The Impact of Citizens' Protest on City Planning in Amsterdam

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When reading the urban studies literature, it is hard to escape the conclusion that urban movements have little impact on the built environment.

To begin with, authors point to several factors that prevent large-scale mobilization. First, there are few citywide collective issues of deprivation (Pahl 1975: 273). And in a process of urban renewal, different categories of citizens have different interests. There are cleavages between tenants and owners, and between those who are eligible for re-housing after renewal and those who are not (Lambert, Paris et al. 1978). Also, urban managerialism causes social issues to be redefined as either individual or technical problems (Lambert, Paris et al. 1978: 169-170). And groups in different neighborhoods are likely to become locked in a zero-sum struggle for scarce resources (Pahl 1975).

When, notwithstanding these obstacles, mobilization does occur, the literature predicts co-optation of activists by policy makers. For example, Saunders (1979: 131) concluded that community action groups either cause some trouble to decision makers, or actually make urban management more efficient by channeling opposition into manageable forms and by providing some necessary feedback for policy development. According to Castells (1977) urban social movements are subject to a double movement of integration/repression. He suggested that escaping this movement was theoretically conceivable, however he could not offer an idea as to how to achieve this.

If an urban movement might overcome the obstacles to mobilization and escape co-optation and repression, there are still structural limitations to be taken into account.. As mentioned, Pahl saw urban politics as a zero sum game: the maximum effect protest groups can hope for, is obtaining a larger share of scarce resources at the expense of others (Pahl 1975). And Castells put forward the view that movements that were simply urban, i.e. not connected to electoral struggles nor connected to the worker's mobilization in the realm of production, are incapable of forcing structural change (Castells 1977).

An overview of the state of the art of general social movement theory discourages us even to wonder whether movements can reach their goals:

"it will not be fruitful to examine the outcomes of social movements in a direct way. Decisions to take collective action usually occur in social networks in response to political opportunities, creating incentives and opportunities for others. Both challenge and response are nested in a complex social and policy system in which the interests and actions of other participants come into play, and traditions and experiences of contention and conflict become the resources of both challengers and their opponents. Particularly in general cycles of protest, policy elites respond, not to the claims of any individual group or movement, but to the degree of turbulence and

to demands made by elites and opinion groups that may not correspond to the demands of those they claim to represent." (Tarrow 1994: 26)

Thus, the prediction that follows from the literature is: when citizens create an urban movement to force some change in policy, they will not achieve what they wanted. Their actions may still have an impact, but this will not correspond to the goal of the movement.

This prediction has an almost law-like character, which makes it interesting to search for "deviant cases" (Lipset 1964: 99). When such cases exist, they will give the opportunity to consider to what extent the lack of direct success is inevitable, and to see if there are special conditions or strategies that bring direct success within reach.

Such research has some potential social relevance, since it has been noted that activism, even when officials finally do what the activist wanted, tend not get credit for making a difference. This is one of the factors that can explain political apathy (Eliasoph 1998, 202-203).

Accounts of the history of city planning, and of specific cities and urban movements, offer hints that such deviant cases might exist. A famous case from the 1960s is the successful mobilization by Jane Jacobs against the planned demolition of West Greenwich Village on Manhattan (Hall 1996: 230). Hall also mentioned a successful mobilization against highway construction in San Francisco in 1964. Mobilization against the "Manhattanization" (construction of high rise buildings) of downtown San Francisco was however not successful (Brahinsky, Feldman et al. 2000).

Later also in Toronto and London plans for urban highways were cancelled (Hall 1996: 316-317).

There are some indications that Amsterdam might be a case in which mobilization made a difference in city planning. In his history of Amsterdam in the 20th century, Roegholt (1979) suggested that opposition against the construction of large buildings and urban highways was successful. And Mamadouh (1992: 228) noted that in Amsterdam, urban movements contributed to "the conquering of space for housing young people and non-family households, and a re-valuation of urban renewal areas and urban living" (Mamadouh 1992: 228). These views became incorporated in municipal anti-displacement policies (Mamadouh 1992: 229).

