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Cities in Sight, Inside Cities: An Introduction

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Dutch dealings with urban change

This book presents the results of the most recent research on urban topics in the Netherlands. Why would those results be of interest for a wider and also non-Dutch audience? We think for several reasons.

In the *first* place, the Netherlands' struggle with many urban problems might be instructive for the urban problems other countries face as well (or will have to confront in the near future). Huge transformations that have manifested themselves in the Netherlands affect many more countries. The Dutch economy has become one of the most open (and in times of economic crisis: most vulnerable) and service-oriented of the world. Moreover, the Dutch population has changed dramatically: with one million Muslims and about one million other migrants (out of sixteen million inhabitants), the Netherlands has *de facto* become an immigration society, like many other West-European countries experiencing similar changes in the past decades. Compared to the old settler societies (the US, Canada, and Australia), the new immigrant countries struggle with problems they had not run into before. Especially for these 'new' immigration societies, the Dutch case might present relevant insights, pointers as well as warnings.

That brings us to the *second* reason why a book on Dutch urban topics is pertinent at this particular moment in history. The Dutch political and societal crisis – that became so visible in the two political murders of Pim Fortuyn (in 2002) and Theo van Gogh (in 2004) – are to a large extent perceived as *urban* crises: it is especially in the big cities of the country that the enormous changes in the economy and in social life express themselves the most. Just as in many other European countries, social problems of disadvantaged neighborhoods have become top priorities for policy makers at all levels: the district, the city, the region, the national and even the EU level. The time when (supra)national governance distanced itself from direct intervention in highly local, neighborhood-specific urban issues is clearly over: some national politicians visit the cities so often now that they come to resemble part-time community workers!

Important to know in this context is that the new 'populist' political parties that gained strength in the early part of the new millennium, developed first in the local, especially urban realm. In 2002, Pim Fortuyn's 'Leefbaar Rotterdam' (Livable Rotterdam) became (the first time it participated in the elections!) the biggest party of that city. 'Leefbaar Rotterdam' was a link – a crucial one – in a chain of 'livable' parties developing in other cities as well ('Leefbaar Utrecht' and 'Leefbaar Hilversum' were important links in this chain earlier on). In order to better understand the national political crisis of the Netherlands – a country often praised for its tolerance and 'calmness' – we therefore have to look at the urban context. And vice versa, in order to understand what is happening at the urban level, we have to take broader political, social, and economic developments into account.

As many chapters in this book will show, there is more to this crisis than just a 'populist', right-wing backlash. And that is the *third* reason why we think it is appropriate, if not urgent, to publish a book on Dutch urban topics: many new *solutions* developed as answers to the problems that have come to the fore need to be documented and analyzed. With a bit of exaggeration, the Netherlands can be considered a *laboratory* for urban development. Though we don't claim Holland as an exceptional case, we do think that the crisis in the Netherlands is particularly profound. Whereas some foreign observers describe the recent developments as a one-dimensional turn of a formerly 'tolerant' country into its opposite, we claim that there is much more at stake. We would argue that what we see is rather the political crisis of a country that is trying to balance the cultural heritage of the 1960s and 1970s on the one hand – the Netherlands being one of the most progressive and secular countries of the world –, and the huge economic and demographic transformations in subsequent and current years on the other hand. This balancing act deserves full attention.

In the midst of all the social and political turmoil, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Knowledge Centre for Larger Towns and Cities (now Nicis Institute) decided that a coordinated research program regarding the Dutch 'urban condition' was urgent indeed. This program, the Urban Innovation Research Program (STIP)¹, was conducted between 2005 and summer 2009. The empirical data presented in this book is collected in the context of this STIP research program. The research is carried out by scholars of several Dutch universities – in a collaborative effort. As might become clear, the chapters are closely interrelated and often refer to each other in terms of results and insights. This is not a collection of individual studies, but a book resulting from an integrated effort to collectively better understand which urban changes have occurred and how the Dutch deal with these changes.

