

# Who Is Afraid of a Changing Population? Reflections on Housing Policy in Rotterdam

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*Like other major cities in the Netherlands, Rotterdam has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of ethnic minority households in its population in recent decades. However, in contrast with other major cities, Rotterdam has responded vigorously to this demographic trend by introducing housing permits for rental dwellings, a program that tries to regulate the inflow of tenants into designated neighborhoods. The Dutch government passed special legislation, called the “Act on Exceptional Measures concerning Inner-City Problems,” popularly known as the “Rotterdam Act,” which offered a way around the anti-discrimination regulations in housing allocation. This article discusses the housing permits based on the Rotterdam Act in the context of (1) the development of Rotterdam and its more general housing policies; (2) the recent rise of populist parties in the city and the country as a whole; and (3) changes in Rotterdam’s demographics. We critically assess the effects of this additional housing policy in relation to the Susan Fainstein’s concept of the “just city” and conclude that it does not convincingly meet Fainstein’s criteria or provide an answer to the problems and public discord it was supposed to resolve. In the end it must be seen as merely a token gesture.*

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The demographic prognosis for Rotterdam in 2017 (Ergun and Bik 2003), and more importantly, the predicted increase of the share of ethnic minorities<sup>1</sup> in specific districts, has sparked a political revolution in the city of Rotterdam and far beyond. The prediction that half the population - more than 70 percent in some places - would belong to ethnic minorities brought about a change in national legislation. On top of existing policies to engineer indirect population changes by altering the composition of the housing stock (e.g. by demolishing cheap rental dwellings and replacing them with more expensive owner-occupied houses), a policy was launched specifically for the allocation of housing.

This policy relies on a specific system of housing permits, which is allowable within the provisions of the “Rotterdam Act” (discussed in detail below). This policy

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aims to change the composition of the population in predefined areas through the application of certain criteria (such as low income), in order to prevent a further increase of the share of ethnic minorities in those areas.

Discrimination on ethnic grounds has always been deemed unacceptable in Dutch housing policies. Earlier attempts in the Netherlands to set up policies to disperse evenly ethnic minorities in cities or to prevent ethnic households from taking up residence in certain areas were invariably quashed (Bolt, 2004; Bovens and Trappenburg, 2004). Nevertheless, at the end of 2003, the city of Rotterdam came up with a policy to prevent - or at least limit - the predicted growth of ethnic minorities in certain areas. To avoid being accused outright of discrimination, the city did not say in so many words that residents from ethnic minorities were a problem, but rather that social problems and low liveability were often associated with ethnic minorities. The actual words were: "The color is not the problem, but the problem has got a color" (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003, 12).

This prognosis was based on the demographic characteristics of the residential population, anticipated immigration, and projected urban renewal plans and building programs for the long term<sup>2</sup>. Since the mid-1990s, the housing policy in Rotterdam has been based on the concept of the "undivided city": the intention behind alterations to the housing stock, through expansion and urban renewal, was to integrate ethnicity and income via the dispersal of ethnic minorities. When this policy proved not powerful enough to prevent the further concentration of ethnic minorities in certain parts of the city, the municipal council decided to stop trying to influence the composition of the population solely in an indirect way through changes in the housing stock. Next to that, it tried to limit the inflow of vulnerable (ethnic minority) households into certain areas by introducing a system of housing permits that would prevent low-income households (this criterion was later changed so as to exclude households without an income from paid employment; see Section 4 of this article for further details) with less than five years of residence in the Rotterdam region from being allocated a home. There was no mention of ethnicity, even though ethnic minority households would be most affected.

There was nothing new about the idea of using the allocation of housing to influence the concentration of ethnic minorities. It had been applied informally and implicitly for many years: until the 1990s, housing associations had frequently used their discretionary powers to prevent concentrations of ethnic minorities in tenements or specific areas (Smit, 1991; Tijdelijke Commissie Onderzoek Integratiebeleid, 2004), but regulations to promote integration or to use quotas in particular areas were always rescinded. Now, public and political debates were providing political support for measures to limit the increase in the share of ethnic minorities; but Rotterdam could not independently introduce and implement a restrictive housing allocation policy. Past experience had shown that the Dutch Supreme Court was more than ready to crack down on any attempts in this direction. What was needed was a legal

basis at the national level. Within just two years - inordinately fast - this legal basis materialized in the form of the Rotterdam Act.

In 2004 an experiment was set up to test the value of housing permits as a means of lowering the inflow of low-income households into designated areas. In 2005 the experiment was evaluated by the city of Rotterdam, and the Dutch government passed the required legislation (for further details of the evaluation, the national legislation and applicability for other cities, see Section 4 of this paper).

To understand why the Rotterdam Municipal Council wanted this policy and why the support was so strong that it led to an Act of Parliament, we need to look at the changing demographics and the housing situation in Rotterdam, as well as the local and national political context at the beginning of the 21st century. This should give us a clearer idea of how this regulatory system developed and allow us to examine its effects on both the designated areas and the households targeted for exclusion.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four parts. Section 2 presents the conceptual framework we used to evaluate the application of housing permits as allowed by the Rotterdam Act. In Section 3 we discuss the housing policy and the housing situation in the city of Rotterdam in recent decades and relate them to the general and political development of Rotterdam and examine the rationale for the housing permit system. Section 4 first explains how the housing permit system came into operation and then sketches the legal context for rental housing in the Netherlands, which sets the conditions for a specific, necessary Act - the Rotterdam Act - which in turn paved the way for the housing permit system. It examines the steps that were taken to apply and extend the policy in Rotterdam and discusses their effects. In Section 5 we reflect on Rotterdam's use of housing permits in relation to the concept of "the just city." We discuss the democratic quality of the policy, whether it fosters diversity, and whether the policy contributes to greater equity.

## THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND THE JUST CITY

We searched for a suitable conceptual framework for evaluating the housing permit system as provided for in the Rotterdam Act. One concept, the revanchist city by Neil Smith (1996) has been applied in various recent papers. Similarly, the concepts of "The Right to the City" (Harvey, 2008) and "The Just City" (Marcuse et al., 2009; Fainstein, 2010) have been used to analyze city changes in a neoliberal context. Without exploring the literature in detail, we will briefly review these concepts and describe the framework we intend to use.

Several assessments of the recent policies of the city of Rotterdam (Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008; Van Eijk, 2010; Schinkel and Van den Berg, 2011) have applied Neil Smith's concept of the revanchist neoliberal city (1996), which is about reconquering the city for capital and for the middle- and higher-income classes.

Smith sees urban revanchism as a class struggle. Uitermark and Duyvendak “test” the concept of revanchism in their paper on Rotterdam and argue that:

...the literature on revanchism needs to be amended on four accounts if it is to grasp the local urban reality of Rotterdam. First, the target groups of the revanchist project are not the same in Rotterdam as in the US. The revanchism of populist parties in Rotterdam is directed in large part to ethnic minorities and especially to Muslims. Secondly, revanchism finds most of its supporters not among the middle classes but among the autochthonous [indigenous] Dutch population and especially the lower classes. Thirdly, we observe not a wholesale shift towards repression but instead argue that there are renewed attempts to discipline marginalized ethnic groups. Fourthly, housing policies do not aim to exclude or segregate marginalised groups but instead aim to create mixed neighbourhoods.” (p. 1486).

Uitermark and Duyvendak contend that the developments in Rotterdam are indicative of how the revanchist project, as used by Smith, could transform in a European context. Essentially, they argue that Rotterdam’s approach is too complex to be labelled revanchist. Schinkel and Van den Berg (2011, p. 1930) add some nuances of their own when assessing the “Rotterdam Intervention Teams”:

Dutch revanchism can be characterized as a specific paternalistic brand of revanchism of which the focus on inclusion of “the marginalized” and the belief in altering their behaviour are important ingredients.” (italics in original)

Van Eijk (2010, p. 831) argues that:

...theories of urban revanchism in their current form cannot do justice to the differential practices of city governments and are therefore forced to introduce conceptual ‘twists’, theoretical ‘flexibility’ and ‘amendments’ in order to stay close to Smith’s thesis of the ‘neoliberal city’.

Van Eijk identifies other motives that are fundamentally different from economic policy motives but which may still result in the exclusion of specific groups; such as the insecurity stemming from demands for social order and concerns about national unity. These motives stand alongside each other, she concludes, “and sometimes are combined, as creating mixed neighbourhoods aims to disperse problems of crime and nuisance, attract the middle classes for financial benefits and integrate deprived groups ‘into society’” ( p. 831). We agree with Van Eijk. The strategy does not simply reflect a clash between the interests of the middle and lower classes (which is what Neil Smith seems to say). On the one hand the policy aims to create mixed neighborhoods but at the same time it limits the inflow of vulnerable households into certain neighborhoods, thereby limiting the right to equal access.

The “Right to the City,” first proposed by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, may be a more appropriate concept for framing the discussion. David Harvey (2008, 315) formulates it as follows:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of

urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

Harvey criss-crosses urban history to illustrate his ideas, but his criteria for the “Right to the City” are somewhat vague.