This paper is an attempt to see whether change in city planning in Amsterdam can be seen as a case of effective citizen's mobilization, and, if so, what can be learnt from it.

A key challenge in such a study is establishing plausible causality. For this, determining correspondence between activists' goals and final outcomes is not sufficient. The possibility has to be excluded that officials and politicians, entirely on their own, were responsible for the change (Pickvance 1976: 207-211). Actor's perceptions may be an additional source of evidence about causality (Pickvance 1976: 201). However, officials may understate the importance of citizens' actions (Eliasoph 1998). Also, such statements may be colored by public relations concerns. Politicians may claim to have listened to wishes expressed by a movement while implementing something else. Alternatively, politicians may tacitly anticipate protest, thereby hiding activists' influence (Noort 1988: 74). Temporal order is important, but one has to avoid assuming that because A happened before B, A is the cause of B (post hoc ergo propter hoc). During implementation, plans can hit obstacles other than resistance. They may lead to protesters seeing their wishes fulfilled, while at the same time

protest is not the cause of this. There is no way to be certain that all relevant factors are included.

In order to try to avoid these pitfalls in establishing causality, I proceeded as follows: First I assessed how planning changed. Then I traced decision-making processes and examined effects of movement activities on the policy network. In order to prevent overestimation of the contribution of citizens' protest, I developed a scenario without protest. This scenario takes into account factors other than protest, such as preferences for office locations, costs, and the general thrust of national policy.

The state of planned urban transformation in 1968

Between 1968 and 1978, city planning and the visions promulgated by city planners, changed drastically. These changes put the city on a different track towards the future.

To summarize the situation of 1968 in one sentence: the key decision-makers were poised to modernize the old city (i.e. the center plus the 19e century ring) while sparing primarily the canals, canal houses and other first class monuments.

During the 1950s and 1960s the following goals dominated city planning in Amsterdam (see map 1.):

- Constructing highways through the city: in the Nieuwmarktbuurt (the east part of the central district), the Haarlemmmerhouttuinen (in the north of the central district) and across the Kinkerbuurt (the southwestern part of the 19th century ring) to the southern tip of the Jordaan (the 17th century neighborhood west of the Prinsengracht).
- Creating large (office) buildings in the Nieuwmarktbuurt, the Eastern Islands (Kattenburg, Oostenburg and Wittenburg, in the northeast of the central district).
- Expansion of the University of Amsterdam in the eastern part of the inner city.
- Development of office blocks and other "city functions" in three areas in the ring of 19th centrury working class neighborhoods: Kinkerbuurt, Pijp and around the Rhijnspoorplein. These plans imply a shift in land use away from housing. The surplus population was to be housed outside the Amsterdam conurbation (Amsterdam 1968: 68-70).
- Building a subway system reaching all corners of the inner city. In Amsterdam, planners saw the subway as a means to obtain more space for car traffic (Gemeente Amsterdam 1960, "Het stedelijk openbaar vervoer", quoted in: Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt 1974b)
- Where land in the 19th century ring would continue to be used for housing, the density was to be lowered (Amsterdam 1968: 70).

Planning officials also supported development of large office blocks outside the areas designated for office construction. Examples are the head offices of the National Bank (Frederiksplein), the AMRO Bank (Rembrandsplein) and the ABN bank (Vijzelstraat). And from 1965 until 1970, planners of the Department of Public Works tried to change land use on Kattenburg from housing into commercial/industrial. (Noyon and al. s.d.)

This overview of the state of planned urban transformation can only serve as a starting point for examining change when it is certain that it is not based on visionary's dreams but on plans that have to be taken seriously. Reasons for taking these plans seriously are:

