

# REFLECTING ON GENTRIFICATION

Resident experiences with the state-led urban restructuring of a social rented area.

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**Master Thesis (GEO4-3313)**  
**Urban Geography**  
**Faculty of Geosciences**  
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Supervisor: Dr. B.M. Doucet

Utrecht, The Netherlands  
30 June 2011

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## FOREWORD

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This thesis is the final product of the research that I have conducted over a period of six months between January and July 2011 as part of the Master Thesis Urban Geography course (GEO4-3313) at the Faculty of Geosciences of Utrecht University in The Netherlands. As such, it serves as the final test for my Master's Degree in Urban Geography.

During these six months, a research proposal has been written and accepted, the literature concerning the topic of gentrification has been explored, analysed and summarised, the proposed outline of the project has been executed, the data has been collected and analysed, and ultimately conclusions have been drawn.

However, before reading through this paper –which will hopefully prove enjoyable– until you eventually arrive at the concluding remarks, I would like to have a moment of your time to express a few words of gratitude towards a number of people that have helped me succeed during my four-year period at Utrecht University and, more notably, even beyond that.

Above all I sincerely want to thank my parents, Mannus and Gija de Boer, for the tremendous support and help you have always been. Without either of you, I would not be at the position I am in today. Thank you for teaching me the most valuable lessons in life, a wisdom that transgresses the contents of any course offered in the academic curriculum.

For their support, company, humour, discussion, shared wisdom, knowledge and interests, cooperation, but most importantly their love and friendship, I am much obliged to my brothers, sister and my family, to Anne, Djim, Martijn, OKV Utrecht, Nesrin and the rest of my friends in Nunspeet, on the Veluwe and in Utrecht. Also I would like to thank my international friends across Belgium, Germany, Norway, Scotland, throughout Europe and even across the globe as far as China and Japan, of course including my girlfriend Chie. Thank you all.

I would also like to thank the residents of Ondiep for their cooperation in this project. Without their response it would not have been possible to conduct this research and ultimately to finish my Master's degree.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor for his advice and guidance during the writing of this thesis, as well as the other staff of the Faculty of Geosciences and the Urban Geography Master program for their enthusiasm and their shared insights and knowledge throughout my entire studies.

Sincerely,

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Even though gentrification is a relatively old-term within the realm of urban geography (Glass, 1964) and its academic field of research, there still are a number of shortcomings to the available literature. These are:
  - The gentrification debate usually merely incorporates scholars, leaving out the personal experiences of residents that live through the process.
  - Residents of the social rented sector are often left out of the discussion, even though, especially in European societies, they are not immune for the process.
  - Gentrification is often portrayed as too black-and-white (good/bad) a process.
- This thesis attempts to help bridge the gap in the academic literature that is the result of the three previously mentioned shortcomings.
- As such, it will increase understanding about the execution of urban restructuring projects and their effects, as the residents of the social rented sector experience them. This knowledge could ultimately assist in ‘tailoring’ such a project more to the needs of the residents.
- It will do so by answering the following research question (for sub questions, see p.9):

*In what way do the residents of social rented housing in gentrifying areas experience the effects of state-led urban restructuring projects, and in addition, what could this mean regarding urban restructuring policies?*
- As gentrification incorporates both a physical and a social upgrade (see p.12), three main variables and several indicators to measure the effects within these two themes have been selected, underpinned and were elaborated upon (see p.14-20). The three variables are:
  - *Social cohesion*
  - *Liveability*
  - *Neighbourhood quality*
- Each of the four elements of modern-day gentrification (Davidson & Lees, 2005) can be applied to large-scale, state-led urban restructuring projects, including the one currently being executed in Ondiep (see p.24-26 for a more detailed description). The four are:
  - The reinvestment of capital
  - Direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups
  - Change in the physical appearance of the neighbourhood
  - Social upgrading of the locale by incoming higher-income groups
- Furthermore, Hackworth & Smith (2001) describe the changed role of the state in the process of gentrification. Throughout the last few decades, the state has taken on a more entrepreneurial role, ultimately including large-scale projects in the social rented sector. This both explains and justifies the selection of Ondiep as the research site.
- Not only did the large-scale, state-led urban restructuring project in Ondiep meet the academic requirements of gentrification, parts of it specifically focused on improving the aforementioned variables. This makes Ondiep a particularly suitable research site.
- By means of semi-structured interviews, 22 residents were asked about their experiences with the effects of the urban restructuring project on each of the indicators (see p.57-58).
- The results showed that the residents make a clear distinction between the effects on their neighbourhood’s *demolished and reconstructed areas* and the *renovated areas*, which is a consequence of the (change in) tenure form (see p.31-39).
- The former shows a much more evident negative effect on social cohesion as well as a positive effect on liveability and neighbourhood quality than the latter.
- Nevertheless, in neither case are the experienced effects of the urban restructuring project considered as particularly positive or negative in general.
- Especially in their own social rental areas, the residents clearly indicate that they experience neither a very positive nor a particularly negative effect of the project on any of the variables incorporated in the research.

- On a neighbourhood scale, the residents experienced the same mix of improvements and deterioration. They therefore seem to have a more or less nuanced opinion on the effects.
- In terms of urban restructuring policy it is advisable to increase the attention that goes out to the social restructuring of the population of a neighbourhood, as even large-scale state-led projects that include large social rented areas have a tendency to serve a more broad idea of society and the new residents, instead of focusing on tackling the (social) issues of the actual target audience; the original residents.

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# FOR MY PARENTS

Mannus de Boer  
Gija de Boer-Rekers

# I INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Ever since Ruth Glass introduced the term in 1964, gentrification has been hotly debated in the fields of human/urban geography and sociology, while being of equal importance to city policy makers and planners. After decades of discussion, gentrification is still very likely to leave a bad taste in ones mouth, even though the Real Estate Board of New York launched a counter-attack in *The New York Times* in 1985 with an advertisement that questioned the *dirty*ness of the term<sup>1</sup>. This *did* famously revitalise an ongoing academic discussion, however, as of today it has not completely succeeded in removing the sour taste of gentrification. Policy makers and government officials are still prone to disguise the process in practice with a cloak of positivity, using terms as urban restructuring, urban regeneration, urban renovation, urban renaissance, urban redevelopment (Nedučín *et al.*, 2009).

As such, the definition of gentrification has been stretched ever thinner to cover a greater variety of processes, including large-scale state-led urban restructuring projects in areas in which its occurrence previously was expected to be unlikely, most notably –for this research– areas occupied by social rented dwellings. In the pursuit of a more liveable city, governments have increasingly resorted to acts that have the potential to gentrify and can affect groups of residents that were believed to be unaffected by it in earlier times. However, it is still relatively unclear exactly how the residents of social rented areas that are the subject of these urban restructuring projects are affected by them and, in particular, how the residents personally experience the effects.

This thesis aims to find out about the experienced effects of urban restructuring projects in social rented areas on three factors that often are important benchmarks for the initiation of such a project. In addition, it will further establish the connection with gentrification, while expanding its definition. However, before all that, this chapter will continue with a more elaborate introduction to the research and its foundations.

**Keywords** Utrecht • urban restructuring • gentrification • social rented sector • resident experiences • social cohesion • liveability • neighbourhood quality

## 1.2 Three shortcomings in the academic literature on gentrification

The gentrification debate naturally involves both proponents and opponents of the process. Indeed, the discussion is commonly conducted between academics stressing the opportunities that gentrification grants to its performers, befitting the *emancipatory discourse*<sup>2</sup> (see Caulfield, 1994; Jones & Varley, 1999) and their counterparts that emphasise the harmful effects gentrification has on the original residents of a gentrifying neighbourhood, supporting the *displacement*

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<sup>1</sup> The tagline of the advertisement read, “*Is gentrification a dirty word?*” and provoked Neil Smith to commence (another) critical analysis of the process of gentrification (Smith, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> For a further (critical) introduction to this discourse, see Lees (1996) and Slater (2004, 2006).

*discourse* (i.e. Smith, 1996; Atkinson, 2000b; Freeman & Braconi, 2004; Moses, 2006; Shin, 2009). Usually an article or research thus focuses either on the positive or the negative effects of gentrification and therefore produces a rather black-and-white image of the phenomenon (Doucet, 2009). Only seldom are the voices of scholars with a more nuanced approach towards gentrification heard in academic literature, although some recognition of the varying effects of gentrification has recently surfaced (i.e. Freeman, 2008; Doucet, 2009).

Ironically, the point about the polarisation within the gentrification debate that was just made reveals yet another shortcoming of the contemporary literature on the subject. It shows that the debate usually incorporates merely academics arguing about the (possible) effects of gentrification. However, it are not these scholars but rather the residents of gentrifying areas that are the ones who experience both sides of the process at first-hand and should therefore be the subjects of analysis (as was done using a quantitative approach by Sullivan, 2007, in Portland, USA).

Apart from the aforementioned two shortcomings of the debate there seems to be a further misconception about gentrification. The residents of social rented housing are often portrayed as being immune to the effects of gentrification (Dulchin, 2004; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Walks & August, 2008). In academic literature, this particular form of tenure is often not regarded as being coherent with the usual targets of the process. Initially only single, working-class, lower-income owner-occupied dwellings were acknowledged as being susceptible to practices of gentrification (see Glass, 1964; Smith, 1996; Aardema & Knoy, 2004, give a Chicagoan example; Dulchin, 2004, on New York; Bridge, 2007; Davidson, 2007; 2010).

Nevertheless, the character of gentrification has changed throughout the decades of its existence (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). This development is particularly important when one is conducting research in European countries such as The Netherlands, where a vast share of the housing stock belongs to the social rented sector (i.e. Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2007). In fact, in Western Europe it is not unlikely for gentrification to occur in areas that are administered by public housing associations (Newman & Wyly, 2006; Lees & Ley, 2008). The list of examples includes Stockholm, Sweden (Millard-Ball, 2000), Dundee in the United Kingdom (Glynn, 2008) and Berlin in Germany (NOS, 2011b). This variant of gentrification usually involves state-led urban restructuring projects of a large scale, which is why this research focuses specifically on the effects of this type of project and the ways in which the residents experience those effects.

To sum up, there are three common shortcomings in the academic literature on gentrification that have ignited this thesis. First, the process is often portrayed as rather black-and-white, while there is reason to believe that its effects are more nuanced. Second, too little attention goes out to the personal experiences of the people who actually live through the process, as academics remain theoretical. Third, gentrification now has the potential to encompass social rented areas and its residents too, however, this is still hardly recognized by academics.

### 1.3 Academic relevance

The three shortcomings in the academic literature concerning gentrification that have just been presented can guide us to the aims and relevance of this research with relative ease. Regarding those shortcomings, many academics agree that taking a closer look at the effects that gentrification has on a variety of factors, as they are experienced by the residents of the social rented sector, is not only a relevant, but also a very useful enterprise (Slater *et al.*, 2004; Freeman, 2008; Lees, 2008; Watt, 2008).

This thesis will do just that. It attempts to bridge a gap that is still largely existent in contemporary academic literature concerning gentrification and that is made up of the trio of shortcomings summarized at the end of the previous section. The focus will lie on the experiences that the residents of social rented dwellings have with the effects of large-scale state-led urban restructuring projects that are being executed in their neighbourhood. As such, it aims to extend the academic knowledge on the impact that gentrification has on those that were previously assumed to be unaffected by it, based on the actual personal experiences of that particular group. Furthermore, it will contribute to the expansion of a recently founded, more nuanced approach towards the process of gentrification.