Susan Fainstein (2010; see also Marcuse et al., 2009) formulates three criteria for “The Just City”.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, it is democratic; people have control over their living environments. Secondly, it is open to diversity. Finally, the city furthers equity.

“The Just City,” as used by Fainstein, is a less rigid concept than “The Right to the City” because the focus is on improving society rather than fundamentally changing it. Uitermark (2012) criticises Fainstein’s choice of the term “equity” instead of equality. “Fainstein thus strives for justice, though not with a capital “j.” Her goal is not to rethink the foundations of society but to push planners and other decision makers to reconsider what they can do locally.” (Uitermark 2012, 108). Though Uitermark may be right, we believe that Fainstein’s more pragmatic approach is more useful for assessing the Rotterdam Act.

### *The Right of the City to Change*

Cities are constantly changing and constantly have to change to keep pace with societal change. In our assessment of the new Rotterdam policies, we cannot neglect earlier research on social mix, since the Rotterdam policy seeks to prevent the further concentration of certain vulnerable groups of residents. Neighborhood effects and policies on social mix have been studied widely (see amongst others: Holmes, 2006, Joseph, 2006; Tunstal and Fenton, 2006; Galster, 2007a, 2007b; Lees, 2008; Cheshire, 2009; Doff, 2010; Van Ham et al., 2012), but it is still debatable whether social mixing is the best response to poverty or ethnic concentration in a neighborhood. On the one hand greater social mix may contribute positively to the reputation of the neighborhood (Ouweland, 2005; Musterd, 2008) but unfortunately targeting neighborhoods for social mixing may partly further stigmatize them (Dean and Hastings, 2000).

When we assess a city’s policies we have to be aware of where they come from (path dependency). The city may be facing the selective out-migration of middle-class households to the suburbs because that is where this group can find the homes and neighborhood environments they prefer. Housing markets often do not act “normally.”

We have the familiar special features of housing as consumption and investment goods. Dwellings last long, they are tied to a specific place, slow to produce, expensive, not easily substituted with other goods, etc. (Arnott, 1987; Stahl, 1985).

A housing stock produced during several decades, sometimes hundreds of years, of building activity creates a powerful historical heritage that any gov-

ernment has to deal with when making housing policy decisions.” (Bengtsson and Ruonavaara, 2010).

Musterd et al. (1999, 582) relate the economic revitalization of cities to the re-differentiation of housing and argue that it is necessary to take differences in global economic restructuring processes and welfare states into account in order to understand the divisions in cities.

Divided cities tend to develop due to economic restructuring, but governments are indeed able to reduce its effects. (...) Especially in the field of re-balancing housing policy, a modest attitude seems to be most appropriate today. Urban restructuring may be a sensible approach to improve the quality of the urban environment, to make the urban housing stock more attractive to different household types, especially to those with higher incomes, and to enlarge the income-generating capacities of commercial properties in the cities. (...) This might be all the more necessary, because in many countries we observe an economic development of cities lagging behind the economic development of the rest of the urban region (Van der Vegt and Manshanden, 1996).”

The composition of the city, the population, the housing stock, the infrastructure, and the facilities (particularly cultural ones) are not static. Therefore, according to this body of thinking, a city has a right to change, to prepare itself for the future, given the political context. The well-being of the residents should be the basis for policy assessment. As Fainstein points out, the city has to be democratic; it should foster diversity and it should further equity. We believe that to define everything as class struggle is not appropriate nor is leaving things as they are and waiting for the “new” society to materialize. We can now use these different conceptual frameworks to examine the housing permits based on the Rotterdam Act.

## ROTTERDAM’S DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING STOCK AND POLITICS

### *Rotterdam’s Port and Housing Stock*

Rotterdam’s history as a city is largely intertwined with its development as one of Europe’s main ports. The city’s economy has always been heavily dependent on the port and the accompanying trade and industrial development. There used to be a strong and constant demand for unskilled labor (Kloosterman, 1996), but this has been shrinking since the 1970s, as a result of industrialization, mechanization and, in particular, the containerization that began in the 1960s (Burgers, 2001). Obviously, other developments have also had an impact on Rotterdam’s economy, such as the growth of the service sector at the end of the twentieth century, and recent growth in the creative sector (art, cultural businesses, advertising, movies, fashion, etc.). However, compared with Amsterdam, the largest city in the Netherlands, Rotterdam has faced many more problems in relation to the upgrading and pro-

fessionalization of employment structures, and may continue to face them in the future (Burgers, 1996; Kloosterman and Trip, 2004). “Absolute growth is trailing in Rotterdam, as the city is relatively weak in most of the service industries that generate the most employment growth at present.” (Trip, 2007, 514).

A former Mayor of Rotterdam said:

Rotterdam heads all the wrong lists: the city has the cheapest housing stock, the highest unemployment, the worst educated working population and the lowest average income of all big cities [in the Netherlands]. All those lists are connected; they sustain each other and create a vicious circle (De Lange, 2000, [our translation]).

The unfavorable socio-economic development and outlook have had a significant impact on Rotterdam’s housing policy and have influenced the composition of the housing stock. On the other hand, the housing stock affects economic development. Syrett and North (2008, 90) state that the relationship “between housing markets - the single most important factor in producing concentrated deprivation - and labor markets” is crucial.

In the first decades following World War II, housing policy in the city focused on increasing the number of social rented dwellings as a result of the government policy to create affordable housing in return for wage controls. In the 1970s, the needs of low-income households in run-down neighborhoods dating from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century were met with a very comprehensive and effective urban renewal program spearheaded by the principle of “building for the neighbourhood,” which entailed the construction of mostly or only social housing for established residents (Priemus, 1978). This improved housing conditions and led to a high proportion of social dwellings (up to 85 percent) in older parts of the city. Additionally, urban renewal had the unanticipated effect of creating barriers to gentrification (Burgers, 2001), and because urban renewal projects were built for established residents, often with low incomes, they contributed to the concentration of low-income households (Stouten, 2010). These fundamental characteristics of the housing stock are not susceptible to change based on ‘normal’ market influences.<sup>4</sup> As a result, national and local government housing policies have historically played a strong impact in local housing markets.

Around the end of the 1980s, the principle of “building for the neighbourhood” was superseded by the principle of social mix under the slogan, “Rotterdam, undivided city” (Gemeente Rotterdam, 1995). This policy shift was in line with more general developments in Dutch urban renewal policy (Priemus, 2004a; Uitermark, 2003). The undivided city policy aimed initially to prevent income-based segregation, but by the turn of the century, the emphasis on ethnicity was getting stronger all the time.

The purpose of the social mix policy was to upgrade and differentiate the housing stock in order to provide better accommodations for the middle- and higher-income groups in the city. The strategy was three-fold: 1) to demolish a substantial part of the existing social rental stock and build new family dwellings and apartments,

preferably for owner-occupiers from middle- or higher-income groups, in areas with a huge concentration of affordable rental houses; 2) to upgrade some of the rental stock so that it could be rented or sold to higher-income families and 3) to sell some rental dwellings to established residents, or after vacancy, to in-migrating buyers (see Kleinhans and Elsinga, 2010). These policies were driven by the belief that owner-occupiers would have a positive influence on the quality of life in the neighbourhood, specifically, that owners would demonstrate more responsibility for the neighborhood and be role models for lower-income residents.

Urban renewal and housing policies have not changed much since 2000, when 57.5 percent (160,700 dwellings) of the 279,000 dwellings in Rotterdam was owned by housing associations, 20.9 percent by private landlords, and 21.6 percent by owner-occupiers. At that time, 124,800 households belonged to the so-called 'primary' target group for social housing, made up of households that required support (subsidized rents and housing allowances) to provide for their housing needs. Between 2000 and 2009 almost 20,000 old and cheap<sup>5</sup> social dwellings were demolished, but only about 6,000 new dwellings were built, leaving a net loss of almost 14,000 units (Dol and Kleinhans, 2012).

The sale of rental dwellings to occupants was another new policy development. All in all, substantial changes have taken place in the composition of the housing stock. The continuous efforts to realize a more mixed housing stock pushed up the share of owner-occupied dwellings from 22 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2009 (Dol and Kleinhans 2012). According to Dol and Kleinhans, these changes had no adverse effects on the capacity to house the primary target group (low-income households), as there were still enough affordable dwellings in 2009. The city of Rotterdam wanted to pursue the strategy that it had chosen in the 1990s, namely: upgrade the housing stock to accommodate, attract and hold middle- and higher-income households and eventually strengthen the socio-economic level of the population. In practice this meant changing the income mix but not necessarily the ethnic mix. At the beginning of the 21st century a new strategy was added but to understand it, we need to describe the political landscape in the Netherlands, and Rotterdam in particular, around 2000, with regard to the integration of ethnic minorities.