- The plans originated from and were backed by the most powerful civil servants: the section of Urban Development of the Department of Public Works. This organization had played the leading role in city planning since 1950. Its top manager, ir. De Gier, admitted that he had a strong influence on political decision-making (Kaiser and Schepers 1976: 193). The alderman for Public Works had little choice but to sell the plans made by the Department of Public Works to the city government. Also, he had to take care that the city government adopted policies that he could implement through his department. He could not afford to come into conflict with his own department (Schenk 1976: 14).
- Plans that designate areas for offices and commercial space can only bear fruit when investors are interested. Because the state has no power over private investment, corporatist decision making between a small circle of city authorities and developers is necessary (Saunders 1979: 175-179). In Amsterdam, there was mutually advantageous cooperation between property developers and the city government. For example, the building company Van der Meijden helped the city in cheaply realizing low-income housing projects, and in turn was offered highly profitable projects (Bergvelt 1980). There is also semi-institutionalized consultation between officials and business leaders on city planning, for example during meetings of the "Amsterdamsche Kring" (Amsterdam Circle). This is an exclusive association of which the proceedings are confidential (Bakker, Heydra et al. 1982). By 1974, the real estate developers Van der Meijden, Caransa and the Philips Pension Funds had realized 39 projects, largely situated along the new infrastructure that had been planned. [Bijlsma et al. 1974].
- Steps were taken towards realization of the plans. See the first three columns of table 1.

Mobilization and framing

The plans triggered protest and resistance from various angles. One of these angles was the conservationist tradition. Since the end of the nineteenth century their had been protests from prominent citizens against destruction of monuments and the monumental character of the inner city.

Representing a very different lifestyle and politics, there was also Provo (from provocation), a local anarchist movement. They were involved in mixing art and politics, defying the ruling powers and the police, developing playful alternative plans (such as a White Bicycle Plan for communal bicycles and a White Houses Plan for promoting squatting) and reclaiming public space. Provos opposed the policy of displacing residents ("overspill") as an unacceptable exercise of state power. They produced a shock by drawing a parallel with the deportations committed by the German occupiers ("Provo" #7, 2 February 1966).

In 1966, high-status conservationists among whom a former mayor of Amsterdam, A. J. d'Ailly, provos and other activists found each other in a joint protest against the construction of an large office building for the ABN bank in de Vijzelstraat (in the centre) (d'Ailly, Brinkgreve et al. 1967).

The planned transformation of Amsterdam implied a reduction of housing units, while at the same time the city was suffering a housing shortage. Already in 1964, this contradiction enraged a few people who were organized in a committee against the

housing shortage. They met with little response. However, when squatting took off in 1965, this contradiction became more and more noted.

Finally, an important development was that residents of threatened neighborhoods started to organize themselves in neighborhood groups. Squatters played an important role in this. The impending changes in land use manifested themselves in vacant buildings. The squatters who occupied those buildings took an interest in the plans that had been made for them.

Let us briefly revisit the various factors said to inhibit urban mobilization. It is true that there were few citywide collective issues of deprivation and that different categories of citizens had different interests. But this did not stop mobilization. The coherency of planning created a coherent set of issues: destruction of buildings for new infrastructure, increased traffic intensity, construction of buildings that do not fit into the scale of the city (the ABN building, for example, spans two blocks and overarches a street), decline of housing, people being forced to leave their neighborhoods or the city altogether, loss of affordable housing, commodification of public space, loss of affordable space for small businesses, demolition of monumental buildings, destruction of the social fabric of neighborhoods and making the center less of a mixed use environment and more of a central business district all are causally linked. Activists put a lot of work in connecting these problems. In this framing process, all the plans that made up the state of Amsterdam city planning in 1968 were (largely) captured by one concept: "cityvorming" (literally city formation; this word is difficult to translate although half of it is borrowed from English, probably to express that it is seen as an alien, imported development) or "grootschaligheid" ("large-scaleness"; exceeding the human scale of Dutch cities). By providing a common concept to reject, framing brought broad coalitions within reach.

There was one territorial zero-sum conflict of interest. Conservationists wanted the 19e century ring of working class neighborhoods to absorb the functions that they wanted to ban from the center; they were willing to see these neighborhoods completely demolished (d'Ailly, Brinkgreve et al. 1967: 46, Roegholt 1997: 161-162). Officials did not exploit this cleavage.

It is also true that plans were presented as inevitable for technical reasons. However, activists carried out and commissioned research, for example into the quality of the foundations of houses that were condemned by planners, and drew up alternative plans. These showed that the municipal plans contained an overwhelming measure of choice. The Amsterdam urban movement was successful in what Tarrow (1994: 122-123) called the "framing work" that consists of "inscribing grievances in overall frames that identify an injustice, attribute the responsibility for it to others and propose solutions to it".