This research and its results will therefore contribute to an increased academic insight in the different forms of gentrification and the various ways in which it affects the population of an area in which the process occurs. The theoretical knowledge of gentrification –which there is in abundance– and its effects on residents will not only be supplemented with a practical example, but it will be expanded as a result of the foci on large-scale, state-led urban restructuring projects as well as the resident experiences with its effects that this thesis has.

### 1.4 Societal relevance

What was described in the previous section as the academic relevance of this thesis contains clues of its societal relevance as well. The increased knowledge on the ways in which residents experience the effects of gentrification, or urban restructuring for that matter<sup>3</sup>, can eventually help policy-makers and executives to gain extra insight into what matters and what is experienced most by the residents of an area in which a restructuring project is executed too. In that way, it can help attune or fine-tune future restructuring projects so that the outcomes on a neighbourhood level better meet the preferences and demands of the project area's residents.

After all, a restructuring project usually is intended to upgrade a neighbourhood and to improve both its physical and its social condition, for the sake of its residents. This means that the constructive minds behind such a project benefit from every bit of extra knowledge that is available on the outcomes of their ideas and the ways in which they are both perceived and received by their target audience; the residents of the project area. Since the residents are the ones who actually

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<sup>3</sup> The relationship between gentrification and urban restructuring projects has been explained only briefly within this introductory chapter; however, a more elaborate explanation will follow in the following two chapters (sections 2.1, 3.2 and 3.3).

experience the effects of the project on a daily basis, they effectively are the ones who ultimately judge if it has been a success or a failure.

The above is particularly true when it concerns a large-scale state-led urban restructuring project that is executed in a social rented area. As will be seen in chapters II, when the terms that are relevant for this thesis will be defined, and III, when the suitability of the research site will be discussed, these projects are often –if not always– ignited after a government has recognized the bad state a neighbourhood is in. This evaluation involves both the physical and the social condition of the area that is then deemed appropriate for restructuring. A project that is initiated after such an assessment naturally aspires to improve that bad physical and/or social condition, which means that policy-makers and executives would very much like to know whether or not their efforts have met a warm welcome and much more *why* this is so.

The assessment of resident experiences can then be used, as said before, to help fine-tune that and future projects. Indeed, the societal relevance of this thesis has already been proven in a meeting between the author and a representative of the housing corporation (Mitros) that is responsible for the execution of the urban restructuring project in Ondiep, where the fieldwork was done. Mitros expressed its interest in the results of the research, as they are currently in the process of re-examining and redesigning the blueprint for Phase 3 of their project, based on an assessment of the success of their Phases 1 and 2.

### *1.5 Research questions*

The relevance of this thesis will come forward through its results. By providing an answer to the following main research question, a greater understanding of the effects of projects that have the potential to induce gentrification in social rented areas, according to the experiences of its residents, will be established. Furthermore, there is room for an assessment of where the strengths and weaknesses of an urban restructuring project lie, which will eventually give a clearer insight in what the results of this research can mean for governmental policies on urban restructuring.

#### *Main research question*

- In what way do the residents of social rented housing in gentrifying areas experience the effects of state-led urban restructuring projects, and in addition, what could this mean regarding urban restructuring policies?

As has been mentioned briefly in both the introductory section and the previous section on societal relevance, urban restructuring projects are usually aimed at an improvement of the physical and/or social condition of the neighbourhood in which it is executed. Having said that, the effects of the project should thus be evaluated best regarding their influence on indicators such as neighbourly interactions, sense of community, feelings of safety, experiences with pollution and the quality of the dwellings. To find out about the experienced effects of large-scale urban restructuring projects on these indicators, the following sub research questions (SRQs) will be answered throughout this thesis. Each of the SRQs incorporates an overarching factor that includes a number of indicators.

### *Sub research questions*

- To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the level of social cohesion?
- To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the liveability?
- To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the neighbourhood quality?

A further elaboration on each of the factors and their indicators, including the arguments for their selection and incorporation, can be found in the following chapter in section 2.4.

### *1.6 Methods*

By means of in-depth interviews residents will be asked about their experiences with several indicators, which together make up the variables that are presented in each of the aforementioned SRQs. Using this form of research provides the best opportunity to find out not only what the respondents feel or experience, but also what their underlying thoughts and arguments are. Throughout the month of April 2011, 22 interviews have been conducted in as many households. More of the process, including its characteristics, operationalisation and some remarks on its limitations will be revealed in the methodological chapter (IV).

### *1.7 Thesis outline*

Before moving on to the pit of the matter, an overview of what there is to expect in the upcoming chapters of this research will now follow.

Chapter II will present and discuss the theoretical foundations of this research. It will include a definition of the central theme of gentrification, as well as an overview of its positive and negative characteristics according to their respective discourses. Furthermore, the indicators and the variables that they compose will be presented and discussed within the confines of this chapter.

The third chapter will introduce the research site of Ondiep, as well as the urban restructuring projects that are currently being carried into effect in the neighbourhood. In addition, the reasons as for why Ondiep is considered a suitable site to conduct fieldwork for this particular research, which will also further elaborate on the relevance of this research, is presented in Chapter III.

The methodological chapter (Chapter IV) will go into the reasons as for why it was decided to use semi-structured interviews to find an answer to the research questions. Also, an explanation will be given for the set-up of these in-depth interviews and the way in which the variables and questions were selected, as well as an overview of the characteristics of the actual fieldwork that has been conducted.

In Chapter V the obtained qualitative data will be analysed and its relevance regarding the main and sub research questions will be presented. To make an indication of its relevance for the academic literature, a connection with existing literature on the topic will be made.

The sixth chapter will provide the reader with a summary of the research results and answers to each of the sub research questions. Ultimately the main research question will be answered and the thesis can and will thus be concluded.

A further seventh chapter will reflect on the findings of this research and present an evaluation of the project, as well as recommendations for future research on the effect that gentrification has on the lives of those neighbourhood residents, in particular of social rented dwellings, that can neither be identified as the *gentrifiers* nor as the *displaced* and therefore find themselves *in between*.

## II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Introduction

It is necessary for the empirical part of this research to be grounded on a solid theoretical basis. A thorough understanding of its main themes is required, not just for the author, but for all who venture to read the report. Therefore, this chapter will introduce and define the most important themes of this research project. Firstly, the overarching theme of gentrification will be introduced, after which a brief discussion regarding its positive and negative effects will follow. Secondly, a closer look will be taken at the themes that are relevant in answering the sub research questions, namely social cohesion, liveability and the quality of the neighbourhood.

### 2.2 Gentrification

The British sociologist Ruth Glass was the first to use the term *gentrification*. In her 1964 book *London: Aspects of Change*, she provided a description to a certain process that was ongoing in the Barnsbury neighbourhood of London. What was described was the ‘invasion of working-class neighbourhoods by those higher up the class ladder’, as can be seen in the following quote taken from her work.

*“One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower. Shabby, modest mews and cottages – two rooms up and two down – have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. ... The current social status and value of such dwellings are frequently in inverse relation to their status, and in any case enormously inflated by comparison with previous levels in their neighbourhoods. Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed”* (Glass, 1964, p.xviii-xix).

Perhaps needless to say, the 1960s Barnsbury context was not the first time the world saw the process that is gentrification at play. For instance, over a century prior, Parisian working-class quarters were being demolished in order to facilitate the luxury residences that befit the new *grand design* of France’s capital city, as was issued by Napoleon III (Smith, 1996, p.34-35). Nevertheless, 1964 marks the year when the term *gentrification* was first coined.

However, nowadays, Glass’ original definition of gentrification is often dubbed “*classical gentrification*” (Lees *et al.*, 2008, p.4), as throughout its existence, gentrification has transformed and adapted to the trials of time (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). Even though the more classical form of gentrification still occurs (Rofe, 2000), throughout the latter half of the twentieth century the definition of the process has expanded to incorporate a variety of developments – i.e. new-build developments (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Visser & Kotze, 2008), large-scale state-led projects (Bunce, 2009; Immergluck, 2009), also in non-Western (world) cities (He, 2007; He & Wu, 2007; López-Morales, 2010), and processes involving industrial sites (Curran, 2007), tourism (Fox Gotham, 2005) and even students (Duke-Williams, 2009) – that had previously been left out of the equation, as can

be derived from the following quotes (text box 2.1). All quotes show a gradual decrease in specificity and thus a gradual increase in the processes that could be comprehended within the definition of gentrification.

**Text box 2.1**

*“By gentrification I mean the process by which working class residential neighbourhoods are rehabilitated by middle class homebuyers, landlords and professional developers” (Smith, 1982, p.139).*

Gentrification is *“the rehabilitation of working-class and derelict housing and the consequent transformation of an area into a middle-class neighbourhood” (Smith & Williams, 1986, p.1).*

*“Gentrification refers to a process of class succession and displacement in areas broadly characterised by working-class and unskilled households” (Atkinson, 2000a, p.149).*

*“Gentrification is primarily an upward class transformation and the creation of affluent space” (Doucet, 2009, p.300).*

The quotes above show that one should take into account that gentrification does not merely concern the upgrading of single residential units by individuals anymore, but has become a term that comprehends a variety of processes involving urban restructuring instead. Indeed, it is because of the recognition of its historical transformation that the term is applicable to the specific context of this research, as will be extensively clarified later on in Chapter III (p.21-26).

### 2.3 *Gentrification; a two-sided coin?*

As was briefly mentioned in the introductory paragraph, there is little agreement among academics regarding the overall effects of gentrification. More often than not, scholars are relatively easily identified as either proponents (i.e. Caulfield, 1994) or opponents (i.e. Neil Smith, 1996) of the process, each for their own reasons. Nevertheless, a more nuanced view towards gentrification often misses, which is what this research aims to ameliorate. Furthermore, gentrification affects the residents of the neighbourhoods that are currently undergoing a class transformation directly, which is why it is more relevant to try and find out the effects that the process has on their lives according to their own subjective experiences.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the arguments brought forward by the academics that are in support of either the *emancipatory* or the *displacement discourse* are useless. Indeed, it gives great insight into the possible experienced effects that gentrification can have on the lives of the residents of neighbourhoods where the process is currently at play. Therefore, an overview of both the advantages and the disadvantages of gentrification is considered to be relevant to this research (see table 1).

#### 2.3.1 *Its disadvantages*

By far the most discussed and feared effect of gentrification is displacement (i.e. Palen & London, 1984; Lyons, 1996; Atkinson, 2000a). This involves not merely the direct displacement of working-class residents as a result of the influx of their middle-class counterparts, but indirect displacement through exclusionary mechanisms, chain effects and displacement pressure as well (Marcuse, 1986). Either as a consequence of their dwelling being the immediate subject of gentrifi-

cation, or due to the prohibiting effect of rising housing prices, the chain effect of the out-migration of successive chains of households or the threatening effect of the impending displacement, resident displacement is prone to occur in areas where the process of gentrification takes place (Lyons, 1996; Smith, 1996).