The STIP program was organized along a number of tracks, paying attention to interrelated topics such as: the social and the material in urban life, the city as social elevator, social safety, urban citizenship, organizing capacity, and co-production in urban governance. Cities are shaped by people, but people are also shaped by cities (cf. Hall, 1998, Scott, 2001, Le Galès, 2002). This fundamental notion underpins the present volume, but also the STIP program from which it follows. Not all of the many specific research projects within STIP could be presented within the inevitably limited pages of this book. However, most of the important issues are *represented* in the three parts of this book, which we have labeled urban transformations and local settings (Part I), urban citizenship and civic life (Part II), and urban governance and professional politics (Part III). In the following pages we will further introduce these parts.

Urban transformations and local settings

To fully grasp *la condition urbaine* in the Dutch context is not exactly an easy job. There are quite a few particularities that seem difficult to explain to a non-Dutch reader. Where else in the world do so many middle-class people live in subsidized social housing? Is there any other big city in the world where the percentage of privately-owned houses is as low as in Amsterdam (about 20%)? Is this vast social housing sector helpful to fight segregation? But why then does the Netherlands show relatively high levels of residential segregation or 'territorial sorting' as geographers would call it? In other words, the Dutch context is, to a certain extent, a peculiar one and some sensitivity to this is necessary.

In the first part of this book, studies are presented that deal with more general characterizations of and transformations in the urban realm; the focus is on the Netherlands, but the issues are wider-ranging. What are the most recent trends in the economy and the urban fabric of Dutch cities, especially in the largest, most international 'mainports' of the country: Amsterdam – the capital of the Netherlands – and Rotterdam – one of the world's biggest harbor cities and the epicenter of the 2002 political shockwave? What do we know about residential segregation? Do urban renewal programs and elaborate mixing programs help to de-segregate, or is this just another round of gentrification, eventually reinforcing segregating tendencies? In this volume, Van der Graaf and Veldboer discuss these and other questions concerning urban renewal processes. Musterd and Pinkster in their chapter, refer to closely-related issues, raising the question if and to what extent social problems are area-based. The answer to this question is all the more relevant, since much of the policy effort on social problems and

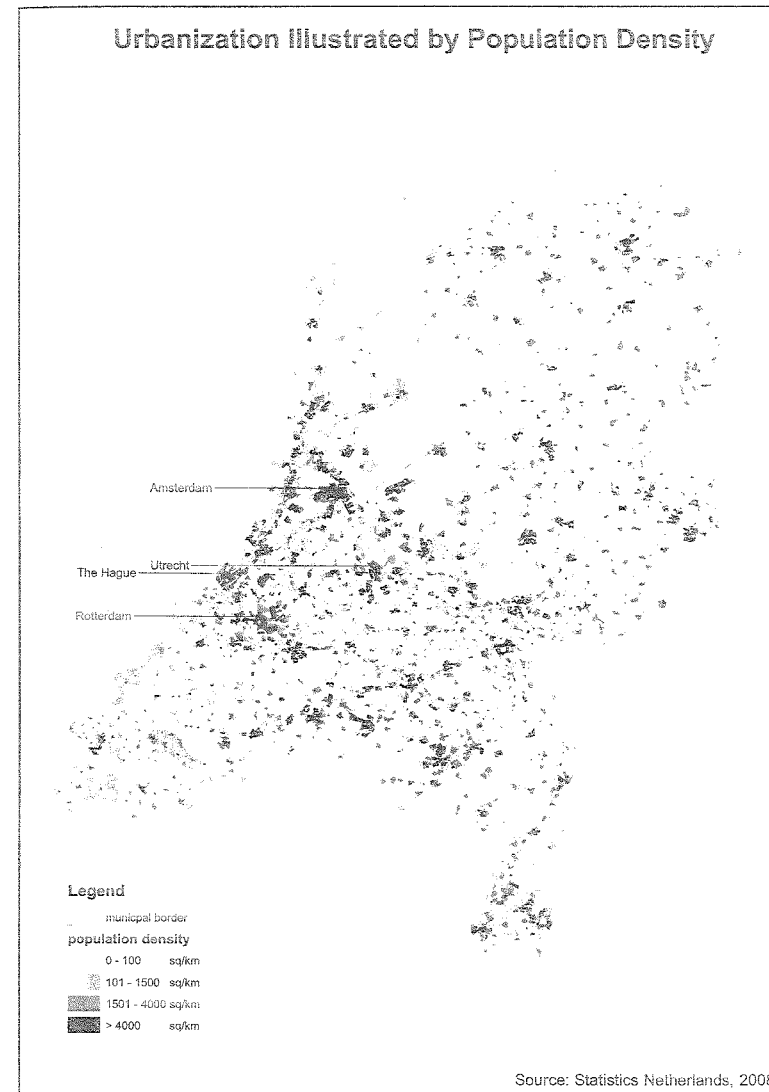
Box 1 *The urban landscape of the Netherlands at a glance*