Attempts at co-optation took place in the shape of "renewal support committees" ("saneringsbegeleidingscomité's") in the Dapperbuurt and Nieuwmarktbuurt, consisting of members of PvdA and Communist Party. These committees accepted demolition but pressed for higher financial compensation for those who were going to be displaced. More importantly, some members of political parties and middle ranking municipal workers were co-opted by the action groups. One of the results was frequent leaking of information towards the action groups.

Conflicts

Wherever the municipality tried to implement something of the plans of 1968, conflicts with neighborhood action groups erupted. Partly, the action groups got what they wanted, plus some extra concessions. Table 1 presents an overview of these conflicts.

Table 1 Planning conflicts

Area/year	Plan	Steps taken toward realization	Resistance	Part plan executed	Part plan scrapped	Further concessions
Jordaan 1969	Housing reduction from 8700 to 4080. Widening some streets. Office buildings.	Citizens' participation. Presentation of planned change to residents as inevitable. Acquisition of property.	Contacts with lower officials. Lobbying with Council for Urban Planning. Research into residents' preferences & technical and planning aspects. Operating squatted action center. Demonstration at officials' meeting. Squatting.	Nothing	All	
Bickerseiland 1970	Office construction.	Office building "Narwal" realized.	Petitioning. Squatting and defending squatted building. Raising the bridges. Demonstrative renovation. Lodging an objection.	Office building "Narwal" realized.	Further office construction.	
Nieuwmarkt 1970	Subway. Four-lane road. Office buildings. Hotel. Town Hall.	Demolition.	Lobbying. Petitioning. Research. Making a plan for an alternative subway trajectory. Squatting and defending squatted buildings. Stopping demolition crews. Preventing cutting of trees. Nailing alderman's home door shut. Sabotage.	Subway. Town Hall (combined with Opera).	Four-lane road. Office buildings, including a 277 meter long building for the University of Amsterdam.	New Housing. Creating physical obstacles to highway planning by strategic renovation and construction. Ban of further construction of subway lines (revoked in 2002[i]).

Area/year	Plan	Steps taken toward realization	Resistance	Part plan executed	Part plan scrapped	Further concessions
Dapperbuurt 1970	Total demolition. New housing in lower density. Shopping center. Market smaller.	Some demolition.	Lodging objections. Demonstrative tent camp. Research. Squatting, street barricade. Seizing and publicizing municipal information. Painting the house of the head of the building inspection.	Nothing	Idea of total demolition. Shopping center.	System of renewal that allows residents to remain in the neighborhood. Differentiation of apartment sizes brought more closely in line with residents' needs (more apartments for one and two person households).
Kinkerbuurt 1969	Office buildings. Reducing housing units by 66 per cent.		Protest by neighborhood-based politicians. Self-managed renovation. Lobbying. Making an alternative plan.	Nothing	Office buildings.	
Weesper-zijdestrook 1972	Office building.	Demolition of old office building. Foundations laid for larger building.	Legal action.	Nothing	Construction of office building aborted.	Low-income housing instead of office building.

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[i] On the basis of new technology that does no longer require demolishing everything that is in the subway's path.

Table 1 lists plans that planning managers and aldermen had enthusiastically tried to "sell", and that later were cancelled or profoundly changed (Beck 1974, Drooge and Verhulst 1976, Ottens 1979, Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt 1974a, Aktiegroep Nieuwmarkt 1974b, Engelen 1978, Naeyé 1979, Reenen 1979, Hoekema 1978, Lange 1977, Dopper and Schilden 1983, Meinsma 1975).

Dissident PvdA (Labor Party) council members played an important role by voting against some of the proposals made by aldermen of their own party. They were supported by council members of Kabouter (anarchist movement that succeeded Provo), the Pacifist Socialist Party and opportunistic members of the VVD (right-wing liberal party). This dissidence within the PvdA can only be understood in connection with the urban movement. Individual PvdA council members were influenced by the criticisms drawn by the prevailing planning policy - which was becoming less and less self-evident. Also, key PvdA politicians came to be distrusted by some of their fellow party-members. A case in point is H. Lammers, who first supported the neighborhood group of the Bickerseiland against office building development, and then, after he had become alderman, switched to the views shared by the city planners (Amsterdams Weekblad #11). In the decision-making process for the list of PvdA candidates for the 1978 elections, a dissident faction that had ties with the counter movement succeeded in taking the dominant position (Brants and Praag 1979).

Scenario without protest

It would be premature to see all these changes as the impact of protest. Other factors were important in frustrating the renewal plans as well.

Important factors to consider are the changes in office building investment patterns, costs and the role of national government.

As a thought experiment I will sketch a scenario without protest. The question is: would the plans, that the leading decision-makers were poised to implement in 1968, become a reality in a situation without protest?

From halfway the 1960s there is a clear trend that offices relocate from the inner city to the city's rim, and that new office buildings tend to be located at the city rim as well (Bergh, Hagendoorn et al. 1979). This trend continues up to this day. In 1999 the ABN-Amro bank (the bank that drew a large protest movement in 1966 when it build its main office in de Vijzelstraat in the city center) moved to the "South Axis", the popular location on the ring road between the city and Schiphol Airport. There, the large bank ING is building its head office as well.

Ample research has been done into the factors that determine firms' location preferences. This research showed that companies have two reasons for avoiding or wishing the leave the inner city:
- the lack of space;
- the lack of accessibility by car (Bergh and Keers 1981: 11).

The original planning of 1968 had called for traffic breakthroughs that would provide space for car traffic in the eastern part of the center, the Western Islands, the Haarlemmerhoutuinen, the southern part of the Jordaan and the Kinkerbuurt. After conflicts with activists these traffic breakthroughs were cancelled.

Thus in a scenario without protest, four-lane urban highways make these areas easily accessible by car. Demolition of the remaining buildings provides space for new office buildings. Clearing the old buildings in these locations leads to few clashes with monument interests, assuming that monumental value is primarily attributed to canal houses. Because of the accessibility and the opportunities to obtain land, there is no lack of interest to situate office buildings in these central areas. Thus as far as the city center is concerned, in a scenario without protest, the original plans of 1968 go through.

In the 19th century ring, the difference between the scenario without protest and what happened in reality is not as pronounced as in the central district. In the scenario without protest the original plan for the Dapperbuurt is realized (the plan was to turn the neighborhood into a plane of sand, create a new street layout, and build fewer, larger and more expensive apartments, a shopping center and a much scaled-down day market). If, however, urban renewal proceeds in this way, expenditures for re-housing skyrocket. These costs of re-housing are especially high because of the policy to re-house displaced city dwellers in designated satellite towns, the so-called "overspill areas" such as Almere, Hoorn and Purmerend. This requires huge investments in services, roads and transportation systems. These costs prompt the national government to put brakes on the overspill process. This happened in reality as well, in 1976/1977 (VROM 1976). In the scenario without protest this happens somewhat earlier, because more people are displaced, causing costs to rise faster. (Conceivably, slowing down the overspill process does not necessarily mean that renewal will be focused on residents' needs. It can also lead to the development of city extension areas.)

Even in a scenario without protest, bulldozer type renewal runs into limitations. In 1975 (in the reality) the national government started inducing cities to change their policy toward maintaining and repairing buildings, and toward building according to local residents' needs (Deben and van der Weiden 1980: 55). In Amsterdam, because of protest, this change – as far as the policy for the 19e century ring is concerned – occurred already in 1972. In comparison with the scenario without protest the counter movement accelerated this change by three years. This acceleration has a lasting effect on the city because of the reflection of the policy in the built environment. In the scenario with protest, these three years is enough to raze the Dapperbuurt and rebuild it in a different pattern with large apartments.

The assessment that protest accelerated the change by three years is based on the assumption that the national policy itself is not influenced by protest, just by financial factors. However, around 1975 neighborhood based protest groups sprang up all across the country. It is to be expected that they had an influence on the national urbanization policy.