Besides the aforementioned physical displacement of residents, a certain 'social' displacement can also be witnessed in gentrifying areas (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Young *et al.*, 2006). Once the middle-class pours into a neighbourhood, its social and cultural character is altered simultaneously, resulting in a gradual displacement of the former local culture (Paton, 2009). Furthermore, as local amenities and services are upgraded to match the gentrifiers' wishes, a feeling that these are no longer meant for the working-class – a *not for us* sentiment (Doucet, 2009) – can begin to grow among the locals (Atkinson, 2000b).

While gentrifiers and locals tend to have a limited overlap in interests, tastes, norms and values, as well as other social, cultural and economic characteristics, the levels of social cohesion, neighbourly interaction, the sense of community and social organization is likely to decrease (Jupp, 1999; Van Beckhoven & Van Kempen, 2003), resulting in social polarisation (Atkinson, 2000b; Blomley, 2004) and social inequality (Hamnett, 2003). It is not uncommon for this polarisation of communities to take on physical forms as well, both in terms of residential and commercial segregation (Butler, 2003). Indeed, gentrification is often considered a 'divisive and disruptive process for local communities' (Doucet, 2009, p.304), in both the physical and the social context.

**Table 1** An overview of the positive and negative aspects of gentrification

<i>Disadvantages</i>	<i>Advantages</i>
Residential displacement	Improvement of neighbourhood quality
Social displacement	Increase in neighbourhood liveability
Decrease of social cohesion	Improvement of neighbourhood image
The " <i>not for us</i> " feeling	Decrease of vandalism and social problems
Less affordable housing	Poverty deconcentration
Social polarisation	Residential mixing
Spatial polarisation	Rising prices for dwellings

### 2.3.2 *Its advantages*

As the famous –or infamous, if one attempts to understand his rather inimitable explanations– Dutch football player Johan Crujff once said: "*every disadvantage has its advantage*". This section will show that many of the disadvantages that were mentioned earlier on, can be perceived as advantageous when looked at from a different perspective, hence the title of section 2.3.

The process of gentrification will result in an improvement of the physical quality of the dwellings in the neighbourhood, as a result of a reinvestment of capital in a formerly dilapidated area (Bromley *et al.*, 2005; Davidson & Lees, 2005). Furthermore, the rising housing prices turn out to be beneficial to those residents that own a dwelling in the area<sup>4</sup> (Bridge, 1994). As gentrification involves

<sup>4</sup> Which naturally is not the case for residents of social rented dwellings.

the social upgrading of a neighbourhood and the creation of affluent space (Doucet, 2009) and residential mixing, it is claimed to diminish instances of violence, vandalism and other social problems that are theorized to be related to a concentration of the lower classes, while improving the social fabric of a neighbourhood, conform the ideas of *New Urbanism*<sup>5</sup> (Putnam, 1995; Ley, 1996; Dekker & Bolt, 2005). It improves the quality and availability of amenities and services (Zukin & Kosta 2004; Freeman, 2006), while simultaneously enhancing local job opportunities in both the retail and the personal service sector (Vigdor, 2002).

When looking at it from a middle-class perspective, gentrification could provide a family-inclusive place of residence, which is close to the city-centre and labour opportunities, while the possibility to raise the children in the same environment remains existent (Karsten, 2003; 2009). Furthermore, artists consider working-class neighbourhoods to be the perfect sites to express their aversion of the neo-liberal commoditisation of spaces, the pinnacle of which is suburbia (Ley, 2003). With artists pouring in, the former working-class neighbourhood now becomes a site of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993). A positive side effect of this process – and of gentrification in general – is that the image that is portrayed outward, unto the minds of non-residents, is no longer one of marginalisation and decay, but rather one of quality, creativity and innovation (Ley, 2003; Slater, 2006)<sup>6,7</sup>.

#### 2.4 *Social cohesion, liveability and neighbourhood quality*

So far the negative as well as the positive effects of gentrification have been discussed from the perspective of a variety of actors involved. A number of these effects, both on the social fabric of the neighbourhood as well as on its physical environment, enjoy special attention throughout this research. Improvement of these factors namely is an important aim of urban restructuring policies. Indeed, state-led urban restructuring is sometimes described as “*an attempt to facilitate the social management of disadvantaged neighbourhoods*” (Uitermark, 2003, p.531), while simultaneously being highly “*necessary from a purely physical point of view*” (Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002, p.251).

Dutch urban restructuring policy is no different in this respect, as it aims to improve the living experiences of residents in the realm of three factors, namely: the physical living environment, including buildings, services and amenities, which in this research is dubbed *neighbourhood quality*; the social environment, including residents and their interactions, which in this research is dubbed *social cohesion*; and nuisances such as crime, pollution and safety issues, which in this research is dubbed *liveability* (VROM, 2004, p.14-15).

As such, this trio of factors will be the subject of a more thorough analysis. At the same time, they will be related to their possible position within governmental policies on urban restructuring. It should be noted that in the methodological

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief overview of *New Urbanism*, see Talen (1999).

<sup>6</sup> According to Wacquant (2008), when non-residents have a negative image of a certain neighbourhood, it can have grave consequences for the chances and opportunities of the residents of that particular neighbourhood through a process that was baptized *stigmatization*.

<sup>7</sup> However, it can be argued that an improving neighbourhood image, especially when it concerns artist-led cultural production, will eventually increase the influx of middle-class residents as well, resulting in a further displacement of the working-class (Ley, 2003).

chapter (IV) an explanation will be given of the manner in which the terms have been operationalised, in order to extract the respondents' experiences with these effects from the interviews more easily. However, before starting this more thorough analysis of factors, it is important to indicate why they have been selected.

#### 2.4.1 *Social cohesion*

Social cohesion is often regarded as 'the glue that keeps the members of a social system together' (Dekker & Bolt, 2005, p.2448). A single neighbourhood is one example of such a social system, while society as a whole is another. Within the last decade the amount of research on social cohesion that has been done has greatly increased, however, the term remains hard to define (Dekker, 2006). In terms of urban restructuring, the Dutch ministry that carries the responsibility for the projects has a hard time defining it as well. Several policy documents do indeed mention social cohesion as an important aspect of their neighbourhood policies; however, fail to define the term (i.e. VROM, 2002).

In their review of the available literature, Kearns and Forrest (2000) identify five dimensions that contribute to a characterisation of social cohesion (text box 2.2). These five dimensions are usually considered interconnected or reinforcing, although not all of them are interchangeable (Atkinson & Kintrea, 2002; Dekker & Bolt, 2005; Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009). What this means is that "*social cohesion cannot be defined as a single concept*" (*idem*, p.458), but rather as a "*domain of causally interrelated phenomena or a class of causal models*" (Friedkin, 2005, p.409).

For instance, residents with common values are more likely to engage in social networks and are thus more likely to invest in a neighbourhood's social capital, while their sense of belonging is perhaps enhanced along the way. On the other hand, a strong sense of attachment to the neighbourhood, perhaps because of school-going children, is likely to enhance social networks and local investments. All these dimensions and their domains (see Forrest & Kearns, 2001) are thus characterised by their ability to reinforce one and another. When looking at text box 2.2 below, it is not very difficult to imagine how each of the dimensions attributes to the enhanced involvement of a resident with his/her fellow residents and with the neighbourhood in general, exposing the adhesive qualities of social cohesion.

**Text box 2.2** The five dimensions of social cohesion

*Common values and civic culture*

*Social order and social control*

*Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities*

*Social networks and social capital*

*Territorial belonging and identity*

*Source: Kearns & Forrest, 2000, p.996.*

What is rather relevant for this research is that it is the aim of many government policies concerned with the urban restructuring of neighbourhoods that predominantly consist of dwellings belonging to the social rented sector –especially those implemented by the welfare states of Western Europe– to increase the level of social cohesion while simultaneously decreasing the level of social pola-

risation through residential mixing (Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Uitermark, 2003; Galster, 2007; Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002; Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009).

Residential mixing includes not only ethnic and tenure mixing to tackle segregation, it also attempts to limit residential turnover and thus increase mixing based on family, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics (Kleinhans *et al.*, 2007; Livingstone *et al.*, 2010). By upgrading both the social fabric and the physical environment of a working-class neighbourhood, governments aim to increase i.e. the residents' sense of community, their willingness to invest in the area, and the frequency and intensity of neighbourly contact, all of which theoretically reinforce the level of social cohesion (Kearns & Forrest, 2000).

Nevertheless, as a government attempts to increase the level of social cohesion within a certain area, it simultaneously proves an important catalyst of gentrification practices. This relationship is further elaborated upon on pages 21-26, when the suitability of Ondiep as a research site is discussed. However, a brief example of the possible effects that are referred to is deemed appropriate.

As part of an extensive Canadian research project on the metropolitan areas of Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver, Walks and Maaranen (2006) concluded that practices of gentrification –whether they are intended or not– increase existing social and income polarisation, a trend that is difficult to consider positive to the level of social cohesion within that area according to the dimensions, especially the one that includes 'social solidarity', shown in text box 2.2. In addition, in an assessment of the entire project's findings it is concluded that residents do not feel more united nor do they experience a greater sense of territorial belonging as a result of their neighbourhood having been gentrified (CURA, 2006).

#### 2.4.2 Liveability

Just as social cohesion, liveability is a term that is very dear to policy-makers and lobbyists (Clayden *et al.*, 2006). In fact, the improvement of neighbourhood liveability is one of the most important aims of the extensive '*40 neighbourhoods project*' in The Netherlands (VROM, 2007). The Dutch government admits that it again is a broad term, as it is subjective to personal opinions, however, it does link the term to an "*accumulation of social problems in neighbourhoods*" and uses it to "*point out the areas in which the quality of the living environment is below standards*" (VROM, 2004, p.13).

At the beginning of section 2.4 it has been mentioned that the term liveability is linked to resident perceptions of nuisances such as crime, pollution and safety issues. Also, traffic nuisance and safety, as well as noise pollution and levels of satisfaction with both dwelling and neighbourhood were recognized as contributable to the perceptions of liveability by the Dutch government (VROM, 2004). In their research on the improvement of liveability in the UK, Clayden *et al.* (2006) put a similar set of indicators to the test, including the perceptions of fear of crime, perceptions of road safety and resident satisfaction with their immediate surroundings (2006, p.58).

In their reflection on the current Dutch neighbourhood policy, Van Gent *et al.* (2009) identify a number of indicators that help establish resident perceptions of liveability in a certain neighbourhood. These are listed below in text box 2.3.

**Text box 2.3** Liveability indicators

Noise nuisance	Pollution
Traffic nuisance	Traffic safety
Vandalism	Social nuisance
Insecurity	Dwelling dissatisfaction
Environment dissatisfaction	

Source: Van Gent *et al.*, 2009, p.361.

As can be derived from these indicators, liveability primarily concerns the (experienced) presence of phenomena considered threatening or discomforting to the health, safety and satisfaction of the residents of a neighbourhood, or –to speak with the words of the Dutch government– “*sources of disturbance*” (VROM, 2004, p.14). Naturally, the lower the instances of vandalism, crime, noise, air and environmental pollution, feelings of insecurity and the greater the satisfaction with the dwelling, public (green) spaces and the physical environment, the higher the liveability of a particular neighbourhood (Clayden *et al.*, 2006).