### *The Rise of Populist Politics and the Ethnic Issue in the Netherlands*

Ethnic segregation gained momentum in the Netherlands at the end of the 20th century. National politics at the beginning of the 21st century were dominated by the debate on the integration of ethnic minorities, especially Muslims. The entrance of the late politician Pim Fortuyn on the political stage marked the start of populist parties in the Netherlands. In the 1980s and 1990s extreme right-wing, anti-immigration parties already had representatives in Parliament and on city councils. They opposed further immigration from non-western countries, but they were always on the fringes, and some of the parties disappeared quickly, often as a result of

internal conflicts. Multiculturalism was widely accepted at that time and it was regarded as politically incorrect to connect social problems with the growing number of non-western immigrants. “Multicultural planning,” expressing the identity of immigrants in urban design and architecture and catering to their specific housing demands, was a well-known device in urban renewal and housing in the Netherlands until the start of the 21st century (Van der Horst et al., 2002a; Van der Horst and Ouwehand, 2012).

In 1991 the integration of immigrants was addressed by a well-known liberal politician, Frits Bolkestein (1991), and later, from a more populist stance, by Pim Fortuyn professor (Albeda Chair in Employment Conditions in Public Service at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam between 1990-1995) and the author of *Against the Islamisation of our Culture* (1997). Fortuyn was also known as “a Rotterdam Rottweiler” (Peet, 2002). Both were reacting to the continuous growth in the immigrant population and its expected long-term negative effects on Dutch standards and values.

The policies and discourse that used to focus on group-wise emancipation and which supported “emancipation with retention of minority identity” (i.e. multiculturalism) took as Schinkel and Van den Berg (2011, p. 1928) call it, a “culturist turn.” Dutch culture became the normative basis for individual immigrants:

Culturist policies shifted the focus vis-à-vis the “minorities policy” of the 1980s towards the level of the individual migrant instead of striving for group-wise emancipation. After 2000, and aggravated by international events in 2011, a populist rhetoric of “realism,” “New Politics” and a break with ‘leftist political correctness’ dominated the discourse on immigrant integration (...) emphasizing the cultural assimilation of immigrants in the Netherlands.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, public discontent with multiculturalism was becoming increasingly evident in the Netherlands. Another political commentator, Paul Scheffer, wrote an essay entitled *The Multicultural Drama* (2000) in which he criticized the integration policies. The 9/11 attacks added fuel to the fire of the debate, nationally and in cities with a strong concentration of ethnic minorities. Rotterdam, the second largest city in the country, with a rather weak socio-economic position and a rapidly increasing ethnic population, proved a fertile seedbed for populist policies. During the campaigns for the municipal and national elections at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002, Rotterdam was the most salient example of the changing mood. Pim Fortuyn mobilized concerns about the inflow of immigrant households and distrust in the mainstream political parties by declaring that Islam was a backward culture, largely because Islamic societies had not experienced modernization or the Enlightenment. When Fortuyn was running for the city council in 2002 with the newly established political party *Liveable Rotterdam* (*Leefbaar Rotterdam*), he declared that the time had come to change the composition of the population:

Nowadays, 56 percent of the Rotterdam population is of foreign origin, which is too high. [...] Rotterdam's neighboring municipalities have to absorb the Rotterdam underclass. [...] The monoculture in certain districts has to disappear. We have to break with Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese neighborhoods, and that calls for forced removals (Leefbaar Rotterdam, 2002 [our translation]).

Fortuyn's party, Liveable Rotterdam, won 17 of the 45 seats on Rotterdam Municipal Council. It became the largest party in the Council and gained a strong position in the municipal executive (mayor and aldermen). Public policy focused on improvements to public safety through stronger policing and zero tolerance. "Intervention teams" visited households to check out deviant behaviour, illegal occupancy and social benefit fraud. This project, developed by the former municipal executive, was forcefully continued (Schinkel and Van den Berg, 2011). The new coalition continued to strive for more social cohesion and for housing policies that would attract and retain more middle- and higher-income households. However, during the coalition negotiations, the other parties prevented Fortuyn from incorporating into the municipal executive's program a policy of reducing the percentage of immigrant households via forced removals.

Fortuyn ran for Parliament, but was murdered prior to the elections on May 6, 2002. His assassination triggered a massive uproar in Dutch society. Fortuyn's national party, the LPF (Lijst Pim Fortuyn), subsequently sent shockwaves through Dutch politics, winning 26 seats and forming part of the new coalition government. This new national party was most clearly defined by its anti-immigrant and anti-Islam stance, which had a profound impact on both Dutch immigration policy and the policies of most political parties.

As a result, renewed attention was paid to policies designed to disperse immigrant households. Similar policies had been rejected in the 1970s because they were perceived to be discriminatory. After 2002 "integration" - meaning assimilation to most people - became the new political buzzword and various policies were introduced to promote the integration of immigrant households. The shift in the integration debate also focused on housing policy, and a parliamentary inquiry was instituted to determine the extent to which government policy was contributing to the integration of ethnic minorities (Syrett and North, 2004). The fact that housing policy was one of the three main areas of inquiry (Van der Horst and Ouwehand 2012) reinforced existing calls in urban areas for restructuring and more social mixing, as native Dutch residents saw the concentration of low-priced rental housing as one of the reasons why the population in their neighborhood was changing from native Dutch to non-western immigrant (Ouwehand and Davis, 2004; Van der Horst et al., 2002b). It also broadened the discussion to include housing allocation policies that were geared toward dispersing ethnic minorities.

In 2004 the public and parliamentary debate on integration and ethnic minorities was fuelled by the assassination of film director and publicist Theo van Gogh, a strong critic of Islam, who had made an anti-Islam movie with the Somali-Dutch

politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Van Gogh was shot and stabbed by a Muslim extremist. A few months earlier, member of parliament, Geert Wilders, had broken away from the Conservative Liberals (VVD) and started his own populist right-wing anti-Islam political party (PVV), which connected almost every political issue to non-western immigration, and spoke of a “Tsunami of Islamization” (Ten Hoove and Du Pree, 2006). The anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic stance of the PVV gained strong support and was very influential in Dutch politics and public debate.<sup>6</sup>

### *A Demographic Forecast*

Pim Fortuyn with his Liveable Rotterdam party won the local elections in Rotterdam in 2002. It was a political landslide in which Liveable Rotterdam gained 17 of the 45 seats, defeating the Labor party. It became the largest party on the municipal council and formed a coalition with the Conservative Liberals (VVD) and the Christian Democratic Party. Fortuyn’s party contributed three members to the municipal executive. Of course, the Labor party leaders blamed themselves for having lost the election and control of the municipal executive. They were determined to regain their former position, and there were some candid exchanges about the political program, in particular their stance towards the integration of ethnic minorities. The Labor party was still very strongly represented on the district councils in Rotterdam, as Liveable Rotterdam had not participated in these elections.

In the summer of 2003, a report was published for the city of Rotterdam (Ergun and Bik, 2003) that highlighted population changes in the period 1990-2002 and projected a further substantial increase in the minority population. Between 1990 and 2002, the percentage of native Dutch in Rotterdam had fallen from 63.8 percent to 53.9 percent and a further fall to 42.1 percent in 2017 was projected (Bik and Linders, 2003). These results reflected sharp neighborhood changes, especially in post-war housing estates, where the ‘original’ residents who had settled in the 1950s and 1960s had grown old and moved away or died. The inflow of immigrant households led to a rapid change in the identity of these neighborhoods (Ouwehand, 2005).

The new demographic forecast predicted a rise in the proportion of ethnic minorities from 34.6 percent in 2002 to 48.0 percent in 2017.<sup>7</sup> It was suggested that this strong increase would be caused primarily by further immigration from Morocco, Turkey, the Dutch Antilles, and in particular, from ‘other poor non-western countries’, which was expected to increase from 7.5 percent in 2002 to 15.7 percent in 2017. These figures immediately sparked a discussion in Rotterdam about the growth of the immigrant population and the inflow of immigrants.

An alderman on one of the district councils, Dominic Schrijer from the Labor Party, was the first to sound the alarm about the predicted growth in ethnic minority households. The percentage of ethnic minorities in his own district, Charlois in Rotterdam South, was expected to rise from 40.1 percent in 2002 (just above the

city average of 34.6 percent) to 75.8 percent in 2017 (far above the city average of 48.0 percent) and to become the greatest concentration in the city (Ergun and Bik 2003). He pointed to the uneven spread of “disadvantaged” immigrant households across the city and the region, and demanded that more attention be paid to the absorptive capacity of Charlois, which was facing a whole battery of problems such as insufficient support services, nuisance, overcrowding, illegal hostels, and so forth.

As stated above, since 1994, the explicit aim of Rotterdam’s housing policy was to change the structural composition of the city by reorganizing disadvantaged neighborhoods. This, in turn, would enhance the differentiation in price and tenure of the housing stock and promote a better social mix of residents. Consequently, social rental dwellings were demolished and replaced by more expensive dwellings for middle-income groups. The short-term results of that policy were modest since it takes a lot of effort, time and money to change the housing stock. The former municipal executive, led by the Labor Party, had already developed a more comprehensive social and behavioral - if not repressive - approach in disadvantaged neighborhoods by introducing “door-to-door” controls (checking out every dwelling for illegal residents, social benefit fraud and so on), stricter policing and street rules (about greeting each other, noise and so on), and by expanding the supply of hostels for the homeless.

