the common determinator is that most residents who live in the Neighborhood want to return after the renovations. For outsiders the place is still somewhat scary. However, he utterly hopes that the changes and improvements are for the people of the Neighborhood, because they are the ones who want to return. He surely acknowledges that the place has its challenges, for instance when it comes to safety. But he also sees the qualities of the place:

“If the neighbor is sick, the neighborhood takes care of her. That specific form of social cohesion scores high. Entrepreneurship scores high.” (Hicham)

He wants things to improve, just like the local government and the housing corporation want, but they need to guarantee that current residents will be prioritized. The focus needs to be on residents who were there already, on how to maintain existing social cohesion, and then see how newcomers fit in, not the other way around: “*that is kind of a betrayal of local residents, especially because they have lived in a deprived position for a long time*”.

Nevertheless, Hicham is very critical about the role of the housing corporation. He thinks that they do not make enough genuine effort to inform the local residents. Moreover, he believes there is an agenda behind it:

"The housing corporation does not benefit from informing residents. If they really understand what their power is, what influence they can exert. Residents should be educated in this, that is a responsibility of housing. But it is not, because then they shoot themselves in the foot. So residents have to come together to fight against housing. That is asking a lot of a neighborhood. Many residents are surviving, are illiterate, there is so much going on. As housing, you have to facilitate that honestly and transparently, give them all the information they need. That does not happen enough, so there is distrust. People have no idea, go along with the system. It puts people in difficult positions."

Even though residents are aware of the renewal plans, they are not always aware of what it means for them. The 'social cement' may disappear, people end up in no man's land. He talks to neighbors who are glad their house will be demolished, but they are not informed about whether they can return or not, or about the rent they pay. The housing corporation should make more effort to share information, to create space for people to ask questions. In the end many residents are not reached, because the communication does not match their lives. He takes his own parents as an example:

"They don't leave the district and if they do, it is for Morocco. Their life world is super small".

This observation also reflects the lives of Arzu and Nezaket, who as widows, recognize that after the passing of their husbands they felt lonely, and their world became too small. It was these life events that caused them to participate more in neighborhood events and led them to organize events themselves and take care of the area. Hicham certainly sees the division in the neighborhood, since everyone is frustrated, but expresses it in a different way. Also, people do not understand each other and therefore blame each other for the changes.

"For one person it is the police, for another it is the housing corporation, for another it is the resident of color. Everyone is looking for a scapegoat. And I understand everyone, because no one is happy with the situation as it is now, no one. Even me, who says, these are the most beautiful neighborhoods in the Netherlands. But I look for it in the system, they should take responsibility for putting the resident first. They don't do that enough now."

A concrete example of this division are the resident interest groups, that are mainly led by Dutch white elders, since they generally have time for these kinds of groups. They typically are against the renewal plans, since their interest is to keep things are they are, so they can stay in their big homes. Therefore, it is very important to have a variety of residents, reflecting the diversity in the area at the decision-making tables. However, there are also developments Hicham is positive about, such as a group of neighborhood youngsters who meet once a week to give advice to the local policy makers.

Their number one topic is housing, like the housing supply and mold in the living room. The initiative gives him hope:

"When you grow up in these kinds of neighborhoods, you get passionate about making things better, because you have seen so much suffering around you. I think the greatest superheroes grow up in these kinds of neighborhoods. They fight for a better Netherlands, that gives me hope. But if you don't have these kinds of superheroes on your radar in time, things can go wrong. The system must not disappoint these young people. People don't ask to grow up in this neighborhood, but they will be grateful." (Hicham).

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can co-creation processes balance the needs of diverse cultural groups in urban renewal projects?
- What measures can mitigate the risk of gentrification in socio-economically diverse neighborhoods?
- How can groups that are opposed to each other still live or work together?
- How can governments and local organizations rebuild trust with residents during redevelopment processes?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

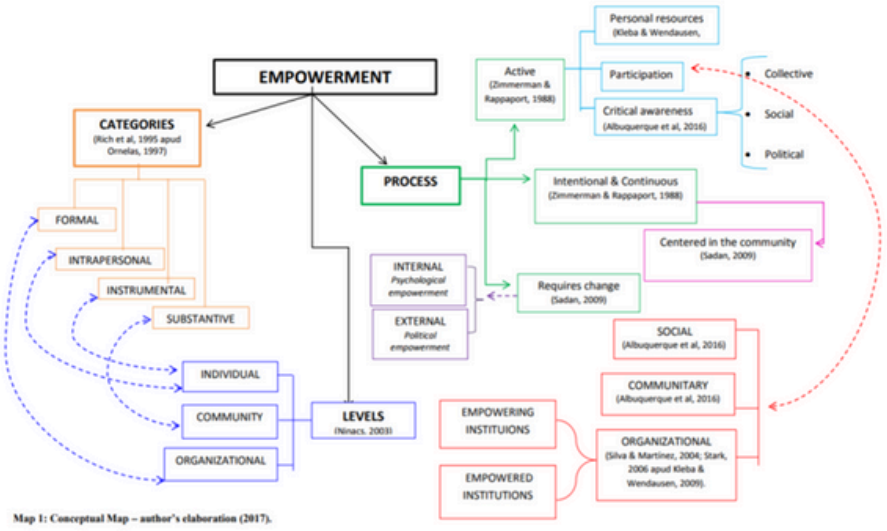
- Understanding multi-dimensional issues through a systems lens.
- Understanding different perceptions form social group lens.
- Identifying practical strategies for enhancing collaboration between stakeholders.
- Understanding gentrification from different perspectives.
- Applications: applying systems thinking to design inclusive policies and programs.