Through a variety of means, including the creation of safer public spaces, increasing and improving public green spaces, tackling social problems, residential mixing, reducing out-migration, and improving the economic quality of a neighbourhood, the municipal and the national governments aim to create a more liveable place of residence. As previously mentioned, a low level of liveability is often linked to a concentration of marginalised residents (Wilson, 1987; VROM, 2007; Rijksoverheid 2011a). That is why governments aim to ameliorate social and residential mixing through large-scale redevelopment projects in neighbourhoods that are infamous for their social problems (Kleinhans *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, “*gentrification is often promoted to the public as a process that stimulates social mixing and diversification of the neighbourhood population, which creates more liveable communities*” (Nedučín *et al.*, 2009, p.67). However, by doing this, governments take the risk that their urban restructuring projects result in gentrifying practices, as liveability issues no longer ‘deter’ non-working class residents.

However, it is not just the social environment of the neighbourhood that needs improvement to support the liveability. The physical upgrading of residences, public spaces and public parks, to enhance resident satisfaction, often is a part of an urban restructuring project as well, as was the case in the Sheffield example of Clayden *et al.* (2006), where street lay-outs were changed in order to support low-velocity traffic –including pedestrianism– to increase feelings of safety and the likelihood of sociability (Du Toit *et al.*, 2007). In this latter aspect, liveability is closely aligned with neighbourhood quality as it is used within this research.

To come back to the Canadian research example, a number of respondents have indicated that, while they experience a *not-for-us* feeling regarding a certain new cultural air as well as new amenities –these changes thus being counteractive to the level of social cohesion– their neighbourhood’s upgrading does indeed have a positive effect on their perceptions of safety and nuisances (CURA, 2006).

### 2.4.3 Neighbourhood quality

To a certain extent, as has been mentioned a number of times prior, the physical state of a neighbourhood is an important benchmark for governments to decide whether or not that neighbourhood should receive special attention in terms of a project of urban restructuring. Often physical degradation is expected to produce social degradation in a similar fashion. Indeed, supporters of *New Urbanism* argue that the physical condition of a neighbourhood can greatly determine the social outcome and characteristics of its residents (Talen, 1999; Jabareen, 2006). Furthermore, many academics have devoted their time and research to the effect neighbourhood socioeconomic characteristics can have on its residents, and in particular its youth (see i.e. Furstenberg *et al.*, 1999; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Kohen *et al.*, 2008).

On many occasions, structurally disadvantaged neighbourhoods turn out to have either a direct or an indirect negative effect on the social outcomes of youths and adolescents (*ibid.*; Rankin & Quane, 2002). Therefore, governments are not at all unlikely to tackle physical degradation as a pre-emptive measure to combat expected social problems. A rise of physical quality naturally involves great costs and it is thus equally unlikely that rent rates will not increase during the process. Even a change of tenure from rental to owner-occupied is very likely to happen in these occasions, as can be seen in the particular case of Ondiep (see p.25). Therefore, an improvement of neighbourhood quality is not unlikely to involve practices of gentrification.

The aforementioned works all focus on so-called neighbourhood effects and their eventual consequences regarding high-school dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, behavioural problems, et cetera. While Flouri & Ekery-Stevens (2008) attempt to find a causal relationship between neighbourhood quality and the school-leaving age, they also indicate which factors are involved with the physical quality of the neighbourhood, as can be seen hereunder in text box 2.4. The Dutch government maintains a similar view, as its policy documents on neighbourhood perceptions present 'the physical environment and the condition of amenities and services' as one of three factors upon which 'resident judgment' is based (VROM, 2004).

**Text box 2.4** Indicators of neighbourhood quality

Relative positioning of dwellings  
Physical condition of the dwellings  
Occupation-level of the dwellings  
Availability of basic amenities

Source: Flouri & Ereky-Stevens (2008), p.207.

Of the factors mentioned in text box 2.4, two require further elaboration. First, the relative positioning of dwellings refers to the density of dwellings in the neighbourhood and thus the distances between them. According to Flouri & Ereky-Stevens (2008), the closer the dwellings are to each other, the lower the neighbourhood quality. Naturally, this is not a universal fact. For instance, European medieval city centres often are densely built, but are not of low quality. However, the assumption suffices when one compares residential neighbourhoods. Second, the level of occupation of dwellings refers to the average number of occupants that each of the dwellings has. Usually, the higher the level of occupation, the lower the quality of the neighbourhood (*idem*).

As has yet been introduced in the previous section on liveability, the physical condition of public spaces, public green and amenities in the neighbourhood can have an effect on, for instance, the feelings of safety of the residents and thus on their perception of the neighbourhood's liveability. Again the aforementioned Canadian research project provides an example as residents of Toronto have specifically indicated that good-quality public green zones in their neighbourhood serve as modern-day *agoras*; the settings of their social lives (CURA, 2006). However, prior to this effect, the actual upgrading of the physical environment usually is part of projects of urban restructuring and with it possibly a catalyst of gentrifying processes (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). A resident's assessment of neighbourhood quality therefore differs from what is described in the liveability section in the way that it involves the perception of the upgrading of the physical quality by the residents of the neighbourhood in which it occurs and not the effect it has on their perception of safety.

Within this research the factors that have been presented throughout this paragraph will each be the subject of analysis in one of the sub research questions. It will be analysed what the effect of gentrification is on the level of social cohesion, on liveability and on neighbourhood quality, according to the experiences of the residents of social rented dwellings in a gentrifying neighbourhood. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish in which way these factors need to be interpreted throughout this research.

In short, the level of *social cohesion* refers to its 'adhesive' qualities, so there will be a focus on the perceived sense of community, civic culture, social networks, territorial belonging, common values, social order, *et cetera*. *Liveability* refers to the residents' perception of threats and nuisances, regarding among other things safety, pollution and the dwelling and neighbourhood types. The factor *neighbourhood quality* will predominantly focus on the physical quality of the neighbourhood, as it will consist of residents' perceptions of the quality, availability and accessibility of the built environment, public spaces, public green and services and amenities.

Without subscribing all the different dimensions to a certain overarching factor –i.e. *social cohesion*– Parkes, Kearns and Atkinson (2002) have acknowledged their relevance to the residents' level of neighbourhood satisfaction. However, in this research the analysis of neighbourhood satisfaction involves a recent change in the neighbourhood's appearance and characteristics as a result of processes of gentrification. In the next chapter an elaboration of the reasons behind the chosen interpretations of the aforementioned dimensions, regarding their specific relevance towards Ondiep as a research site, will be presented.

### 2.5 Resident experiences with gentrification

As was already seen in each of the three previous sections, in which a variable or factor was introduced, and as it is the aim of this research to find out in what way, the residents of gentrifying areas are the ones who experience the effects of the processes both at a personal and at a neighbourhood level. The results of the CURA research project indicate that the residents commonly have a mixed set of experiences with the effects of gentrification –which, as we have seen and we will continue to see, includes large-scale state-led urban restructuring projects,

too– on a variety of social and physical indicators (CURA, 2006). The effects in the great Canadian cities have been perceived as positive in some ways and as negative in others.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the article of Doucet (2009) on Leith, in the Scottish city of Edinburgh, where residents i.e. indicated that they appreciate shops that are complementary to the existing range of shops being drawn into their neighbourhood, as a result of its gentrification, however, simultaneously displaying their displeasure with the fact that only a few of these shops were readily accessible –in a number of ways– for people of their level of income.

Even though the overall impression that is raised through quantitative analysis of resident opinions on the effects of gentrification in two Portland (USA) neighbourhoods is leaning towards the positive side, Sullivan (2007) indicates that within his group of respondents there are significant differences between the attitudes towards the experienced changes based on the respondent's form of tenure and a combination of a long period of residence and African American ethnicity. The groups that feel less well represented within the project aims or less capable of reaping the (financial) benefits of the plans actually speak of more negative experiences with the effects of gentrification.

These findings give reason to assume that the residents' perception of the effects of gentrifying practices or projects that show characteristics of gentrification are indeed more nuanced than had always been expected. Based on the majority of previously published material (see also p.12-14), one was led to believe that residents usually take a very definite position towards the effects of gentrification in their neighbourhood, because these studies often did not focus on resident experiences. However, recent studies have shown the importance of doing so, in understanding the actual perceived effects of gentrifying practices.

Because of what is known from the aforementioned studies, it is expected that the general perception of the effects of large-scale, state-led urban restructuring projects among residents of the social rented sector is similar to the perceptions that were described earlier on in this section. The resident experiences might not lean towards extremes –neither negative nor positive– but rather towards the centre of the scale. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the effects of the gentrifying practices on the level of social cohesion in particular will tend to be perceived more negatively in general, as the large scale of urban restructuring projects might harbour the power to disrupt entire communities. Regarding the other two main variables within this research, liveability and neighbourhood quality, it is expected that the residents can easier identify the positive effects a restructuring project has. An upgrade of the appearance and physical quality of the neighbourhood, as well as the efforts to relieve social problems are effects that perhaps are both easier to witness and harder to deny as being positive. The residents might therefore have more positive perceptions towards these effects, although it would not be surprising if the changes are not considered to be aimed at or accessible for the residents of the social rented sector.

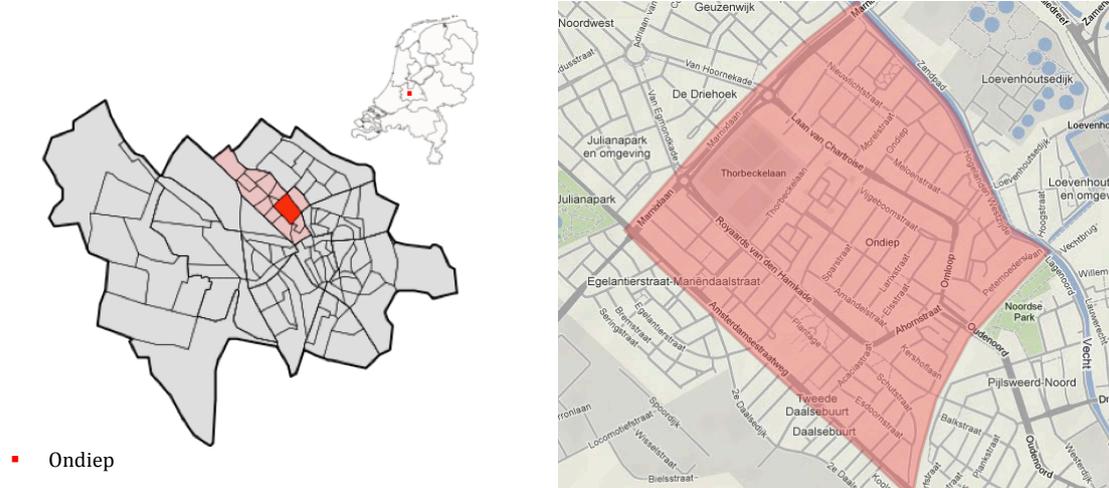
### III THE RESEARCH SITE: ONDIEP, UTRECHT

#### 3.1 An introduction to Ondiep

Ondiep is a neighbourhood located in the northwest of Utrecht, The Netherlands near the city centre (figure 1) It comprises of the area between the Marnixlaan in the northwest, the river Vecht in the northeast, the railway that connects Utrecht and Amersfoort in the southeast and the Amsterdamsestraatweg in the southwest (figure 2). The neighbourhood owes its name to its location on the banks of the river Vecht, where in earlier times a bend in the river had begun to silt. This site was called *Ondiep*, the Dutch word for *shallow*.