The Netherlands is one of the most urbanized countries in the world. As much as 82 percent of the population (16.6 million inhabitants in total) lives in an environment that can be called urbanized. The urban landscape is polycentric in nature. There is not one paramount city that leaves all of the rest far behind in terms of size and capacity. The comparatively small country (41,528 square kilometers) is characterized by a relatively large number of not very big, but nevertheless quite substantial, and highly interconnected urban centers. With 760,000 inhabitants, Amsterdam is the biggest in the urban field of the Netherlands. It is not, however, in a league of its own like, for example, Paris or Mexico City are in their respective countries. Amsterdam is in a league with Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht and, together, these cities form part and parcel of the Randstad or 'Deltametropolis', the urban network in the Western part of the country. It is in a wider league of Dutch cities, many of which are also interlinked in urban networks. In many respects, differences between large urban centers, towns and countryside are not very substantial in the Netherlands.

In the framework of the Big Cities Policy, the four largest cities (G4) and 27 of the larger cities and towns are lumped together as the G31. They are commonly lumped together by policymakers because of their size, but also, and mainly, because of the concentration of urban challenges in these cities. One of the most hotly debated, highly urban challenges of today is related to immigration and 'multiculturalization'. Immigrants from non-western countries constitute more than ten percent of the total population in the Netherlands, but their presence is much higher in the large urban centers of the country. In major cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, non-western immigrants make up one third of the population. The second generation is growing rapidly and immigrant children form a large share of the urban youth. In Amsterdam and Rotterdam, half of the population aged 0-20 has a non-western immigrant background. But smaller cities may also have substantial immigrant populations, and towns like Venlo, Tilburg, Gouda and Ede have also witnessed inter-ethnic tensions, fuelled by 9/11 and its aftermath. Much of this tension and conflict focus on the role and position of the Islam in the urbanized west.

Dutch cities are institutionally embedded in a 'decentralized unitary state', consisting of twelve provinces and 441 municipalities. Urban politics is channeled by a dual system of a representative 'municipal council' on the one hand and an executive 'board of burgomaster and aldermen' on the other. Urban governance is traditionally and

typically co-governance, both vertically – various tiers are involved in a system of multilevel governance – and horizontally – various governmental and (quasi)non-governmental organizations and actors have to work together to get somewhere.

Map 1 *The urban landscape of the Netherlands at a glance*

immigrant integration involves an integral neighborhood approach. Van der Waal and Burgers study the relative effects of both residential segregation and job opportunities on ethnic conflict. Interestingly, they question the effect of the immigrants' share in urban neighborhoods on interethnic relations.