In 2003 the municipal executive (which included Liveable Rotterdam) had considerably strengthened these policies, but Schrijer argued that more drastic measures were needed. Otherwise, he said, Charlois would remain the “drain” of municipal and regional housing (Reijndorp and Van der Zwaard, 2004). As Reijndorp and Van der Zwaard pointed out, Schrijer’s initiative was also a political response to the 2002 election results. The Labor Party, in an attempt to regain the voters’ trust, was capitalizing on Liveable Rotterdam’s popularity by espousing its political concerns about integration.

When the Labor Party attempted to put the inflow of vulnerable ethnic minority households into particular neighborhoods back on the agenda, the leader of Liveable Rotterdam, Marco Pastors, seized his chance. He made a plea for “ring-fencing Rotterdam” and putting a “stop to immigrant households.” The subsequent public and political debate forced him to reframe his argument and to refer to “disadvantaged households” (Article 1 of the Dutch Constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of race, religion or sex). Nevertheless, the municipal executive announced a policy program in response to the projected increases in disadvantaged households in certain districts. This program, ‘Rotterdam Perseveres: Toward a city in balance’ (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003), was published at the end of 2003.

## THE ROTTERDAM ACT: REALIZATION, APPLICATION AND EFFECTS

In the last section we described the context of Rotterdam, the situation the city faces, and the sense of urgency among politicians ‘to do something’ about it. Because Rotterdam’s problems are spatialized to a certain extent, policymakers have sought to solve problems by changing the local population, i.e. through social engineering. Housing allocation is one of the instruments that can create a more “balanced” population distribution. Rotterdam politicians also wanted to introduce a policy that would exclude “disadvantaged” households from “distressed” neighborhoods by setting up a system of housing permits that placed extra demands on house-seekers. As the Dutch housing market is highly regulated, a legal framework in the form of a government act had to be developed for this system, i.e. the “Act on exceptional measures concerning inner-city problems,” better known as the Rotterdam Act. In this section we discuss the steps that were taken and the way in which the housing permits system actually works. On the basis of secondary data we also show the effects of the policy for the neighborhoods in question and the target population, i.e. the low-income households that were interested in moving into these neighborhoods.

### *From Experiment to Government Legislation*

In the Netherlands, the allocation of rental housing is regulated by local authorities acting within the constraints of the Housing Act (passed in 1993) (Staatsblad, 1992). Together with housing associations and other organizations, the local authority (region or city) formulates rules and criteria for allocating housing. The Housing Act obliges the local authority to provide affordable housing for low-income households and gives house-seekers the freedom to take up residence wherever they want when housing is available. Officially, the local authority may intervene only when “scarcity” generates negative effects; in other words, when demand exceeds supply and adversely affects low-income households or other target groups. The Housing Act assigns administrative responsibility and provides tools in the form of criteria to ensure equal and a fair allocation of housing. When necessary, eligibility criteria can be set: for example, the household composition may be matched with the size of the dwelling or the income may be related to the rent. Allocation can be regulated via housing permits or through an agreement with housing providers. The city of Rotterdam decided two decades ago to organize its housing allocation policy in an agreement with the housing associations. The new agreement only dealt with the social rental sector; the previous housing permit system had encompassed the private rental sector as well.<sup>8</sup>

There is an on-going debate as to whether housing allocation can and should be used to steer population flows and thereby improve neighborhood liveability. In the implementation of the new Housing Act considerable attention has been devoted to the potential role of housing allocation as a means for tackling liveability problems. The first version of the proposal for the new Act included liveability as well as scarcity as a justification for intervention by housing authorities, but this was deleted in a later version. The Council of State (Raad van State, the judicial advisory council to the Dutch government) found that the criterion of liveability was unclear and needed to be better defined. In the meantime, there was a change of government and the new minister dropped the liveability argument altogether from the Act. The government coalition has changed several times since then, and there is still no new Housing Act. The proposed Act and the current Act (the older one, which is still operational) both allow housing associations a fair amount of discretion to experiment with housing allocation criteria, depending on the regional context. In the current situation, actual interventions are rarely checked, so there are many examples on a very local level in which additional demands are made on house-seekers. For example, in the Hambaken neighborhood in the city of Den Bosch, new residents have to be officially employed and must produce a certificate of good behaviour to show that they do not have a criminal record. Strictly speaking, there are no legal grounds for these interventions (VROM-Inspectie, 2011).

In the report *Rotterdam zet door* (RotterdamPerseveres) (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003), the Rotterdam city council asks the government for clear guidelines and resources “to turn the tide” for the city and its most vulnerable neighborhoods. The council argues that the existence of neighborhoods in distress calls for legislation that is tailored to special circumstances. It argues that to prevent further degeneration in already distressed neighborhoods, the inflow of disadvantaged households needs to be controlled and contained:

Neighborhood degeneration is mainly a question of a decline in liveability, for example, due to overcrowding and crime. If nuisance and crime gain the upper hand, the neighborhood will degenerate. If this threatens to exceed the absorptive capacity of the city or neighborhood, then action has to be taken and we have to be more selective about incoming residents (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003, 42-43, [our translation]).

As discussed in the previous section, the immediate cause for trying to influence population flows into and within the city was the predicted increase in the share of non-western immigrants. Although the plan for ring-fencing Rotterdam and a full immigration stop were withdrawn, the report *Rotterdam Perseveres* focused almost exclusively on immigration. It started as follows:

In July 2003, COS published the *Forecast Population Categories 2017*. The essence of the conclusion was that in the coming years the number of autochthonous [native] Rotterdammers will further decrease and that there will be a significant increase in the number of people from ‘other poor countries’ and the Dutch Antilles. (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003, 5, [our translation]).

The rest of the report is peppered with notions on ethnicity and graphs that show the increase in immigrant populations in neighborhoods. However, the key problem is no longer based on ethnicity but on economics:

The absorptive capacity of some neighborhoods is being exceeded due to a continuous inflow of disadvantaged households and the departure of privileged households who can afford to live somewhere else. Together with nuisance, illegality and crime we see this as the key problem (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2003, 7, [our translation]).

In line with the economic reframing of the problem, the city proposed that the inflow be managed on the basis of income (first, the applicants had to earn 120 percent of the minimum income, later they had to show that they had an income from paid employment, a pension or a study allowance). However, the city needed the Dutch government to amend the 1993 Housing Act or grant partial dispensation, as it was not legally permissible to exclude households on the basis of income. Furthermore, a large part of the inflow of disadvantaged groups into Rotterdam was ending up in the unregulated, low-cost private rental sector. To put both issues on the agenda, the city proposed the reintroduction of a housing permit system, as this would enable it to control and contain the inflow of vulnerable households into designated “problem areas”. On the basis of the argument that “exceptional” problems needed exceptional measures, the city successfully lobbied for a separate government Act (supplementary to the 1993 Housing Act).

Notwithstanding the change in the definition of the problem, critics argued that the proposal was meant to exclude immigrants from specific areas and that it was therefore discriminatory (Priemus, 2004b; Reijndorp and Van der Zwaard, 2004). This was not the first time that a heated discussion on the dispersion of immigrants had flared up in Rotterdam or that an actual de-concentration or dispersion policy was considered. In 1972, the city had tried to institute a dispersion policy on the basis of the so-called 5 percent regulation. The immediate cause were the race riots in Afrikaanderwijk (Bolt, 2004), an impoverished neighborhood in the South of Rotterdam where many migrant workers lived in overcrowded conditions. To ensure a proportional distribution of migrant workers across the city, the dispersal policy stated that the share per neighborhood ought not to exceed the average city share, which was five percent at that time. In 1980, a 16 percent quota was adopted, but subsequently prohibited (Ireland, 2008).

Intriguingly, the latest call for a dispersion policy was made in response to the demographic forecast that the share of immigrants would exceed 70 - 80 percent in some neighborhoods. Whereas previous attempts aimed at implementing such policies were quashed by national authorities on the grounds of discrimination, this time Rotterdam got full support from the Dutch Government. In fact, the government cited Rotterdam as an example for other Dutch cities that were attempting to combat inner-city problems, even though the Dutch Equal Treatment Commission stated in its official recommendations that the Rotterdam policy was indirectly promoting unequal outcomes on the basis of race and nationality (Commissie Gelijke

Behandeling, 2005). The government was sympathetic to the political demands of Rotterdam as a result of the shifting political context after the Fortuyn revolt. Furthermore, reducing ethnic concentrations had become a national issue. Also, in 2009, the Act was discussed in relation to the Antillean problem (the overrepresentation of Antilleans in terms of unemployment, school dropout rates and crime statistics) and whether the Act could help to address it (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2009).

### *Application and Effectuation*

On October 1, 2004, Rotterdam launched the “area-based reintroduction of housing permits” experiment which served as a test case for the further development of the Rotterdam Act. In the experiment, low-income house-seekers (tenants) were excluded from the Carnisse neighborhood and nineteen streets<sup>9</sup> in the city’s designated hotspots, a term used in Rotterdam policy for problem areas faced with rising crime, illegal occupation, vandalism, nuisance, and drug-related offences. Carnisse was chosen because a population change was foreseen and the neighborhood had a large proportion of private rental dwellings.