At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the planned construction of dwellings that would house the workers of the industrial plants at the nearby Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal commenced in the area. Throughout the following decades a total of around 4,000 houses was built. As Ondiep was initially planned to house the urban working-class, it is hardly surprising that the social rented sector takes up a relatively large amount of the total housing stock. In 2005, almost 78 percent of the dwellings belongs to the social rented sector, which stands in stark contrast to the 46 percent mean in Utrecht. Other features, such as density, building materials, its focus on residential use and the relative absence of public green, further accentuate its working-class character. (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007; 2011a; WistUdata, 2011)

**Figures 1 and 2** Ondiep in Utrecht, The Netherlands



Sources: CBS, Topografische Dienst Kadaster (2008); Google Maps (2011), edited by author.

It is not merely the aforementioned physical features that characterize Ondiep as a working-class neighbourhood. On the municipal website, Ondiep is described as a “*genuine people’s neighbourhood*,” housing the “*born and raised Utrechter*,” who likes to “*sit out on the pavement and enjoy a beer during hot summer days*” (Gemeente Utrecht, 2011a). Indeed, neighbourhood statistics show that the majority of Ondiep’s residents (68,7 percent) is of Dutch origin, while the available socio-economic characteristics give reason to typify it as a lower-income neighbourhood, with unemployment and beneficiary rates almost twice that of the city’s mean (see table 2).

**Table 2** Socio-economic characteristics of Ondiep and Utrecht

	Native Dutch (%)	Social security beneficiaries (%)			Unemployment (%)
		Unemployment <sup>8</sup>	Welfare <sup>9</sup>	Disability <sup>10</sup>	
Ondiep	68,7	2,3	7,8	11,1	7,0
Utrecht	68,3	2,0	3,5	5,8	4,2

Source: *WistUdata (2011)*.

It was mentioned before (p.21) that, according to the Municipality of Utrecht, typical residents of Ondiep like to make use of the public space surrounding their dwellings by bringing forth certain private social activities, in this case enjoying a beer, outside. This rudimentary example immediately provides an interesting dialectical interplay, where both the advantages and the disadvantages of the same event are easily identified.

On the one hand, enjoying the sun out on the pavement increases the likelihood of neighbourly contact and could thus increase social cohesion. However, on the other hand it also exhibits a certain social disorder<sup>11</sup>, which in its turn could lead to aggravation among neighbours. The Municipality of Utrecht in their *Wijkvisie Ondiep* (neighbourhood vision) recognizes both the high level of social cohesion and the (potential for) social problems in Ondiep (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007).

Even though a concentration of friends and relatives, as well as numerous activities that reinforce social cohesion are present in the neighbourhood, it is perhaps most known for its civil unrest, occasionally culminating in riots (NOS, 2007a; 2007b; 2010; de Volkskrant, 2007), and its extensive social problems, including unemployment, high rates of school drop-out and truancy, alcohol and drug addiction, financial and health problems, parenting problems, and instances of neglect and abuse (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007). It is believed that the residents' negative experiences with the authorities in Utrecht as well as the poor physical appearance of the neighbourhood might induce further social deprivation (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Ondiep has been recognized by the Dutch national government as the fifth worst neighbourhood in the country, based on its performance on factors such as health, income, unemployment, education, crime, safety and physical quality of the dwellings and public spaces (Rijksoverheid, 2011b).

### 3.2 *Ondiep and urban restructuring*

Although the situation did not escalate in mass riots until 2007, resulting even in the loss of a life (NOS, 2007a), there had been a general awareness of the state of deprivation Ondiep was in. In 2005, after years of planning, the Municipality of Utrecht started an extensive urban regeneration project in Ondiep, in cooperation with the Mitros housing association, Portes –an institution concerned with the social wellbeing of neighbourhoods– and the Province of Utrecht (Gemeente

<sup>8</sup> Dutch: WW (Werkloosheidswet); benefits those unemployed through no fault of their own.

<sup>9</sup> Dutch: ABW (Algemene bijstandswet); benefits those without any other form of income.

<sup>10</sup> Dutch: WAO (Wet op de arbeidsongeschiktheidsverzekering); benefits those who lack the physical or mental ability to participate in the labour market.

<sup>11</sup> Although disorder might just be a normative assumption based on a collective perception of what is (dis)order (Sampson, 2009) and could therefore just as easily not be perceived as such by the residents of a specific location, in this case Ondiep.

**Figures 3 and 4** The process of urban regeneration at work in Ondiep



*Source: photographs taken by Margreet Meijering (2010).*

**Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8** A panoramic view showing the different phases of urban restructuring



**West**

**South**



**East**

**North**



*Source: photographs taken by author (2011).*

Utrecht, 2011a). Although in 2004 a liveability project had been set up, this did not involve any physical restructuring of the neighbourhood. A project that aimed for the improvement of the physical quality of Ondiep thus commenced in 2005 and was due 2015. However, at the time of writing (2011) it is already well behind schedule. Nevertheless, as the principal method that is used to ultimately achieve the regeneration of Ondiep is demolition, proof of the process at work is not far to be sought nor is it hard to find (figures 3 and 4). Also, since the entire project is executed in phases, it is even possible to see four different phases at a single junction (see figures 5 to 8, junction *Ondiep–Laan van Chartroise*).

The regeneration of Ondiep involves several different projects with various foci. Corresponding to Dutch standard restructuring procedures (Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002; Uitermark, 2003), the joint venture between the government and the housing association focuses on upgrading the physical appearance of the neighbourhood. It thus aims to improve the quality of housing, infrastructure and public spaces, as well as the diversity of the housing stock in terms of tenure and dwelling type (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007). The aims are also part of the *Nieuw Wonen* (New Living) project by the Province of Utrecht, with which it hopes to combat residential turnover as a result of a change in household characteristics, by making Ondiep *life course sustaining*<sup>12</sup> and thus enhancing neighbourhood safety, security, involvement and eventually the quality of social organization (NICIS, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is also stated in the *Wijkvisie* that Ondiep's social problems are not merely tackled from a deterministic approach –the authorities thus not fully committed to the idea of *New Urbanism* (Talen, 1999; Jabareen, 2006)– since another important 'pillar' of the project aims at improving the quantity and quality of services and neighbourhood facilities that help contribute to a higher degree of education, a sense of community and the possibility for activities (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007).

Furthermore, special attention is paid to the improvement of the quality, availability and accessibility of public green and parks. The *grOeNDIEP* project, a play-on-words combining the name of the neighbourhood with the Dutch word for 'green' (*groen*), was set up to ensure the enduring liveability of public green spaces in Ondiep (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007; 2008; 2011a; 2011b). Also, there will be a small part that is concerned with the viability, quality and accessibility of the neighbourhood's amenities at the shopping areas of the *Plantage* and the *Amsterdamsestraatweg* (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007).

All of the urban regeneration projects that are currently undertaken in Ondiep have numerous interesting spatial and social consequences, of which a certain few are particularly interesting for this research. These are listed below and have all been taken directly from the *Wijkvisie* (*ibid.*).

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<sup>12</sup> Dutch: levensloopbestendige wijk.

- The share of the housing stock that is appointed to the social rented sector is diminished from 78 percent to 41 percent.
- Of the total of 2077 dwellings, only 48 are left untouched, while the rest will either be torn down (1168) and rebuilt (1300) or will be renovated (575).
- The new urban design of Ondiep should resemble a *town* rather than a *city* and therefore increase social cohesion and social organization.
- The *grOeNDIEP* project aims to increase the liveability of and the level of social cohesion within the neighbourhood.
- The *Nieuw Leven* project aims to create a sustainable neighbourhood for every stage in a life course, increasing the liveability and quality of Ondiep.

### 3.3 *Ondiep and gentrification*

Now what makes Ondiep a suitable subject for a research that has gentrification as its theme? In several ways it does not fit in with the original definition, as was coined by Ruth Glass in 1964 (see p.11). Indeed, the developments in Ondiep do not involve an invasion of the middle-class per se, as it is possible, in theory, for pre-2005 residents of the neighbourhood to return after the urban regeneration project has finished. In fact, the development phase is divided into three parts, of which the first is entirely devoted to the renovation and reconstruction of social rented dwellings (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007). Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons why the neighbourhood can be linked to the theme of gentrification and these will be elaborated upon in the rest of this section.

As Davidson & Lees state in their case in favour of the identification of new-build developments on the shores of the river Thames in London (UK) as a form of gentrification, "*gentrification is an active urban process that has changed over time*" and therefore "*we cannot and should not stick to outdated definitions of it*" (2005, p.1187). In modern times, the process often does not involve direct displacement of residents and culture, but is, however, still typified by four core elements. These four core elements are i) the reinvestment of capital; ii) social upgrading of the locale by incoming higher-income groups; iii) change in the physical appearance of the neighbourhood; and iv) direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups (*ibid.*). All four core elements can be witnessed throughout the project of urban regeneration in Ondiep, as the decrease of the share of social rented dwellings from 82 to 41 percent of the total housing stock creates very fertile ground for the assumption that there will in fact be displacement among the residents as well as a social upgrading of the locale. In addition, a changing physical appearance as a result of an enormous reinvestment of capital is not hard to perceive.

This leads us to a further change in *and* false assumption towards the character of modern-day gentrification. Throughout its existence, state involvement in the process has altered, from a direct, managerial approach in more socialist times (1960s-1973), to a more indirect, entrepreneurial approach in contemporary neo-liberal society (1980s-today) (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). Nowadays, gentrification or urban regeneration projects are often of a large scale and are typically led by the state in a state-led joint venture. With the involvement of the state in the process, there is now a possibility –even an opportunity– for dwellings in the social rented sector to become a subject of gentrification (Uitermark, 2003).

Especially in The Netherlands, a country with a relatively large stock of social rented dwellings, it is not unlikely that an entrepreneurial approach of the government regarding urban restructuring will –deliberately– turn out to have effects that are gentrifying by nature (see Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2007, on Hoogvliet; de Volkskrant, 2011, on Beverwijk; NOS, 2011a, on Rotterdam). In fact, Dutch policy even aims to increase both the number and the percentage of owner-occupied dwellings in a social rented area that is up for restructuring through renovation and demolition (Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002; Uitermark, 2003). This process is similar to that currently underway in Ondiep, where an upgrade is achieved through renovation and demolition, while the Municipality of Utrecht has literally stated that there is *no* solid guarantee that every resident will be able to return to Ondiep after the project is finished (Gemeente Utrecht, 2007, p.28). This definitely shows the project’s gentrifying potential.

To conclude this chapter and to answer the question that was asked at the beginning of this section (p.25); Ondiep is a very suitable site for this research since the state-led urban regeneration project that is currently being executed in the neighbourhood shows characteristics of modern-day gentrification, it involves a considerable number of social rented dwellings and has specific foci on the level of social cohesion, liveability and the quality of the neighbourhood. Hence, it has all of the necessary components to help this thesis to reach its aims (see the checklist in table 3).