In the first part of this volume, the reader will come across additional Dutch particularities, for instance the institutionalized, 'pillarized' way of dealing with cultural and religious differences in the past, which inevitably still colors debates on how to deal with religion in the Netherlands, nowadays, in particular, Islam. Many scholars and politicians alike not only claim that the Dutch have pursued multicultural policies in line with their pillarized past, but that it is precisely these policies that have caused the huge social problems Dutch society is struggling with today (Koopmans 2007; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Joppke 2004). By overstressing and overvaluing cultural differences, policy makers would have neglected the urgent need for newcomers to integrate into Dutch society. Though it can be questioned whether the Netherlands really has pursued hard-core multicultural policies for a long time (Duyvendak et al. 2009), reality is that recent, new policy measures are defined as a break with the alleged 'multicultural model' of the past. Formulas that could be associated with a 'consociational' version of 'multiculturalism' – the development of publicly-funded Islamic schools and broadcasting companies for migrants, for example – have undoubtedly come under pressure of critical scrutiny. This book is not so much a work of historians focusing on what has happened in the past in the Netherlands, but it does show how perceptions of the past strongly influence how actual problems are experienced and what kind of solutions become 'imaginable'.

Even though this (perception of) history gives a particular twist to current Dutch policies, there is more to these policies than just a path-dependent past. How could we otherwise claim that the Dutch case is a laboratory for what is happening in many countries? How could we otherwise understand *international* convergent developments in urban problems and practices, as several authors in this book show? What is the role of global economic transformations, of worldwide migration and resulting demographic changes, of 9/11 and 'the war on terror' on the *shared* perceptions of urban challenges at the start of the 21st century in many Western countries? Centrifugal, polarizing tendencies seem to develop in urban landscapes everywhere. French sociologist Jacques Donzelot (2008) even claims that whereas the twentieth century was the age of confrontation, ours is one of polarization and spatial segregation. There is, moreover, not only convergence in *definitions* of the problems regarding the urban state of affairs. In a 'global village' such as ours, governments, NGOs, housing corporations and devel-

pers alike, learn across cities, countries, and continents about *solutions* as well. The diffusion of innovative urban policies takes place at an ever increasing pace. A good example of 'international learning' is the way the Dutch 'Big Cities Policies' (developed in the 1990s) inspired the French *politique de la ville* and the German *Sozial Stadt* programs. Ideas and practices related to the furthering of 'active citizenship' and 'interactive governance' have traveled cross-border as well, as will be discussed later in Parts II and III of this volume.

This is not to claim that national particularities have all lost their pertinence, but the chapters in this book show that what happens in the Netherlands – both in terms of problem definition and conceived solutions – do speak to the problems and possible new urban practices in other cities, in other countries.

Let's give one more example that shows both a certain particularity of the Netherlands and its common features with other countries that facilitate international comparisons. Several chapters in this book deal, in one way or another, with questions of 'culture' and 'ethnicity', mirroring dominant problem definitions in the Netherlands. Vermeulen and Plaggenborg, in Part III, explicitly refer to this problem definition. Though the degree to which urban problems are (assumed to be) 'ethnic' will vary across Western countries, and though the exact classifications and categorizations will diverge across boundaries, in other Western European countries 'culturalization' of social problems took place in the past decade as it did in the Netherlands. Even in an alleged 'color'- and 'culture'-blind country as France, culture and cultural differences are at the heart of urban policies (Bertossi and Duyvendak 2009). In the Netherlands, like elsewhere in Europe, this 'culturalization' often takes the form of 'islamization'. Current debates on the integration of immigrants mostly focus on Turks and Moroccans and other Islamic groups. Other immigrant groups, like post-colonial immigrants from the Caribbean, are far less in the spotlight. To be sure, this is also related to their respective socioeconomic positions – the postcolonial immigrants, on average, ranking higher in the socioeconomic hierarchy than the Turks and Moroccans (cf. Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk 2006). Nevertheless, much of the public debate on immigrant integration focuses not so much on color as on religion, and questions the possibility that Muslim immigrants will ever integrate into Dutch society. This affects the public image of these immigrants and is, in itself, a factor in processes of radicalization among some Muslims (Buys et al 2006; Sloomman and Tillie 2006).