Tenants had to apply for a permit to move into these areas. For a dwelling with a rent between €250 and €600, an income of 120 percent of the minimum wage was required, equating to a gross household income of at least €1,639 per month (set date 2005). (This corresponds to approximately \$2,200 income per month for a rent between \$330 and \$798, according to the exchange rates of 2005). Hence, house-seekers with incomes below €1,639 a month were excluded from occupying vacant rental accommodation in both the social and private sector. The experiment ran until the Act came into effect and was evaluated for a period of six months (October 1, 2004 - April 1, 2005) by the city’s Center for Research and Statistics (Centrum voor Onderzoek en Statistiek or COS) (Van der Wilte and Van der Zanden, 2005). The evaluation concluded that the policy had successfully lowered the inflow of disadvantaged households and that it had enhanced liveability.

One salient detail was, however, that the decline in the letting of social rented dwellings to low-income households from 79 percent to 37 percent corresponded to an absolute difference of just nine households. Before the experiment, 30 households with an income lower than 120 percent of the minimum wage were allocated to social housing in Carnisse. During the first six months of the experiment this figure was 21 households. Notwithstanding the small number of observations and consequently the low reliability of the percentages (Van der Wilte and Van der Zanden, 2005), the conclusion that the regulation had reduced the inflow of low-income households was one of the key arguments behind the Dutch government’s decision to approve Rotterdam’s request to introduce the Rotterdam Act in five areas (Letter of Directoraat-Generaal Wonen, March 22, 2006). The conclusion that liveability had improved was based on a small, unspecified number of interviews with professionals working in the area. In our opinion, it was too early to observe any changes as the experiment had only been in operation for six months.

Nevertheless, the experiment was warmly received by the municipal council and by the Dutch government. Not only did it provide the basis for extending the income criterion to other parts of the city, it prepared the ground for new legislation at the national level. The Rotterdam Act, which was passed at the end of 2005 (Kamerstuk 30 091, STB9921, Staatsblad 2005, 726), created a legal basis for special regulations on housing permits for a period of four years (with the possibility of a once-only extension for another four years). As soon as the legal basis had been established, the municipal executive proposed that the Act be implemented in other designated neighborhoods (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006). In contrast to the conditions in the experiment, permits were no longer based on the 120 percent minimum wage criterion, but on income from paid employment, a pension or a study allowance. Moreover, the proposal no longer prohibited the inflow of households who had been resident in the greater Rotterdam area for at least six years, irrespective of whether these households had a regular income at that time. The Act was therefore particularly geared toward excluding renters on social benefit from outside Rotterdam.

The next stage in the formal application of the Rotterdam Act was the proposal for designated neighborhoods (Gemeente Rotterdam, Municipal Executive, January 31, 2006). The city took three steps to choose the top twelve target neighborhoods. The first step involved the selection of the 25 most threatened neighborhoods on the basis of a 12-indicator index constructed by COS. The indicators - percentage of single-family dwellings, percentage of vacant dwellings, length of residence, crowding, percentage of non-western immigrants, percentage of recently arrived immigrants, percentage of cheap private rented dwellings, percentage of households on social benefit, mutation degree, WOZ value (the basis for the real estate tax), reports of disturbance and reports of violence - were deemed to provide a valid indication of the downward spiral of the quality in a neighborhood. The 25 neighborhoods are shown in Table 1.

The list was narrowed down to the neighborhoods in the second column on the basis of several considerations. First, neighborhoods with a large social rental sector were removed from the list, based on the fact that housing associations could manage population inflow via tailor-made solutions based on housing allocation rules, i.e. use their discretionary powers to allocate social housing through selection and priority criteria. Second, neighborhoods that had shown positive signs since 2004 were eliminated (Spangen and Bloemhof dropped off the list). Third, central urban neighborhoods that were beginning to gentrify were also eliminated (Oude Westen and Cool were dropped). Fourth, neighborhoods exhibiting indicators of decline were included (Agniesebuurt, Bergpolder and Afrikaanderwijk). Fifth, the council wanted neighborhoods in the north and the south of the city to be equally represented (as a result, Nieuwe Westen was replaced by Oud-Charlois). After these adjustments, ten neighborhoods remained. The city itself considered this collection of neighborhoods a desirable area (with 35,000 rental dwellings) for applicants.

However, only four neighborhoods (Tarwewijk, Hillesluis, Carnisse, Oud-Charlois) and the hotspot streets were submitted to the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment as eligible for the introduction of housing permits, as the government had stressed that the measure had to be exceptional and essential in light of other measures already taken.

**Table 1:** Three steps in the selection of target neighborhoods

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Tarwewijk	Tarwewijk	Tarwewijk
Hillesluis	Hillesluis	Hillesluis
Spangen	Carnisse	Carnisse
Carnisse	Oud-Charlois	Oud-Charlois
Tussendijken	Afrikaanderwijk	
Middelland	Tussendijken	
Delfshaven	Middelland	
Bloemhof	Delfshaven	
Oude Westen	Bergpolder	
Nieuwe Westen	Agniesebuurt	
Bospolder		
Oud-Mathenesse		
Oud-Charlois		
Cool		
Afrikaanderwijk		
Oude Noorden		
Agniesebuurt		
CS-kwartier		
Pendrecht		
Feijenoord		
Nieuw-Crooswijk		
Katendrecht		
Bergpolder		
Schiemond		
Provenierswijk		

Source: Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006.

The total area contained approximately 20,000 rented dwellings, of which 1,800 fell vacant every year. Rotterdam intended these four neighborhoods to constitute the first phase and expected to expand the policy to an even larger area (the “growth model”) during later phases. The second phase was set to include six more neighborhoods, so all together ten neighborhoods and the hotspots (a total of 35,000 dwell-

ings, with an average of 3,150 of falling vacant every year). Table 2 highlights the differences between the experiment, the executed phase 1, and the planned phase 2.

**Table 2:** Differences between experiment, phase 1 and phase 2 of the inflow regulation

	Experiment	Phase 1	Phase 2 (not executed)
Application area	Carnisse neighborhood and hotspots (8,000 dwellings)	Top 4 most threatened neighborhoods and streets (20,000 dwellings)	Top 10 most threatened neighborhoods and streets (35,000 dwellings)
Available dwellings per year	700	1,800	3,150*
Target group	All house-seekers	House-seekers from outside greater Rotterdam and house-seekers that had not lived in greater Rotterdam during the preceding 6 years	House-seekers from outside greater Rotterdam and house-seekers that have not lived in greater Rotterdam in the last 6 years
Income demand	120 percent of minimum wage	Income from labor/pension/ or study allowance	Income from labour/pension/ or study allowance

Source: Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006.

\* This number is not given in the document of 2006, it is an estimate by the authors.

Although the debate about the Rotterdam Act emphasized economics, in fact, the selection of target neighborhoods was intertwined with the issue of ethnicity. In the first proposal to the council, the letter of August, 24 (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2004), the top twelve neighborhoods in the growth model (see Table 3) included was based on the recent inflow of non-western immigrants. Also, two out of the twelve indicators that were actually used to select the target neighborhoods were directly related to the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood.

The proposal was approved by the municipal council in 2006 and received broad support, not only from the ruling coalition, but also from the Labor Party. The latter gave its support on the condition that the revised measures were temporary, the criterion of 120 percent of the minimum wage was no longer used (so students and senior citizens were no longer affected) and house-seekers who had lived in Rotterdam for a longer period were exempt. In a letter to Rotterdam Municipal Council, the minister sanctioned the implementation of the Rotterdam Act in the requested neighborhoods for a period of four years (Directoraat-Generaal Wonen, 2006). The municipal council elections at the beginning of 2006 brought a change

of leadership. The Labor Party won and regained control of the municipal executive from Liveable Rotterdam (which still remained a significant player, holding fourteen seats out of 45). Notwithstanding the political change, the Labor Party continued implementing the Rotterdam Act. The Green Left party, which had joined the new coalition, also accepted the housing permit regulation under pressure from the coalition.

The municipal council decided to continue the policy until at least 2010 on the basis of a first evaluation of the first year of phase 1 of the housing permits, the period July 1, 2006 - July 1, 2007 (Van Dun and Van der Zanden, 2007). It also ordered a second evaluation which was expected to be decisive in the decision whether or not to continue the policy after July 1, 2010, when the first period expired. The council chose four assessment criteria: the percentage of households on social benefit (corrected for the composition of the housing stock) and the score on the safety index, the social index, and the neighborhood signalling index (Council Minutes, 2009-1528, quoted by Van Dun and Van der Zanden 2009, 12).<sup>10</sup> It was decided that only neighborhoods with marginal scores<sup>11</sup> on all four indicators would be eligible as a target area for the Act. On the basis of this evaluation of the period July 1, 2006 to July 1, 2009 (again by COS, Van Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009), COS recommended that the policy be continued in Tarwewijk (marginal scores on all four criteria) and stopped in Carnisse (marginal score on only one criterion), Oud-Charlois and Hillesluis (marginal scores on three criteria). COS also examined the situation in six neighborhoods that were potential candidates and advised that the policy only be introduced in Bloemhof.