**Table 3** Checklist for the suitability of Ondiep as a research site for this thesis

<b>Focal point</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<i>Gentrification</i>	✓		Modern-day gentrification in the form of large-scale, state-led urban restructuring. The share of social rented housing is brought back from 78 to 41 percent, monthly rent increase (€50). No solid guarantee for return of original residents.
Attention going out to <i>Social Cohesion</i>	✓		High levels of pre-restructuring social cohesion, plans aim for increased sense of identity, responsibility and cohesion through residential mixing and town planning design. Large influx of immigrants of a higher class and with a higher level of income as a result.
Attention going out to <i>Liveability</i>	✓		Pre-restructuring: government proclaimed it fifth worst neighbourhood in The Netherlands according to certain social standards. Project <i>Nieuwleven</i> aims at improving life cycle opportunities, social problems (including threats and nuisances) combated through residential mixing policy.
Attention going out to <i>Neighbourhood Quality</i>	✓		Pre-restructuring housing dating back to 1924, quality improvement through demolition and renovation, Project <i>grOeNDIEP</i> aims at improving public green.

## IV METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter the reasons as for why Ondiep was selected as a suitable site for this research have already been elaborated upon. Therefore, this chapter will merely present an explanation for and a description of the methods used to allow the research to come to a conclusion.

Since this research aims to explore the reflections of the residents of social rented housing in gentrifying areas on the process of gentrification, it is considered absolutely vital to approach respondents through the use of qualitative methods (Baarda & De Goede, 2006; Bryman, 2008). In-depth, semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to find out *why* the interviewee experiences or feels *what* he/she does, a quality of this method that reaches well beyond the scope of the structured survey of the quantitative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using interviews will thus make it easier to understand and assess the complex and complicated nature of the respondent's experiences with the process of gentrification, as it leaves ample room for specific an explanation by each of the respondents. As such, the researcher is allowed to reach to a deeper understanding of the motivations behind their statements.

In order to do so, fieldwork was conducted over a four-week period in the month of April 2011. During this period 22 residents, out of a total of 52 that had been approached, were interviewed, resulting in a response rate of 42.3 percent. For the standards of qualitative analysis, this is a very reasonable percentage and it provides a certain degree of credibility and relevance to this research, as it allows for an –albeit very cautious– opportunity to reach a legitimate conclusion about the experiences that residents of the social rented sector have with the large-scale, state-led urban restructuring project that was implemented in their neighbourhood. Nevertheless, without describing how the aforementioned figures and results were obtained, this research will lose any credibility and/or validity that it might enjoy. It is thus important to recognize the process that preceded the interviews, in other words, how the interviewees were 'selected'.

After the initial process of selecting a suitable research site, it was time to find suitable respondents. As 'the residents of the social rented sector' had been appointed as the research's subjects, it was necessary to sieve the dwellings in Ondiep and find out which belonged to the social rented sector. Both Mitros housing corporation and the Municipality of Utrecht were willing to cooperate in this, however, could only do so with certain limitations. As Dutch Privacy Law prohibited both institutions to provide the author with a list of addresses where there would be rental housing, a solution was found in the provision of a map of the neighbourhood that indicated the different forms of tenure using colours.

This map, however, dated back several years and showed the situation as it was *before* the state-led restructuring was initiated. As the aim of this research was to analyse the experiences of residents of the social rented sector who have 'lived through' the process and who would therefore be better able to indicate the effects it has had on their lives and the neighbourhood, it was necessary to find out in what parts of Ondiep the form of tenure remained unaltered by the urban restructuring project. Here, the plans of the project offered a solution, as several

maps of Ondiep in it show the eventual form of tenure throughout its different phases. By drawing a comparison between the *before* and the *after* maps, it was possible for the author to locate those parts of Ondiep where the form of tenure would remain unchanged<sup>13</sup>. Exactly there is where the author spent many a morning, afternoon and evening approaching and interviewing respondents. Although the author is aware of the absence of randomness in this selection, it should be noted that both laws on privacy and a limited amount of available time constrained further elaboration of the selection procedure<sup>14</sup>.

Narrowing down the research site to specific areas where it is possible to find residents who not only live in the social rented sector at the time of interviewing, but had also been living there prior to that moment is only one part of the actual 'selection' of respondents. Once arriving on scene, respondents still needed to be approached. After announcing the period of data collection in the neighbourhood by means of 200 pamphlets, respondents were approached personally by ringing the doorbell on every third door, a method that provides randomness to this part of the selection procedure. If a resident met the pre-set criterion of 'living in the social rented sector in Ondiep (long) before the restructuring projects were implemented<sup>15</sup>', they were asked if they would like to participate as a subject of this research. As mentioned before, 22 out of 52 (42 percent) agreed to do so.

Within that response group, there was a slight overrepresentation of women (16 out of 22), which was the result perhaps of most women in the neighbourhood fulfilling the traditional role of housewife and who therefore were more often available to be interviewed. Additionally, even when the men were initially addressed after opening the door, they often stated that their wives were 'in charge of household matters' and were thus more eligible to be interviewed.

The ethnicity ratio was slightly skewed too, with native Dutch making up almost 85 percent of the response group. According to the neighbourhood statistics, this percentage is around 68 percent in reality. The difference is purely coincidental; out of the four randomly approached non-Dutch, only one declined cooperation. Similarly coincidental seems the relatively high average age (61) of the response group, although younger generations (naturally) are less likely to have lived in the neighbourhood for more than 9 years, as well as seemingly less eager to partake in an interview. As a result, the average number of years that the response group had lived in the neighbourhood exceeded 28 years.

Regarding household composition, the response group showed a 50/50 division between single-person households, commonly involving widows or widowers, and multi-person households, often involving both parents and at least one child. A small number of the respondents had followed a form of secondary education,

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<sup>13</sup> However, to respect the privacy of the respondents, the author has chosen not to incorporate the layered street-tenure map of Ondiep within this research.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, it will contribute to our knowledge of resident experiences to incorporate also those residents that have been able to take the step and move out of their social rented housing into an owner-occupied dwelling in the same neighbourhood, however, this reaches beyond the scope of this particular research and might be advised as a subject for future research.

<sup>15</sup> Meaning that the resident had to have lived in Ondiep at least since the year 2002. This year was chosen rather arbitrarily, preceding the project's actual initiation by five years.

resulting in an (expected) overall low level of education and subsequently a low level of income, usually somewhere around €1200 per month.

Most often within the comfort of their own homes, the respondents were asked questions about their experiences with the restructuring projects concerning a number of focal points. These have been described in Chapter II, however due to their often rather theoretical terminology, Appendix A shows a number of more practical terms that have been used during the actual interviews. This was done in order to create more accessible questions and enhance the conversation, since a term like 'social cohesion' would presumably mean quite little to the average resident.

The interviews usually lasted around 30-40 minutes, during which the respondent was given the opportunity to speak freely about his/her experiences, albeit guided along the focal points by the interviewer. Much to the author's surprise, the respondents turned out to be very open towards being the subject of research. Those who did not want to participate seemed to do so because of either a fear of letting a strange man into their homes (i.e. widows), a disinterest in academic research in general (i.e. young, working people) or a complete lack of faith in yet another interview about their opinions (i.e. residents opposed to the urban restructuring project). Nevertheless, those who did participate were very much capable of putting their experiences to words too, which provided a flood of information that seemed to reach the point of data saturation quite early in the process.

Using semi-structured interviews among the respondents at the research site has helped the author to obtain a rather clear image of what the experiences of residents of the social rented sector with urban restructuring projects are. However, it should again be noted that, even though certain procedures were undertaken to enhance the randomness of selection within the target group, it has not been the aim of this research to provide results with equal abilities to generalise as would those of quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of the underlying thoughts and motives of the target group towards the more general image –that they themselves sketch– certainly belongs within the range of qualities of this research. Exactly what this deeper understanding is comprised of will become clearer in the next chapter.



## V DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter the data that was obtained through the use of semi-structured interviews will be presented. A division will be made based on the three overarching variables that were described in Chapter II, namely: social cohesion, liveability and neighbourhood quality. However, before presenting the data, an important observation, which was made during the fieldwork period and which is vital to increase the understanding of the data, needs to be discussed.

During fieldwork it became clear that the restructuring of Ondiep differs slightly from what one might expect from an attempt to upgrade both the physical and the social character of a neighbourhood [Dutch: *wijk*]. Especially concerning its various social factors, the influence of the urban restructuring project and the way the residents experience it, is greatly subjected to the scale upon which its evaluation is based. As Ondiep consists of several 'sub neighbourhoods' [Dutch: *buurten*], each with their own sense of community and identity, most residents review their experiences from this sub-neighbourhood perspective. Intra-neighbourhood comparisons were thus not only easily made; they were also made in abundance. This research was therefore provided with a scope that is different from what was expected beforehand by the author, although it does prove that the hunch that Van Kempen and Priemus (2002, p.247) had was right all along. However, it fortunately did not cause the research to encounter any problems as a result, since the data is not considered less reliable.

What remains to be said is that in every interview extract that is included within this chapter, the words of the interviewer are presented in a grey colour, while the words of the respondent are presented in *italic*.

### 5.1 Social cohesion

Since social cohesion was defined as the glue that keeps a community together, it primarily refers to the interaction between residents and their commonalities. It is not unimaginable that a large-scale urban restructuring project results in a change if it comes to social cohesion and the entire social character of a neighbourhood. In fact, many academics recognize this as one of the more negative consequences of neighbourhood upgrading and gentrification. This paragraph will go into the resident experiences regarding this matter, whether it includes a noticeable change or not.

#### 5.1.1 Common values and civic culture

The majority of the respondents stated that they had indeed witnessed a change in the neighbourhood, especially in a demographic sense. Along with a change in demographics went a change in areas such as common values and civic culture. However, this change did not present itself in their own *buurt* as it did in the newly built areas. Still, its welcome was not very warm, since an alternated demographic composition in any of the *buurten* was subsequently experienced to lead to a different social character in the entire neighbourhood too, as a 62-year-old single father who had been living in the neighbourhood for 32 years illustrates in the following extract.

*“Ondiep should be for the Ondiepers, so why would you build 86 owner-occupied and 18 social rented dwellings? (...) These [the Ondiepers] are all people who eat meat, potatoes and vegetables<sup>16</sup> and who hover between jobs.”* (Interview 4)

The previous quote implies that the people of Ondiep consider themselves to be blue-collar workers, something that the statistics have shown as well (see p.22). As a result they do not often find themselves in the financial position to buy a newly built owner-occupied dwelling. Nevertheless, the tenure ratio is shifting, resulting in an increased influx of non-Ondiepers into Ondiep, in particular into the new-build developments. This turned out to be very relevant for the manner in which the original residents experience the quality of social cohesion in their neighbourhood.

Virtually all respondents stated that the incoming group of residents, who have moved into the owner-occupied dwellings<sup>17</sup>, are rather different from the typical Ondieper. For instance, it was said that, due to mortgage obligations, the new residents were more prone to work and were therefore less involved in the neighbourhood on a social level. This resulted in a very limited degree of contact between the original and the new group of residents. Often even, the inhabitants of the social rented areas admitted that they chose to evade the owner-occupied areas, because they did not feel any sort of connection with the inhabitants of those areas. The newcomers were regarded as strangers and as being too posh, too sophisticated and too young for Ondiep.

### *5.1.2 Social networks, capital, order and control*

According to many of the respondents, Ondiep definitely fit the description that was provided by the municipality (see p.21), as pre-restructuring levels of social cohesion and control were experienced as very high. One could always expect a friendly neighbour to assist with the installation of a new television set or the relocation of a cupboard, while neighbourhood car-owners would step in to give non-owners a lift to the hospital for their monthly check-up, according to a 79-year-old widow who had lived there for 32 years. A 72-year-old resident for 46 years added that sugar and milk always was available elsewhere, when one had accidentally run out of either one. Furthermore, social activities took place outdoors where residents would engage in them collectively, while children were stimulated to play together.