The negative imaging and the polarizing trends are mirrored in several of the contributions to this volume, especially the ones that present research conducted in the city of Rotterdam. Van Liempt and Veldboer, for example, show how the local urban regime in this city ham-

pered the development of multi-ethnic neighborhoods into sites of multicultural leisure and consumption. And Van Bochove, Rušinović and Engbersen, in their chapter on middle-class immigrants in Rotterdam, start their analysis with the increasingly dominant political discourse on the supposed incompatibility of dual citizenship and full integration into the receiving society.

Urban citizenship and civic life

Cities are shaped by people, but people are also shaped by cities: this is what the chapters in the opening part of the book show, and this is what the chapters in the next part of the book continue to pick up on – albeit in a somewhat different fashion, zooming in on the ways in which citizens operate in civic life. Referring back to the STIP program: the city might be conceptualized as a ‘social elevator’, but the city does not always help to lift up the spirit in civic life.

The Dutch political crisis is often depicted as a ‘revolt of citizens’ against the dominant elite that had alienated itself from reality, especially the *urban* reality with its many urgent problems (Wansink 2004; Buruma 2004). Particularly widespread is the idea that a wide gap has grown between citizenry and politicians. Whether this is true or not, the fact is that in the past years an unstoppable stream of politicians started to visit disadvantaged neighborhoods, claiming to bridge the gap with ordinary people by listening to their daily concerns. It is interesting to note that each politician came out of these visits with quite different stories, all resembling their own political preferences.

Paradoxically, this attention to the problems of citizens is often and quickly translated into problems caused by citizens and tasks for citizens. Though politicians as modern flagellants don’t stop to blame themselves for mistakes in the past, citizens get burdened with many new tasks in order to help create a better and brighter urban future. They have to become ‘active citizens’ who take up responsibility for their neighborhoods, for their neighbors, and for themselves. If they don’t do so – or are expected not to take up these new responsibilities voluntarily – they might be forced: social professionals are given much room to intervene in families and households. These interventions most often concern a minority of the population – though sometimes vast parts of the population in delineated neighborhoods are target groups for these intense social programs. In practice, these programs are to a considerable extent, albeit indirectly, focused on ethnic or other minorities that are not as ‘integrated’ and active as policy makers want them to be. Particularly at the local level, many programs and projects are developed to stimulate the ‘civility’ (Uitermark and Duyvendak

2008) of its citizens and their active participation. Interestingly, these programs vary across cities, and the Rotterdam case, in particular – with the most interventionist programs – gets the attention it deserves.

Whereas, from fear of ‘uncivilized’ behavior of an ethnic underclass, tough measures are taken regarding that specific group, policy makers are more ambivalent, if not paradoxical, in their evaluation of the behavior of the majority population. On the one hand, politicians praise those emancipated citizens who are not dependent on strong communities (or the welfare state) but live their own autonomous lives. On the other hand, there is great concern that, due to all the very emancipated and assertive citizens, social cohesion has evaporated, social isolation increased, voluntary work declined and that citizens only want to deal with their own, individual problems, driven by private interest. This latter, rather gloomy picture informs a lot of policies to stimulate all Dutch citizens to become more socially active, to care for family, friends, and neighbors, and to not ‘hunker down’ (Putnam 2007) in heterogeneous, multicultural neighborhoods.

Research carried out in these fields is often rather critical regarding the empirical basis of those opinions voiced in public and political debates that claim a linear decline in civic engagement. Most research shows a transformation of the type of commitment and engagement by citizens instead of a simple decrease. In this respect, the development of ‘communities light’ (Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2004) is proof, for some, of the resilience of modern citizenship, whereas others consider this as proof of the incompetence of modern citizens to really relate to others, particularly to people with another social, cultural, and political background. The claim being that, given their homogeneity and their elective character, ‘communities light’ perhaps contribute more to the persistence of social cleavages and anomie than to anything else.