However, the municipality asked the minister's permission not only to introduce the policy in Bloemhof, but also to continue it in all the neighborhoods that had been included in the first period, i.e. Tarweijk, Carnisse, Oud-Charlois and Hillesluis. According to the mayor, the improvement in these neighborhoods was still very fragile and the policy needed to be continued. In 2010 Rotterdam received ministerial permission to continue and expand the Rotterdam Act to a total of five neighborhoods for another four-year period (July 1, 2010 - July 1, 2014). The city no longer proposed including the hotspot streets in the program.

### *Effects of the Policy*

In this section we use secondary data to evaluate the effectiveness of the housing permit system to reduce the inflow of disadvantaged households, to create an income mix and a stable ethnic mix and to increase overall liveability. More specifically we examine 1) the share of non-western immigrants in the neighborhood population; 2) the share of disadvantaged households in the neighborhood population; 3) the inflow of households on social benefit; 4) the neighborhood score on the safety index; 5) the neighborhood score on the social index and 6) the score on the neighborhood signalling index. (The social and signalling indices are described

in detail below.) At the end of the section, we also discuss the unintended effects of the policy.

Although ethnic composition of the population was the impetus for the housing permits based on the Rotterdam Act, the evaluation did not report on changes in the share of non-western immigrants subsequent to the introduction of housing permits. We used data from Statistics Netherlands to assess whether the introduction of housing permits was correlated with changes in the ethnic composition of the neighborhoods. We selected the four target neighborhoods and the six control neighborhoods that COS used in its evaluation. These control neighborhoods had been included on the list of candidates, but were not selected during stage 1 (see Table 2).<sup>12</sup> Table 3 shows that none of the neighborhoods - target or control - exhibited a meaningful change in the share of non-western immigrants. Thus, the policy had not affected the level of ethnic concentration.

**Table 3:** Share (%) of non-western immigrants in the neighborhood population, 2005-2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Index
<b>Target Neighborhoods</b>						
Tarwewijk	64	63	64	63	62	97
Carnisse	39	40	40	40	41	105
Oud-Charlois	43	43	43	44	44	102
Hillesluis	73	74	74	74	74	101
<b>Control Neighborhoods</b>						
Agniesebuurt	54	53	54	55	55	102
Delfshaven	49	50	49	49	49	100
Tussendijken	67	68	69	68	68	101
Middelland	51	50	50	49	48	94
Bergpolder	26	26	26	26	27	104
Afrikaanderwijk	77	78	78	79	79	103
Rotterdam as a whole	35	35	36	36	36%	103

Source: Statistics Netherlands (statline.cbs.nl).

It appears that the predicted ethnic changes for the city of Rotterdam issued in 2002 were inaccurate. Indeed, a new, adjusted forecast published in 2007 showed a significantly smaller increase in non-western households in the city (Ergun, Bik and Stolk, 2007). The smaller number of ethnic minorities, as well as what happened for the period until 2007 compared with the expectation of 2003, as the expected growth on longer term, is the result of both administrative adjustments<sup>13</sup> and the level and composition of foreign immigration on national level<sup>14</sup>. One salient detail is that the administrative adjustments never played a role in the further debate on the application and extension of the policy.

The 2009 evaluation discusses the changes in the share of disadvantaged households in the four target neighborhoods and hotspot streets, compared with Rotterdam as a whole. Table 4 shows the percentage of households in the potential Labor force who were receiving social benefit.

**Table 4:** Share (%) of households on social benefit in the potential labour force of the neighborhood population, 2005-2009

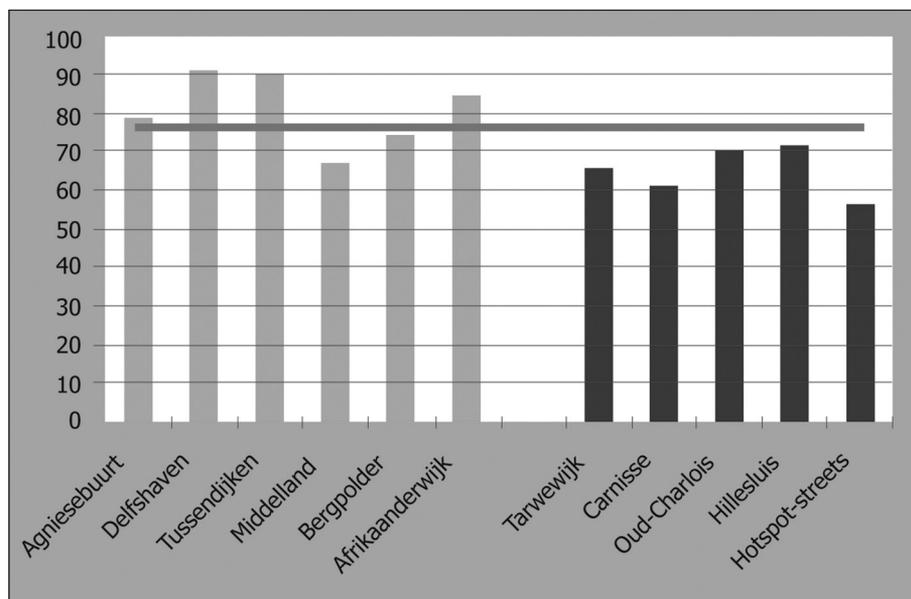
	Year before introduction	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Index
<b>Target Neighborhoods</b>						
Tarwewijk	14.6	13.4	12.5	10.6	9.5	65
Carnisse	8.5	6.9	6.1	5.6	5.2	61
Oud-Charlois	12.1	11.7	10.3	9.1	8.5	70
Hillesluis	14.4	13.1	11.8	10.6	10.3	71
<b>Hotspot streets</b>						
Rotterdam as a whole	9.3	8.9	8.1	7.6	7.1	76

Source: Van Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009, 18.

As city officials had hoped, there was a sharper decline in the share of the population receiving social benefits in the target neighborhoods than for the city as a whole (Figure 1). The decline was strongest in the hotspot streets (with an index score of 56, counted from 2005), followed by Carnisse (index score of 61)<sup>15</sup> and Tarwewijk (index score of 65). The decline in Oud-Charlois (index score of 70) and Hillesluis (index score of 71) was more in line with the city as a whole (index score of 76). Similarly, there was a sharper decline in the proportion of the population receiving benefits in the target neighborhoods than the control ones.

The evaluation report by COS also examined the share of disadvantaged households, movers to (and within) the neighborhood (instead of looking at the total neighborhood population). It showed the same tendency: a larger decrease than in the city overall, and a more positive trend compared with the non-selected neighborhoods. On average, the share of movers on social benefit fell by 35 percent in the designated neighborhoods as opposed to 17 percent in Rotterdam as a whole. Table 5 shows the figures for four years and the index scores. Again, the most positive trend appears in the hotspot streets (index score of 61). Oud-Charlois, Tarwewijk and Hillesluis also show a large decrease in the percentage of movers on social benefit. Carnisse, which showed a large decrease in the total share of households on social benefit, did not experience much change in this respect. This is remarkable as it suggests that the changes in the composition of the neighborhood were affected by other developments than just the inflow of households. With the exception of Agnieszbuurt, the trend in the control neighborhoods was less positive (a slower decline) than in the target neighborhoods.

**Figure 1:** Change in households on social benefit in the potential labour force in the neighborhood population, 2005-2009 (index score) (baseline=Rotterdam as a whole)



Source: Adapted from Van Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009, 19

**Table 5:** Share (%) of movers on social benefit, 2005-2009

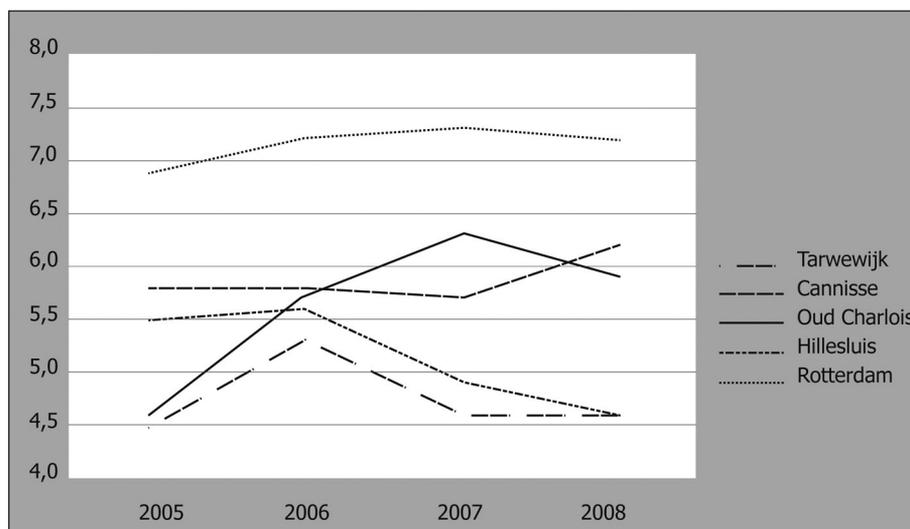
	Year before intro- duction	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Index
<b>Target Neighbourhoods</b>					
Tarwewijk	15.4	12.1	10.3	10.1	65
Carnisse	4.7	4.7	4.2	4.5	96
Oud-Charlois	14.1	8.3	8.3	8.7	62
Hillesluis	11.5	6.3	8.7	7.7	67
Hotspot streets	11.3	6.7	5.7	6.9	61
<b>Control Neighborhoods</b>					
Agniesebuurt	6.8	6.0	6.6	4.1	60
Delfshaven	12.0	11.0	11.7	13.2	110
Tussendijken	14.5	13.3	10.2	12.7	88
Middelland	9.8	8.2	8.2	7.7	79
Bergpolder	3.7	5.0	3.2	3.2	87
Afrikaanderwijk	13.8	13.5	12.4	12.2	88
Rotterdam as a whole	8.7	7.9	7.4	7.1	81

Source: Van Dun & Van der Zanden, 2009, 20.

COS concluded on the basis of these results that the introduction of the housing permits had contributed to a fall in the percentage of households on social benefit (Van Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009). COS also examined various aspects of the quality of life in the neighborhoods by applying the three indexes: the safety index, the social index and the neighborhood signalling index.

The safety index is based on numerous objective indicators (e.g. registration of theft and other crimes), subjective indicators (e.g. experienced nuisance) and eight contextual indicators (among which the ethnic composition of the neighborhood). A safety index between 1 and 10 was generated (based on z-scores for all indicators, which were weighted). Compared to the situation at the start of the policy, three target neighborhoods showed improvement (Carnisse and Tarwewijk a bit, Oud-Charlois more than 1 point) and one neighborhood had deteriorated (Hillesluis). Two of the six control neighborhoods (data not presented) showed a minimal increase in the index, one showed quite a large improvement and two showed a decline, pointing to a worsened situation. Because of the mixed results, COS concluded that the positive effects of introducing housing permits on safety were not visible in every neighborhood.

**Figure 2:** Scores on the safety index, 2005-2008



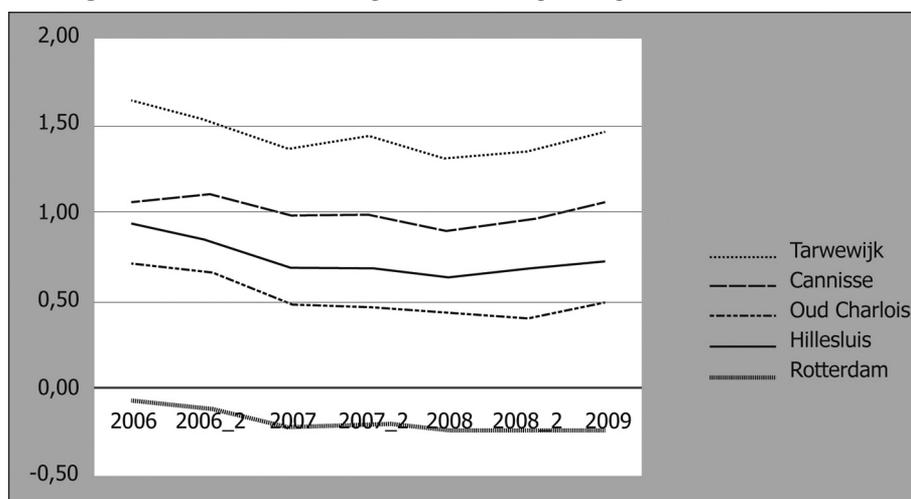
Source: Adapted from Van Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009, 23

The social index is likewise based on numerous objective and subjective indicators in four domains: living environment (e.g. quality of services), individual capabilities (e.g. health and income), participation (e.g. social contacts) and attachment (e.g. feeling at home). The index score ranges from 1 to 10 and the higher the score, the higher the social quality of the neighborhood. Data are available only for

2008 and 2009, and on the basis of the differences between those years, COS states that Oud-Charlois experienced a decline in social quality and the other three target neighborhoods a modest increase. The control neighborhoods all showed a modest increase. Thus, the results for the social index were inconclusive.

The neighborhood signalling index, which was used to select the top 25 most threatened neighborhoods to introduce housing permits (see Table 1), is a measure of the accumulation of problems. The higher the score on this index, the more problems a neighborhood presumably has. One of these problems is the share of non-western immigrants. Despite an improvement, the index score for all target neighborhoods increased after 2008, indicating more problems (Figure 3). This increase, which is most noticeable in Tarwewijk and Carnisse, is largely the result of the increase of the share of non-western immigrants in these neighborhoods. The control neighborhoods showed a mixed picture and, as in the target neighborhoods, there was an increase in the indicator after 2008.

**Figure 3:** Scores on the neighbourhood signalling index, 2005-2008



Source: Adapted from Van Dun & Van der Zanden, 2009, 29

All things considered, we conclude that the housing permits, based on the Rotterdam Act, had a minimal impact on target neighborhoods. Though the share of households on social benefit decreased, there were no demonstrable effects on safety or on the social quality of the neighborhoods. Apart from the fact that only minor effects are observed, we offer two additional criticisms. First, the rationale for the policy was that a critical boundary had been passed and the absorptive capacity of neighborhoods was exceeded, but no arguments were put forward about tipping points or thresholds linked to negative neighbourhood effects (see Galster, 2007a). Furthermore, officials did not provide a compelling case for why a small reduction

in the number of incoming disadvantaged families would improve the liveability of target neighborhoods.

Second, the evaluations did not include a proper analysis of the extent to which other interventions besides the housing permit policy (e.g., extra policing, zero tolerance to drug-related issues, preventive stop-and-search, demolition of housing and the building of new housing for better-off households) contributed to the general developments in the neighborhoods. It is very difficult to discern the effects of different area-based interventions that might have been responsible for changes in liveability. Nevertheless, this constitutes a serious shortcoming in the evaluation.

Moreover, the introduction of housing permits generated some unintended and unwanted effects. The designated neighborhoods were characterized by a large share of cheap rental dwellings. If some groups are officially excluded from the housing market - in this case, house-seekers from outside Rotterdam with no source of income - it is the law of housing market dynamics that dwellings either stay vacant or other groups are attracted to them. Indeed, in some target neighborhoods the vacancy levels in the private rental sector did increase (Van der Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009).

Furthermore, some of the target neighborhoods have been experiencing an increase in immigrants from other European countries, such as Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. These are mostly temporary workers for whom their employers arrange housing. In some cases they do not register with the municipality and thus do not apply for a housing permit as their stay is short. When they have work and do register and seek housing in the target neighborhoods, they do not belong to the target group of the Act as they have a regular source of income

Nevertheless, some residents and practitioners link the presence of these new immigrants with mounting liveability problems, such as overcrowding, nuisance (public drunkenness) and criminality (Dun and Van der Zanden, 2007; Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009; De Groot, 2008). Some have suggested that the in-migration of families in this group is the reason why some target neighborhoods failed to show the expected improvements.

In 2007 Liveable Rotterdam tabled a motion to expand the target group of the Rotterdam Act to foreign workers, but it was defeated by the Council (Leefbaar Rotterdam, 2007). Irrespective of the question whether it is correct to connect the liveability problems to the presence of these new immigrants, it clearly demonstrates that restricting in-movers based on being employed is not a workable approach to improving liveability.

Another undesired effect is that vacant dwellings are occupied illegally ("squatting") or let illegally to unwanted groups. The Mayor of the Charlois district, Dick Lockhorst, observed an increase in illegal housing in one of the hotspots: "People are flowing into the neighborhood in large numbers, they stay anonymously, and do not register with the municipality" (Algemeen Dagblad, 2006, [our translation]). Limiting the legal inflow seems therefore to have caused an illegal inflow.

The effects of the policy on all possible disadvantaged house-seekers are unclear. However, there is some evidence that the policy did not severely hurt immigrants. Minority families continued to move into target neighborhoods (particularly in Carnisse) and most of the excluded households, those who did not receive a permit, found housing somewhere else (Van der Dun and Van der Zanden, 2009). There is however another category of home-seekers that no longer tries to find housing in these areas as they are discouraged beforehand.

Earlier, in the municipal executive's proposal to the council (2006), extensive attention was paid to the supply side, the demand side, and the possibilities of obtaining a dwelling. At city level, 180,000 affordable rental dwellings were available (137,000 social and 43,000 private). Overall, according to the COS, the supply for incoming disadvantaged households in the social rented market will decrease slightly by 4 percent, whereas the supply in private-sector rental will decrease by 17 percent. Incoming disadvantaged households are often in urgent need of housing, and there is little chance that this group, like starters in the housing market, will obtain a social rental dwelling in time (Van Daalen and Davis 2006; Kromhout et al., 2006). This makes them heavily dependent on the private sector. The proposal acknowledges that the 17 percent decrease will make it slightly more difficult for disadvantaged households to obtain dwellings in Rotterdam. The municipal executive continues: "Given the importance of a lower inflow of people without an income from employment in the selected areas, we consider this to be acceptable" (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006, [our translation]). Although in a recent analysis of the supply of affordable rental dwellings, Dol and Kleinhans (2011) concluded that the Rotterdam housing market offers sufficient possibilities for housing the target group of low-income households as a whole, we need to point out that the negative effects should not be neglected, that is, a decrease of 17 percent in private-sector rental opportunities for this vulnerable group is meaningful and may result in a longer waiting time.