Nevertheless, as a result of the development of owner-occupied dwellings in the area, residents of the social rented sector stated that they experienced a decline in that typical high level of social cohesion. Over the period of restructuring a general change in attitude had been witnessed on a neighbourhood level.

According to a 52-year-old mother of two –and grandmother of two more, residing in the same seven person household– a group of people that would *“always support you and be there for each other”* (Interview 10) was replaced with a

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<sup>16</sup> These are the components of a traditional Dutch meal, which is considered to be especially popular among and characteristic for blue-collar households.

<sup>17</sup> And who might therefore be called ‘*gentrifiers*’, as was described in Chapter II.

group that the aforementioned father-of-one characterized as having the credo “*every man for himself and God for us all*” (Interview 4). Consequently, social activities had most probably been relocated from outdoors to indoors, as streets in the newly built areas were described as barren, deserted, sterile and lacking of children’s and family activities. In particular long-time residents expressed their grief over this loss.

### 5.1.3 *Territorial belonging and identity*

Most respondents did not feel that the new group of residents belonged in their neighbourhood and seem to have deliberately chosen not to put any effort into a process of ‘immigrant assimilation’, nor did they experience any such effort from the newcomers themselves. In terms of territorial belonging and identity, as well as social networks and solidarity, new, imaginary boundaries were drawn in the minds of those who considered themselves ‘true Ondiepers’, leaving out the residences of those who had migrated into their community. Save from mothers whose children went to the same school as some of the newcomers’ children and who therefore had the occasional schoolyard chat, none of the residents of the social rented sector socialized with their new neighbours or felt connected to them in any way, as a relatively young (42) mother/housewife with 15 years experience of living in Ondiep firmly stated.

### 5.1.4 *Different scales, different effects*

However, as was elaborated upon in the introduction of this chapter, the project in Ondiep clearly has two different sides. While the residents of the social rented sector indicated their predominantly negative experiences and dismay with the new-build developments in their neighbourhood, stories on their experiences with the restructuring of their own *buurten* –the subjects of renovation– turned out to be of a less one-sided nature. Most residents said that, up to a certain degree, they were rather satisfied with the relative absence of change in their own *buurt*. Even though the renovation of their dwellings had meant a €50 increase in monthly rent, once again a change that had not met a very warm welcome in Ondiep, most residents had somehow devised a way to ‘cough up’ that amount and had therefore –perhaps unknowingly– safeguarded the social character of their *buurt* that they appreciated so much.

Naturally, the raise in rent and the troubles one has to go through during the renovation of one’s dwelling had taken its toll, however, the social changes that were experienced seemed to be rather limited. Residents stated that they were still quite satisfied with their own *buurt*, as the majority of pre-restructuring residents had managed to maintain their position and the community therefore suffered only minor alterations. The level of social cohesion was still experienced as being quite high, since you could still count on your neighbours to help you move your heavy television set. Furthermore, people still identified with the neighbourhood and its inhabitants, or at least they shared a sense of community and belonging with those abiding similar values and with whom they shared a certain cultural and historical background. Although changing times had meant a change in mentality of people everywhere across Utrecht and The Netherlands, residents of the social rented sector in Ondiep claimed that they did not neces-

sarily experience a more noticeable change within their own *buurt*<sup>18</sup>, particularly not when compared with the new-build developments in other *buurten*.

## 5.2 Liveability

In terms of liveability, the respondents seem to draw a similar division between their own renovated *buurt* and the new-build developments, as will be described later on. However, a number of observations concerning the entire neighbourhood have been shared as well.

### 5.2.1 A nuanced approach to nuisances

Especially regarding the 2007 mass riots that gave Ondiep its nationwide reputation of *problem area*, every single respondent indicated that this was merely an incident and that the culprits were not the inhabitants of Ondiep. Therefore, the solution to this social problem should not be sought in the neighbourhood itself, but is one that demands to be reviewed and tackled on a far bigger scale, according to the residents. Looking back on the event, this does not seem farfetched. Ondiep is home to only a few hands full of youth, whereas there were hundreds of adolescent rioters in 2007. Most of the respondents felt that in this incident grave injustice was done to (the name of) the neighbourhood, while so far they had not experienced an improvement in the outward image Ondiep has as a result of the restructuring that is currently taking place.

While interviewing the residents of Ondiep's social rented sector, it seemed that Sampson's (2009) idea of order being a highly subjective judgment (see p.22) indeed is very relevant to keep in mind. When asked about their experiences with social threats and nuisances in the neighbourhood, most respondents stated that they had not witnessed any change, at least not any positive change, in most of the indicators, simply because they had never before considered those indicators as being problematic. Most of the time it was what made Ondiep such a lively neighbourhood and it seemed appreciated as such by the inhabitants.

Naturally, setting fire to a bin went a bit beyond what was tolerated, said a 74-year-old widower, but most often it was the presence of the police force in the neighbourhood that ultimately ignited the rebellious spirit of the youth according to a 52-year-old mother of two teenagers. She considered the police to be too strict in maintaining the societal sense of order in Ondiep, due to the negative outward image it has. Would there be a bit less intervention, then there would subsequently be a little less insurrection too. According to the residents, the biggest social problem lay in the different approaches towards certain indicators.

### 5.2.2 Traffic safety

Nevertheless, the respondents did not ostracise all their experiences with what others would certainly label threats, nuisances and social problems. For instance, there seemed to be a unilateral agreement about the fact that the streets of their *buurt* should not be used as a race-track, especially since its –unofficial–

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<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, besides not being experienced as negative to the level and quality of social cohesion, a downside was also indicated by some of the residents, as will become clear later on in this chapter.

secondary purpose was to serve as a playground to the youngest residents of the neighbourhood. Even though a redesigned street and parking place layout should contribute to an increase in traffic safety, a former member of the neighbourhood commission explains why the streets' lack of space to actually make a difference is attributed as the reason as for why an improvement was not experienced by the residents in the following extract.

*"The people have to park their cars on the pavements now, but they are opposed to that, because, when the children are playing there, sometimes you can't see them and they might get hit."* (Interview 12)

### 5.2.3 Further findings: It's all in the mentality

It might be considered contradictory, since it was just explained that residents of Ondiep have a different view of what is order than, for example, the government, still they seem to recognize and in some cases also experience what is labelled as disorder by the authorities and they have not refrained from forming an opinion on the matter. Naturally, there also are residents who do have a slightly varying sense of order. Either way, the respondents indicated that the urban restructuring project did not contribute to an improvement in their *buurt* and that this could be explained in, what appears to be, a fairly obvious and easy manner. A cancer-stricken retired widower, who has resided in the same street in Ondiep for all of the 76 years of his life, reveals that cause in the extract below.

*"It is the mentality of the people."* (Interview 3)

His opinion is supported by the majority of the residents, including a 51-year-old housewife, who had already enjoyed 25 years of living in Ondiep. In the statement below she clearly indicates that, if there is a problem, that problem is with the people, not with the neighbourhood itself.

*"As long as the same people remain, it won't change."* (Interview 22)

A comparison between the renovated and the new-build areas in the neighbourhood provides an interesting addition to the above quote. Although most of the respondents were satisfied with the fact that they were not going to be displaced due to the construction of new-build developments in their *buurt*, they did experience the advantages of a complete demolition and reconstruction when they compared their *buurt* with a newly built one, especially when it came down to matters of liveability. The following extract from an interview with a 55-year-old 'born and raised' Ondieper will help clarify this.

*"So actually, the people that live here [renovated buurt] are deteriorating, it's their own fault. They should do something about it themselves, which has nothing to do with restructuring. It's just that the mentality has to change."*

So when you walk through that newly built *buurt*, you see less of that [social problems, threats and nuisances]?

*Yes, far less! There you see thrash cans, not just garbage drifting around.*

And that is because there is a different mentality?

*Yes, different people, different mentality. Just like I told you, it attracts a different audience than over here [social rented buurt] when there are owner-occupied dwellings. (...)*

So there is a greater sense of responsibility for the buurt?

*Yes, but also for their houses. (...) Homeowners do like to keep things tidy.*

So there is a different mentality?

*Yes, (...) that is why I keep on saying, it doesn't matter what you do to the houses or if you renovate, the people remain the same, so you don't change anything in the neighbourhood structure. (...) The neighbourhood isn't changing, so you'll keep the nuisances you have here. Even if you would make these houses out of gold, if the same people stay in..." (Interview 18)*

Another resident, again a retired widower, contributes with a more practical and nuanced example of the influence of a renewed environment:

*"A positive effect of the new-build developments and the renovation is that, once a buurt is nice and tidy, the residents will also put more effort in keeping it that way. For instance, take these people [social renters] during the last winter; they didn't even have a broom to get rid of the snow in front of their doors!" (Interview 13)*

Many of the residents have thus indicated that they witness a greater sense of responsibility regarding the liveability of the neighbourhood among owner-occupiers. As can be seen in the previous extracts, those residents are considered to put greater effort into keeping things neat and tidy as well as being less prone to conduct other forms of 'disorderly behaviour', including speeding. Nevertheless, this change is not experienced throughout the entire neighbourhood, as renovation alters neither the form of tenure nor the composition of its residents. Of course there are exceptions, but overall the respondents experienced little to no change in liveability in the areas in which the dwellings continued to belong to the social rented sector.

### *5.3 Neighbourhood quality*

It is of course hard to ignore the qualitative improvement of dwellings throughout Ondiep. Whether it is in the renovated social rented sector or in the newly built owner-occupied developments, the quality of housing is undeniably getting better and along goes the neighbourhood.

#### *5.3.1 Physical quality of the dwellings*

Most residents were happy to see that the new-build developments fit into the character of Ondiep quite well. They have stated that the appearance of these dwellings, apart from the cleanliness of the façades, does not stand out from the overall appearance of Ondiep. This was attributed to the number of floors rising no higher than four, the fact that the doors and windowsills were not painted in flashy colours and the similarity in the type and colour of the brick used. The

most significant difference was that some of the newly built houses had a front garden, which according to some contributed both to a nicer appearance as well as a decrease in social interactions (with neighbours now lacking the possibility to go 'window shopping' at each other's dwellings).

As for the renovation of their own *buurt*, most respondents seem to agree that it was about time that something was done about the bad quality of their housing. Cracks in the walls, rotten frames around the windows and a terribly old heating system had made winter the residents' worst enemy, as cold and wind roamed freely through their dwellings. Naturally, those who had not taken matters into their own hands yet, were satisfied something was done about this qualitative shortcoming, however, most respondents indicated that they felt very unhappy with the small fee they got to cover the costs for redecoration. The raise in rents was not received very well among the residents either, since many felt that the pre-restructuring housing conditions were too ghastly to delay intervention, as is illustrated by the following extract taken from an interview with a long-time resident, who coincidentally was employed as a construction worker.