Hurenkamp, in his chapter, discusses the ‘communities light’ as mentioned above. Van de Wijdeven and Hendriks, in their chapter, show that there are ‘real-life expressions of vital citizenship’ that evolve irrespective of gloomy reports on declining civic virtues as well as conscious government policies to ‘civilize’ citizens. Participation-inducing policies and real-life expressions of citizenship co-evolve, without the former steering the latter in a unidirectional way. Verplanke and Duyvendak dig deeper into a particular policy field – community care for people with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities – in which policy-makers radically transformed the lives of the groups involved by pushing them out of the institutions into ‘normal’ neighborhoods, living ‘normal’ lives as regular citizens. Van den Berg, in her chapter, turns the spotlight on the social networks that Moroccan migrant women weave through what is commonly called gossip. Van Bochove, Rušino-

vić and Engbersen show how middle-class migrants in Rotterdam – a step ‘higher’ in the social stratification than most of the Moroccan women that Van den Berg interviewed – have developed their own ways of dealing with local and transnational aspects of citizenship.

Urban governance and professional politics

The Dutch are well-known for their elaborate planning systems and have witnessed a rich history of rather interventionist urban policies. Building on the discussions in Part II about ‘active citizenship’, in this part we analyze what changes occurred in the governance of the urban field in the Netherlands, and how professionals positioned themselves in the changing environment. In the new configuration, not only organized citizens play their role, but also the practitioners and officials representing semi-privatized housing associations, urban developers, community workers and other social professions. The latter are traditionally quite numerous as well as visible in the Dutch urban setting.

The debate on professionalism in the Netherlands shows the same conjuncture as in many other countries. The low-tide of professional appreciation of the 1980s and 1990s, has recently reversed into high-tide: there is broad consensus now that professionals are needed to guide urban renewal processes, to ‘civilize’ the young and the poor, to activate the unemployed, to ‘empower’ the relatively powerless, to animate the lonely, et cetera. This new wave of professionalism (Freidson 2004) is meant to support citizens in urban neighborhoods to further develop their own skills. The zero-sum conceptualization of the earlier days, claiming that professionals crowd out active citizens and therefore suffocate civil society, has been replaced by a win-win idea: professionals can activate citizens, who – in close cooperation with social professionals – help to implement all kinds of social programs aiming at the reinforcement of social cohesion in heterogeneous urban neighborhoods.

This demands quite a balancing act from the professionals involved. They have to deal with politicians who desperately need their urban programs to succeed. It is precisely in this highly politicized field of urban problems that professionals have to perform. Moreover, they have to deal with citizens who either have become more vocal and assertive (Tonkens 2003), or more difficult to ‘grasp’ since they have withdrawn from public life and try to effectively escape from professional interventions.

For urban governance at large the metaphor of a balancing act is quite appropriate as well. The association of urban governance with ‘municipal government’ – plain and simple – is further removed than ever. Various types of governance come together in present-day urban

governance: public as well as private, ‘governmental’, ‘non-governmental’ and ‘quasi non-governmental’, local, sublocal as well as supralocal. Actors and organizations engaged in urban governance focus increasingly on the sublocal, including the neighborhood issues that Dekker, Torenvlied and Völker analyze in their chapter. But they focus just as strongly on the ‘supralocal’, including the metropolitan and urban-regional issues that Janssen-Jansen and Salet elaborate on in their contribution (cf. Capello 2000; Kreukels et al. 2002; Barlow 2004). The chapter by Dekker et al., together with the one by Janssen-Jansen and Salet, nicely illustrate the simultaneous upward and downward shifts in urban governance in the Netherlands; urban policymakers find themselves right in the middle, attempting to cope with both (Hendriks and Tops 2000; Hendriks 2006a).