Another issue is the costs of the operation and the extra administrative tasks for housing associations. The total cost of the operation is estimated to be €2.2 million (approximately €700,000) a year. Among these costs are wages for personnel that execute the intake of house-seekers at the desk, the processing of requests and executing administrative and actual house controls. The housing associations are mandated to check the requested housing permits, and according to them, it costs them an extra half hour to process each form. The housing associations explicitly state that, as far as they are concerned, the instrument is superfluous as they were already able to select "at the gate" by publishing selection criteria in their advertisements and by checking that the requirements were met before letting the dwelling.

### *The National Evaluation of the Rotterdam Act*

In 2012 the Rotterdam Act was evaluated by the Dutch government on the basis of a questionnaire and interviews with key informants. In a letter to the Lower

House (Tweede Kamer) the Minister (Spies) noted that Rotterdam was the only municipality using the Act (Directoraat-Generaal Wonen, 2012). Other cities have decided not to adopt the Act, either because they are not experiencing the serious problems affecting Rotterdam or because they have identified other ways to intervene on the basis of the general Housing Act. The only user, Rotterdam, was satisfied with the results, and since other cities supported the Act as an “ultimate remedy,” the minister decided to continue the Act even though the effects of housing permits were minimal (the report stated that the results were positive, but the program did not have a sufficient impact up to that point). The minister therefore concurred with the suggestion of Rotterdam and extended the application of the policy for another four years to give it more time to become effective.

## CONCLUSION

Like other major cities in the Netherlands, Rotterdam has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of ethnic minority households in its population in recent decades. However, in contrast with the other major cities, Rotterdam has responded vigorously to this demographic trend by developing a variety of ‘strong’ housing policies. Rotterdam has not only tried to influence the composition of the population by means of urban renewal, it has also tried to regulate the inflow of the most vulnerable (typically ethnic minority) households from outside the Rotterdam region into designated neighborhoods.

Rotterdam has received the support of the Dutch government, which passed a special piece of legislation called the “Act on exceptional measures concerning inner-city problems,” better known as the Rotterdam Act, which offers a way around the existing anti-discrimination rules in housing allocation. The Rotterdam Act allows municipalities to set specific conditions for the issue of housing permits in designated areas for a fixed number of years, subject to the approval of the Housing Minister. In a number of Rotterdam neighborhoods housing permits were denied to applicants who did not have an income from employment, a study allowance or a pension, and who had not lived in greater Rotterdam during the previous five years. Although the criteria did not explicitly focus on ethnicity, the aim was to reduce the flow of non-western immigrants into the city.

We have attempted to evaluate the housing permits based on the Rotterdam Act using the criteria formulated by Susan Fainstein (2010) for a just city. A just city should be democratic in the sense that people should have control over their living environments; it should be open to diversity and governmental policies should promote greater equity.

First, with respect to democracy, we could say that this criterion is met, in that the Act was passed and implemented through democratic means and reflects the wishes of the majority. However, it is important to note that the Act illustrates

the democratic dilemma observed by Fainstein (2010): That is, the interests of established residents who long for a more stable and safe environment (see also Van Eijk, 2010) conflict with the interests of the disadvantaged households who want to move into the neighborhood on the other. Both interests are legitimate.

The second criterion, that the city should be open to diversity, was not achieved. In the first place the city used discriminatory means. Although the final regulations do not discriminate on ethnicity, but use economic proxies instead, it cannot be denied that the policy was developed to lower the predicted increase in ethnic minorities in certain neighborhoods in the city and that ethnic minority households would be affected the most. Secondly, city leaders equated an increase in ethnic minority households with an increase in physical and social problems. Although the majority of these households do not have criminal records and do not show anti-social behaviour, they are all equated with problems. Politicians and practitioners exhibited a tendency to stereotype ethnic minorities as problematic; the same type of stereotyping occurs along with the increase of immigrant workers from other European countries, such as Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. These observations support the conclusion that the policy was not based on thorough and precise argumentation but rather on a pure political populist stance.

Nor does it appear that the Rotterdam law has promoted equity, the third criterion.

By promoting a greater social mix the policy may have contributed to equity among the established residents, i.e. through enhancing liveability and strengthening the social-economic level of the population and neighbourhood reputation. But at the same time there are negative effects for the lower-income families who wanted but who were unable to move into the target neighbourhoods. In our opinion, this places an inequitable burden on low-income families.

We contend that the Rotterdam policy was specifically developed as a response to political pressure at the beginning of the twenty-first century—political pressure that drew on a mix of intolerance of ethnic diversity, anti-Islam sentiments and issues about low liveability in different neighborhoods due to crime, nuisance and vandalism, and (feelings of) uncertainty and insecurity among the established residents. The policy and its effects were not based on clear arguments. In the end, it was a token policy that did not answer the public discord in an effective and justified manner.

## NOTES

- 1 When we speak of ethnic minorities in this paper, we mean the group of immigrant households that have been defined in the Netherlands as deserving special policy attention and support. This group includes all households from

Surinam, the Antilles, the Cape Verde Islands, Turkey, Morocco and other poor non-western countries. Of course, that does not mean that every household in this group will actually need special attention and support. All persons that were born in these countries and all children with one parent born in these countries are counted as belonging to ethnic minorities in the Netherlands.

- 2 There is a big difference in the expected growth of a city depending on the extent of expansion of the housing stock in greenfield areas. The population will increase with new housing possibilities if the regional demand is big enough. Also, the change in the quality and price of the realized and the existing housing stock will influence the characteristics of the future population.
- 3 In his review of Marcuse's book, Varady (2011) distinguishes between two groups of scholars writing under the rubric "The Just City." The first are those who fundamentally oppose neoliberal, capitalist societies ("radicals"); those in the second group use their position in academia to promote social justice within neoliberal societies ("incrementalists").
- 4 The Netherlands has strong legislation guaranteeing tenants' rights as well as stringent inflation-linked rent regulation.
- 5 "Old and cheap" does not mean that those houses were of inferior quality and dilapidated. Some were, but the majority of the demolished housing stock belonged to the social rented sector. These houses were managed by housing associations and were of a reasonable quality, compared for instance with American standards. They are not vacant, but will meet some problems when being let. They will become vacant via active or passive relocation policies.
- 6 The PVV gained nine seats in Parliament in 2006. In the 2010 national elections it emerged in third position with 15.5 percent of the votes and 24 seats. While the PVV supported the minority government, it strongly influenced national policy. After it withdrew its support, new elections were called and the PVV fell back to 15 seats and 10.1 percent of the votes. The focus in the national political debate has shifted in the past year from anti-Islam to the economic situation in the Netherlands and Europe.
- 7 Besides the native Dutch population and the ethnic minorities, a third group is mentioned in the demographic forecast, the "other rich countries" (North-West Europe, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Israel and former Dutch India) and north Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and former Yugoslavia). Together these groups comprised 14.5 percent of the population in 1990, 11.4 percent in 2002 and 9.9 percent in the projection for 2017.
- 8 The costs of the housing permit system no longer balanced the benefits of the system as the number of private rental dwellings was also modest. That was the main argument to liberalize the private rental sector in the beginning of the nineteen nineties.
- 9 For those familiar with Rotterdam, hotspots concerns the following streets in Rotterdam-Zuid: Putsebocht, Strevelsweg, Dordtselaan, Hillevliet,

Slaghekstraat, Riederstraat, Moerkerkestraat, Borselaarstraat, Bas Jungeriusstraat and Katendrechtse Lagedijk; in West: Mathenesserdijk, Dirk Danestraat, Willem Beukelszoonstraat, Wallisweg, Vosmaerstraat, Mathenesserweg and Grote Visserijstraat; in Centrum: West-Kruiskade and 1e Middellandstraat (from the West-Kruiskade to the 's-Gravendijkwal).

- 10 The last three indicators are ones that the municipality uses to detect problems in neighborhoods. For a further description see the subsection on effects of the policy.
- 11 Marginal scores are scores below or above a certain standard. The neighborhood composition is regarded as problematic when the percentage of households on social benefit is higher than the Rotterdam average and when the actual score is higher than the predicted score (when corrected for the composition of the housing stock). The marginal score for the safety index is everything below 6, for the social index everything below 5, and for the neighborhood signaling index it is everything above 0.48, which is one standard deviation above the Rotterdam average.
- 12 It is important to stress that these are not average neighborhoods. Instead, they are problem neighborhoods according to the COS signalling index.
- 13 From time to time the Municipal Base Records are corrected as the records sometimes show inaccuracies. Based on the Base Records, the number of Antilleans was overestimated.
- 14 The immigration on national level turned out to be smaller than expected in 2003, due to the effects of policies on national level.
- 15 Note that the percentage for Carnisse (the target neighborhood in the experiment) was already lower than the city average at the start of the policy.

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