After taking, by means of a thought experiment, these three factors into account: preferences for office location, costs and national urban policy, we can conclude that between 1968 and 1978 protesters achieved the following results:
- Blocking the construction of urban highways through the historic inner city.
- Partially preventing development of large buildings at various locations in the existing city.

- Accelerating the policy change from renewal of the 19e century ring based on complete razing and "overspill" to a type of renewal that allows more residents to remain in their neighborhoods. This means less change in the composition of the population of the old neighborhoods. The acceleration of change means that the structure of the Dapperbuurt is now much different than would have been the case without protest.
- The countermovement leveraged tensions within the Partij van de Arbeid (Labor Party) that occupied the central position in Amsterdam politics. The effect is that, in 1978, a faction that was determined to gear renewal policy towards meeting local residents' needs, and to maintain and repair buildings rather than develop highways and large buildings in the existing city took over the dominant position in the party.

The aftermath

Now, we have to consider the possibility that authorities rolled back concessions given under pressure.

The risk existed, because the city planners tried to keep open the possibility of further urban highway construction. In 1972 the city council voted against the plan to build a four-lane road through the Nieuwmarkt. This road should have been the final piece of a traffic artery that runs through the center to the central station. By 1972, it had been completed up to and including the Jodenbreestraat. A decision had to be made regarding the block Zwanenburgwal/Anthoniesbreestraat, which had, except for one building, been demolished for the construction of the subway. The buildings lines of this block would determine whether it would ever be possible to extend the four-lane artery through the Nieuwmarkt. The Department of Public Affairs tried to keep the gap wide enough for a future four-lane road. When asked to design several options, they came up with only one: a wide gap (Hoekema 1978). Finally, the area was rebuilt and renovated in such a way, that only a narrow gap remains. This spot can now be seen as a monument for the urban movement. It is best experienced when one walks or cycles, going north, up along the four-lane Wibautstraat. The subway is underneath you; alongside the road are office buildings. Continue on the Weesperstraat, which is also four-lane and turn into the Jodenbreestraat. This street was widened and laid out as a four-lane road as well. On the right hand side, in the 1960s a gray concrete building was constructed, that stretched along the entire length of the street. Now it has already been demolished. At the end of the Jodenbreestraat is the Anthoniessluis, which is a very wide bridge carrying a narrow street and huge sidewalks on which tourists drink cappuccinos.

Also at the Haarlemmerhouttuinen, the Department of Public Works clung to reserving space for four-lane road, after the city council had turned the plan down.

And when the Department rejected a proposal for an alternative route for the subway that would have spared the Nieuwmarktbuurt, a variety of motives were used. One motive was never mentioned: that in the alternative plan the subway line would not arrive at the central station in the east to west direction, which would have precluded further extension to the west, although the city council had decided against this. An engineer, who worked at the subway bureau, confirmed to me that this was the real motive.

A later opportunity for the planners of Public Works for providing the center with four-lane accessibility was the development of the south bank of the IJ river. After protest, this was only partly executed.

After 1978, the political opportunity structure for urban movements in Amsterdam declined. The PvdA instituted a strict party discipline, removing the opportunities for leveraging internal conflicts. The "compact city" remained the hegemonic planning model. Things that attracted the ire of activists, such as an underwater car park right in the center, were just deviations from the hegemonic model. Activists could protest, but they could not draw power from creating an alternative vision. This is because the alternative vision had become the official model. A very recent incarnation is the municipal "breeding places" policy, in which the City wants to provide sanitized, squat-like spaces in which young artists can thrive (Breek and Graad 2001).

The area of contestation became limited to deviations from the hegemonic model of the compact city; legal action tended to take the place of the battle of ideas.

Before 1978, the movement had the planning *power* of the city to mobilize against. After 1978, activists mobilized against the *powerlessness* of the city government to act against speculators. In their framing work, the squatters had to explain why they were fighting against a city government that basically wanted the same that they were pushing for.

Nevertheless, while the squatters met with increasing repression, the municipality bought two hundred of the buildings that were occupied by squatters (Duivenvoorden 2000: 323), thereby legalizing them. This created permanent housing for young people at prime locations in the inner city, bringing some variety into a gentrifying area.

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