Moreover, there are simultaneous shifts to internal governance – the preoccupation with ‘new public management’ in its various generations is not over yet – and external governance – the focus on ‘interactive’, ‘participative’, ‘public-private’, ‘co-productive’ governance continues to be strong – to be dealt with. No wonder that urban policymakers often ponder and sometimes complain bitterly about the complexities of urban governance. In the 1990s, complaints were often formulated in terms of institutional ‘viscosity’ (*stropenrigheid*); in more recent years the concerns tend to be voiced in terms of ‘administrative hubbub’ (*bestuurlijke drukte*), but the underlying phenomenon is very much the same. ‘Governance’ is a buzzword with a positive connotation – different actors and organizations working together, keeping each other in check and in shape. However, the flipside – a host of actors and organizations involved, a multitude of veto points and a high level of complexity – cannot be ignored, certainly not in the urban setting. The two sides are closely related, they are inevitable, part and parcel of (post)modern urban governance (Hendriks 1999; Hendriks et al. 2005).

The chapters by Tops and Hartman, and by Vermeulen and Plaggenborg, show that professionals working in the ‘frontline’ of public administration – those who deal directly with involved citizens – develop their own ways of dealing with the complexities of urban life. Practitioners working with immigrant youth tend to prefer what works in the real world of urban neighborhoods, relatively independent of what ‘is done’ in the ideal world of abstract policy precepts, as Vermeulen and Plaggenborg suggest. Tops and Hartman show that effective frontline professionals are well-versed in the relevant policy precepts and programs, but are first of all able to ‘read’, understand and feel their way through the real world in which they have to deal with real people with real concerns. It is not that they detach themselves completely from the complexities of the institutional logic – they cannot and they

should not if they want to retain the necessary support and resources – it is more that they deal with it selectively and often strategically, putting the situational logic up front.

The four chapters in the final part of the book follow from the research tracks on 'coproduction' and 'organizing capacity', rightly emphasized as important topics in the wider STIP program. For, in contemporary urban fields and quarters, organizing capacity cannot and should not be taken for granted, while urban government cannot and should not be seen as the prime mover in urban governance. Governance, to distinguish from government, is a multi-perspective endeavor. A narrow, statist approach does not befit present-day urban governance, let alone urban studies.

Urban studies: seeing more like a scholar, less like a state

The fact that many chapters in this book deal with policy programs might surprise those non-Dutch readers who come from less state-interventionist countries. The policy-orientation of urban studies in the Netherlands is related to the actual situation: Dutch policymakers play an important role in urban developments, or at least they have the ambition to do so. Hence, those of us who professionally carry out research regarding urban problems in the Netherlands cannot avoid a focus on policy issues. At the same time, we have to be aware of an overly narrow 'statist' perspective on urban problems. 'Seeing like a state' (Scott 1998) is not the best perspective for urban scholars to apply and it does not help to produce new, common-sense challenging, knowledge regarding urban questions. 'Seeing like a scholar' – an engaged, connected, but still independent, and if necessary critical scholar – would be more appropriate, and in the end more productive.

Authors contributing to this volume have tried to work in this vein, and they have been able to do so in a context of a national science foundation (NWO) and a knowledge center for cities (Nici Institute) agreeing on a wide-ranging research program that puts urban questions firmly on the agenda but gives researchers ample room to be engaged in independent urban research of various types, reflecting different research disciplines, methods and traditions. The variety is reflected in this volume. We hope that this book will be read in this independence- and variety-favoring spirit and that it will contribute not only to a better understanding of our urban problems but also to sane solutions, especially needed in the difficult times that we currently face.

In order to put the Dutch perspectives on urban issues in proper perspective, we have invited John Mollenkopf to reflect on the contribu-

tions to this volume. He is director of the Center for Urban Research and a professor of political science and sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. But above all, he is the relative outsider who is capable of looking at the Netherlands in a detached way. Coming from the United States, but very much familiar with the Netherlands, he is the expert par excellence to put the Dutch situation into an international comparative perspective. That is why we are very pleased that he accepted our invitation to conclude this volume with a commentary chapter.

Note

- 1 The Urban Innovation Research Program (Stedelijk Innovatieprogramma) was co-financed by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment.