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URBAN RESTRUCTURING, DEMOLITION, AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

Uncovering the Janus Head of Forced Residential Relocation

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Introduction

Across both sides of the Atlantic, continuous attention has been paid to improving the prospects of deprived neighborhoods and their residents since the 1970s. In the United States and many European countries, substantial housing and neighborhood restructuring programs have been implemented to fit this purpose. While these programs usually involve economic and social interventions, the emphasis has been on demolition of public or social housing and new construction of rental and owner-occupied housing on the original site. Renowned examples of such restructuring programs are HOPE VI (U.S.), Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinders in England, urban renewal in France (based on the *Loi de programmation sur la ville et la rénovation urbaine*), and urban restructuring in the Netherlands. Such urban renewal programs have several goals, ranging from the creation of mixed-income neighborhoods and poverty deconcentration to improving area reputations and social cohesion among residents (Dekker and Varady 2011; Kleinhans 2012).

Regardless of the differences in context, problems, and housing stock characteristics, all physical renewal programs usually require temporary or permanent relocation of significant proportions of the original residents from dwellings slated for demolition or upgrading. While large-scale relocation has often been contested, laws and regulations that provide the basis for housing and restructuring programs, and that are an indispensable part of a renewal operation, enable public housing authorities (U.S.) and housing associations (Europe) to relocate their tenants and sometimes also owner occupiers to other dwellings. In other words, the initial decision for relocation is usually not made by residents themselves, but by policymakers, housing authorities, and landlords. Hence, this type of residential mobility can be defined as *forced relocation*, as opposed to mobility as a "choice" made by households themselves.

Since the 1960s, forced relocation has fueled a large body of research connected to various urban policies, such as urban slum clearance in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Paris and Blackaby 1979; Thomas 1986), gentrification in the 1980s (up to the present), and urban renewal policies with a strong housing market-oriented approach since the early 1990s. Across many European countries, post-1990

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urban renewal policies (as discussed earlier) share the general aim to lower concentrations of social rented or public housing in certain areas, in favor of building more owner-occupied housing and thus strengthening the "social mix." Forced relocation has been a recurring theme in these policies. However, the framing of this phenomenon in scientific debates shows similarities between countries. Research on relocation has been inspired by gentrification theory and research. A particular characteristic of this framework is a mostly negative displacement perspective on the outcomes of relocation processes (Kleinhans and Kearns 2013). The debate around gentrification has been fueled not only by policy and research findings, but to a certain extent also by neoliberal ideologies that, according to critics, increase the role of markets and capital at the expense of poor people and state-provided social security (e.g., Hackworth and Smith 2001; Lees et al. 2010; Uitermark et al. 2007). An example of a gentrification-based perspective is provided by Lees (2008), who argues that the "movement of middle-income groups into low income areas creates overwhelmingly negative effects, the most significant of which is the displacement of low-income groups" (Lees 2008, 2457). In sum, displacement of residents is one of the primary dangers mentioned by those concerned about the exclusionary effects of market-driven as well as state-driven gentrification (Newman and Wyly 2006, 27).

The discussion on neighborhood impacts of forced relocation has focused on concepts such as social mix and social cohesion (Uitermark 2003), whereas relocation outcomes for individual tenants have been framed in terms of displacement and (altered) place attachment (Kleinhans and Kearns 2013). This chapter focuses on the latter strand of outcomes. The scientific literature shows that scholars disagree about the extent to which the act of forced relocation is, by definition, a form of displacement that hurts households or if forced relocation may not necessarily be experienced as such, because it helps households to improve their living situation. This essay discusses the evidence from relocation research in the Netherlands and shows how it fits into the scholarly discussion on displacement. While pre-relocation expectations are usually negative, many households may actually be better off in terms of their housing and neighborhood situation after urban restructuring. Furthermore, the combination of counseling and legal compensations appears to have a mitigating influence regarding the negative impacts of both the process and the relocation outcome. The results give reason to counter-argue the predominantly negative discourse on displacement as an inevitable "dark side" of state-led gentrification (see also the chapter authored by Wouter van Gent, Willem Boterman, and Myrte Hoekstra) and urban renewal programs. The next section discusses theoretical perspectives on forced relocation and displacement. Subsequently, the Dutch policy context will be explained, providing a background for understanding relocation outcomes. The following section reviews the main outcomes, followed by conclusions and policy recommendations.

On Displacement, Relocation, and Gentrification

The first traces of the term "displacement" in the literature date back to the late 1970s. A particularly detailed definition can be found in a report from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where displacement was defined as the situation in which:

> any household is forced to move from its residence by conditions which affect the dwelling or its immediate surroundings, and which: (1) are beyond the household's reasonable ability to control or prevent; (2) occur despite the household's having met all previously imposed conditions of occupancy and (3) make continued occupancy by that household impossible, hazardous or unaffordable.
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> *(Grier and Grier 1978, 8; see also LeGates and Hartman 1986)*

In essence, this definition does not include any reference to housing policy, market forces, or any form of neoliberal policy. However, the term has become intricately connected to gentrification, which was

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