TEACHER NOTES

[These responses represent possible options but are not exhaustive.]

How can co-creation processes balance the needs of diverse cultural groups in urban renewal projects?

Empowerment Theory plays an important role (Wandersman et al., 2005) and discusses empowerment evaluation as an approach that enables communities to monitor and evaluate their own performance. The conceptual map shows the inter-relationship amongst concepts, categories, and levels, which can help in the understanding of the complexity which underlies the processes of empowerment (map taken from article of Cavalieri & Almeida, 2018).



Map 1: Conceptual Map – author's elaboration (2017).

Co-creation processes in urban renewal projects can balance the needs of diverse cultural groups through **empowerment at three levels**: individual (self-confidence and participation), organizational (shared leadership and inclusive decision-making), and community (collective action and social cohesion). The four categories of empowerment (intrapersonal, instrumental, formal, and substantive) ensure that all groups actively contribute and have real influence. **Critical awareness** is central, enabling participants not only to engage but also to understand how their involvement contributes to social change.
Another important principle is **inclusion**, which encourages involvement, participation and diversity. By involving all stakeholders, regardless of their cultural background, in the evaluation process, different perspectives can be integrated, which contributes to a balanced approach that takes into account the needs of diverse groups. They can do this by guaranteeing information that is available for all and in multiple languages

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What measures can mitigate the risk of gentrification in socio-economically diverse neighborhoods?

Urban renewal projects often lead to rising property values, which can result in the displacement of low-income residents—a process known as gentrification. To counteract this risk, policymakers and social workers can apply **Rawls' Principles of Justice (Rawls, 1971)**, particularly the principle of "fair equality of opportunity." This principle suggests that all individuals should have equal access to social and economic advantages, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Rawls argues that a just society ensures that opportunities are not distributed based on arbitrary factors such as wealth or social status. In the context of gentrification, this means that urban renewal policies should actively prevent displacement and ensure fair access to affordable housing. This aligns with Rawls' difference principle, which emphasizes that social and economic inequalities are only justifiable if they benefit the least advantaged members of society.

Strategies

- Ensuring that developers and local governments fulfill promises to rehouse displaced residents within the community.
- Strengthening rights through legal support and anti-displacement policies of the residents.
- Lobbying for rent controls, social housing investments, and housing subsidies for low-income households.
- Empowering local communities by facilitating resident participation in urban planning decisions.
- Providing resources for tenant associations and grassroots movements advocating for equitable development.

How can groups that are opposed to each other still live or work together?

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how groups that perceive themselves as opposites can still learn to live and work together. According to this theory, people categorize themselves into social groups (ingroup) and distinguish themselves from other groups (outgroup). This can be based on visible (skincolor) and invisible (norms, values) aspects. This categorization can lead to stereotypes, biases, and conflicts, as seen in the described neighborhood, where ‘us-versus-them’ tensions exist between residents with a migration background and white Dutch residents.

One of the key challenges in such communities is empathy—the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Without empathy, misunderstandings persist, and micro-aggressions (such as Karin’s experience at the market) can escalate into deeper divisions. Social workers and policymakers can use targeted interventions to foster empathy and social cohesion, ensuring that different groups not only coexist but also recognize and appreciate each other's experiences.

Strategies

- Facilitate structured conversations where different groups openly share their experiences, frustrations, and aspirations.
- These dialogues help clarify misunderstandings and address micro-aggressions, such as Karin’s discomfort at the market, by providing context to different cultural behaviors.
- Breaking the ‘us-versus-them’ divide requires consistent, meaningful interactions in informal, everyday settings.
- Creating superordinate identities (broader group identities) can help: instead of viewing residents as "migrant" vs. "native Dutch," promoting a collective identity such as "neighbors of the neighborhood" fosters a sense of unity.
- Highlighting shared values (e.g., safety, family, and well-being) makes people see commonalities rather than differences.

How can governments and local organizations rebuild trust with residents during redevelopment processes?

During urban redevelopment, residents often feel excluded from decision-making, leading to distrust in institutions. **Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy (1970)** provides a framework for addressing this by empowering communities through dialogue, education, and critical reflection. Freire emphasizes that people must be active participants in shaping their environment, rather than passive recipients of top-down policies and residents can be empowered by dialogue and participation

Strategies

- Appointing community liaisons from diverse backgrounds helps bridge the gap between institutions and residents, ensuring trust and accessibility.
- Governments should collaborate with local advocacy groups and resident-led initiatives to ensure redevelopment aligns with community needs, rather than bureaucratic goals, which is done in the neighborhood.
- Providing resources and funding for grassroots organizations ensures that residents have an independent platform to voice concerns and propose solutions.

Another way to rebuild trust during redevelopment is through **Nussbaum & Sen's Capabilities Approach**, which argues that people need real opportunities to improve their lives and live the lives they want, not just physical infrastructure improvements. Trust is restored when residents see that redevelopment also enhances their social, economic, and educational opportunities.

Strategies

- Supporting affordable and accessible language courses ensures that all residents can effectively engage with redevelopment discussions and opportunities.
- Strengthening youth programs (such as advisory groups or job training initiatives) allows younger residents to actively shape the future of their community.
- Creating inclusive decision-making spaces, where all residents—regardless of background—can participate equally, reduces power imbalances in redevelopment processes.
- Mixed-use public spaces encourage cross-cultural connections, helping to bridge social divides and build mutual trust.
- Encouraging community-driven urban design, where residents shape their own neighborhoods, reinforces the idea that redevelopment is for everyone, not just newcomers or developers.

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