*I don't see the renovation as an improvement, but merely as deferred maintenance.*

But all things considered; it does not make a better impression?  
*I will stick to my point; these houses were built in 1924. You can do all the renovation you want, but it will remain an old shed. (...) It's all camouflage.*  
(Interview 4)

### 5.3.2 Occupation level and relative positioning

As was stated before, most (if not all) of the respondents were only able to keep living in their dwellings because of the absence of tenure change in their *buurt*. Regardless of their satisfaction with the opportunity to stay put, most residents thus indicated that they did not experience the changes made to their dwellings during the renovation project as being sufficient. As renovation logically did not change a thing to the relative positioning and the occupation level of the houses, residents neither expressed experiences with positive, nor with negative change towards these indicators.

In the new-build developments the situation was experienced differently. The new dwellings were considered bigger, as a few of the respondents had heard personally from people they knew or some of the new residents they had met at their children's school, and their relative positioning was considered to be more spacious. Naturally, this was the result of building fewer dwellings on the same area, according to the respondents. This did, however, leave less room for back gardens and terraces; uses of space that allegedly are characteristic for Ondiep. It has a further negative side effect on the atmosphere in the neighbourhood, as a 79-year-old former barber said.

*"If they would demolish this, then they will be 1 or 2 houses short in the end, since the surface area will be bigger. But I think it is cosy here [renovated area], I am fine with this." (Interview 17)*

### 5.3.3 Availability of basic amenities

The residents of Ondiep seemed to be perfectly aware of the favourable location their neighbourhood has. Most respondents acknowledged that being within cycling<sup>19</sup> distance of the city center, as well as a medium- and large-sized shopping mall makes Ondiep quite attractive to new, middle- to high-class city dwellers. It also was the reason why the quality, availability and accessibility of services and amenities in the neighbourhood received a high degree of satisfaction from the residents, although it was made clear that this (initially) was unrelated to the urban restructuring project.

Already during the 90s, the supermarket had started to replace smaller, specialized stores within Ondiep. As many of the respondents mentioned, the family stores were unable to challenge the sheer size and reach of the supermarket. This trend was witnessed several years before Ondiep became the subject of large-scale urban restructuring. Nevertheless, with the neighbourhood now being demolished, rebuilt and renovated, the last of these smaller stores were disappearing. During the last few years, residents had experienced the loss of the neighbourhood bakery and butcher. Even though these could now be found at the shopping malls at the outskirts, the respondents did mourn the loss of these shops and subsequently the atmosphere and character it brought into the neighbourhood. Several respondents said that they missed the possibility to socialize with others at the bakery, however, were eager to state that a general change in the working of the society or the economy was the culprit rather than the recent restructuring.

Nevertheless, the residents did experience an increase in other, non-commercial services. Before restructuring, Ondiep lacked an apothecary and a GP's office, but with special attention seemingly going out to the improvement of the residents' wellbeing, Ondiep now houses both of these services. This development is regarded as positive by most of the respondents, although sometimes they admit not to have transferred to the service available in their own neighbourhood yet.

The topic of public parks and other forms of green is evaluated in similar fashion as a number of topics that have already been discussed in this chapter. The new-build developments are regarded to be a bit greener than the renovated *buurten*. As not much attention went out to green spaces at the time the neighbourhood was originally built, the areas that are currently undergoing renovation hardly have room for new public green initiatives. Apart from the occasional flowerbed, the residents did not experience a change in the availability of public green in their *buurt* and neither do they in its quality. It is as a Turkish resident jokingly described, referring to the streets' being named after fruits and trees:

*"This might be a fruitbuurt or a treebuurt, but you hardly see any green when you look around."* (Interview 20)

A number of respondents also indicated that the new-build developments had improved opportunities for children to play, such as playgrounds and strips of

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<sup>19</sup> The bicycle perhaps is the single most important mode of transport over short, intra-city distances within Dutch society.

grass, whereas their own *buurt* showed no sign of improvement on this matter. In this, the *football cage* was not experienced to make the situation any better, as it merely attracted the wrong types of crowd, according to the residents. Also, no effects were experienced on the availability of sports facilities and clubhouses, although no one could be heard complaining, as the neighbourhood had already been considered relatively rich in this aspect. The residents did however indicate that these facilities attracted a lot of youngsters who see in Ondiep an opportunity to wreak havoc.

It is shown throughout this chapter that there are different ways in which the residents of Ondiep look at the effects of the urban restructuring project. Nevertheless, regarding most indicators there seems to be a certain unanimous agreement about the effects that can be witnessed on a (sub) neighbourhood level. In the next chapter the results of this data analysis will be put in the context of their relative research questions, from which the final conclusion for this research will be drawn.



## VI SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter it is time to draw conclusions from the analysis of the results that have been presented in the previous chapter in order to provide a satisfying answer to each of the (sub) research questions. As a reminder, these questions are each shown in text box 6.1 below.

**Text box 6.1** Reminder of the main and sub research questions of this thesis

Main research question (MRQ)

- In what way do the residents of social rented housing in gentrifying areas experience the effects of state-led urban restructuring projects, and in addition, what could this mean regarding urban restructuring policies?

Sub research questions (SRQ)

- To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the level of social cohesion?
- To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the liveability?
- To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the neighbourhood quality?

Naturally, finding answers to the questions that were stated above is the main goal of this thesis. Whether a conclusion shows any similarity to what might have been expected is not the most important issue, but answering all of the research questions serves a number of other purposes. One of them is to increase knowledge and understanding about the ways in which urban restructuring projects and acts that are potentially gentrifying are experienced by residents of the social rented sector who, in particular when it concerns large-scale state-led urban restructuring projects, possibly live through the process.

This knowledge can be used by policy-makers, lobbyists –for instance those from neighbourhood commissions– and urban planners, in order to adapt the large-scale projects, which they most often create and lead, more to the comfort and needs of the inhabitants for whom, in theory, the plans for a neighbourhood upgrade are intended. As such, this thesis could assist in creating plans that will perhaps receive a warmer welcome among the residents of the areas that are up for restructuring.

Furthermore, the expansion of knowledge on this topic serves a specific purpose in the academic field. So far, little attention has gone out to resident experiences of the effects that processes that are gentrifying in nature, including large-scale projects of urban restructuring (as was discussed in Chapter II), have and have had on those people that manage to maintain in their places of residence. Often even, academics failed to take into account resident experiences, as they are too busy theorizing about the consequences of gentrification. By focusing on resident experiences, this thesis takes one step away from mere theory and therefore contributes to a, perhaps more nuanced, resident perspective.

The scientific relevance of this thesis lies not merely in the expansion of knowledge on resident experiences with gentrification. In fact, as this research focuses on a rather specific group of residents, those living in dwellings that belong to

the social rented sector, it adds a further depth to the results. Only recently have a number of academics started to involve social renters in gentrification research as well, since initially the definition of gentrification did not include this group of people. However, this thesis does and it thus helps expand academic knowledge on a very particular group of residents and their experiences.

The process of restructuring that is currently at play in Ondiep contains all four characteristics of gentrification according to the definition by Davidson and Lees (2005). When one keeps in mind the role that the state can have in modern-day urban restructuring projects, it is safe to conclude that even a large-scale, state-led project like that in Ondiep is in fact a modern form of gentrification (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Uitermark, 2003; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2007). Resident experiences from this area therefore contribute to knowledge on experiences with gentrification.

Although not every project is the same, there is a number of overarching principles existent in the majority. Most often, national or municipal governments decide to intervene in a neighbourhood once the quality of certain indicators or variables is regarded as being problematic. In Chapter II, these were identified as *social cohesion*, *liveability* and *neighbourhood quality* (the variables that return in the sub research questions, see p.14-19 for an elaboration of the indicators). As a result, urban restructuring projects usually aim to improve the quality of the aforementioned variables. It is the governments' intention to bring forward a change by tackling any problems they encounter in the realms of these variables.

This (positive) change is exactly what the residents of the neighbourhood should be able to experience when they have lived through the realisation phases of a project. As these urban restructuring projects in Ondiep and the neighbourhood itself very clearly showed either the presence of social (at least statistically) and physical dilapidation, liveability issues, nevertheless combined with a high level of social cohesion, or an intention to improve the situation regarding all of these facets, it has proven an excellent choice for the fieldwork that was necessary to conduct for this thesis. Over a period of four weeks, twenty-two people had been interviewed (using semi-structured interviews, see the methodological chapter), which has ultimately helped to provide answers to the research questions, as we will now see.

*SRQ 1: To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the level of social cohesion?*

It appears to be that, regarding the effects of the urban restructuring projects on the level of social cohesion a rather distinctive division is made by the residents of social rented dwellings. Where state intervention results in the complete demolition and reconstruction of an area, the level of social cohesion is experienced to have dropped significantly or even to have disappeared completely. It is due to the fact that demolition creates the opportunity for the construction of dwellings with different qualities and characteristics, including the form of tenure. This is exactly what has happened in Ondiep, however, it is not exclusive to this particular neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, the residents indicate that the change in tenure has meant a rather dramatic decrease of social cohesion in those newly built developments. As the homeowners that are residing in these parts of the neighbourhood usually are employed, it is experienced by rental-dwellers that they are less able, but also less prone to put some of their time and effort into their neighbourhood. It has thus definitely lost some of its typical pre-restructuring level of social cohesion, control, solidarity and its sense of community, territorial belonging and identity. The group of new residents (homeowners) are accepted as neighbours, but they do not actually seem to be included into the community, due to their different demographic characteristics. Original residents admit that they do not undertake much action to incorporate the new residents and, on the other hand, have not experienced any attempts of assimilation by the newcomers.

New community boundaries seem to have been drawn in the heads of the social renters. Even though they cannot deny the fact that the newcomers reside within the confines of their neighbourhood, the specific areas they live in have not been incorporated into the map of their imagined community. In some cases, what used to be part of their territory is nowadays experienced almost a *no-go* area, as residents fail to experience any sense of community between the two areas.

An almost 180° turn of stance is seen when the residents talk about their own little part of the neighbourhood. As the dwellings that have continued to belong to the social rented sector all are located within the confines of what could be called a sub-neighbourhood, the residents bring forth a completely different tale about it.

There, the dwellings have not been torn down and rebuilt, but were merely renovated. Even though this meant an increase in monthly expenses, it has turned out not to be significant enough to induce processes of gentrification in those areas. The majority of residents that lived there before restructuring commenced still reside in the very same dwellings. Because of that, the population has not shown much alteration. Apart from natural causes, not many residents have actually left as a result of the neighbourhood upgrade. Therefore, the level of social cohesion and all of the indicators that were mentioned in Chapter II, were not experienced as having declined. The community in the renovated areas has 'survived' the urban restructuring project virtually unscathed, which has allowed the residents of the social rented sector to continue to experience that shared sense of belonging, the similarities in values and views and the high levels of social cohesion and solidarity that had been present in their neighbourhood all along.

As such, not much has changed throughout their community, which means that the project has not meant an improvement in the social character of that specific part of the neighbourhood either. This does not automatically mean that the projects in these areas have therefore become futile, because it could already be seen as a minor success that the level of social cohesion, through a variety of other social indicators, is at least not experienced as having decreased. Nevertheless, it does mean that the residents do not experience a noticeable change in the social character of their own part of the neighbourhood.

The indicated experiences have turned out to be rather duplex, as can be seen above. Hence, the experienced effects of the urban restructuring project on the

level of social cohesion can be seen both as none to very little, in the areas where the dwellings have continued to belong to the social rented sector, to moderately negative overall, when one also takes into account the experiences with the new-build developments.

*SRQ 2: To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the liveability?*

A similar division as was made by the residents of the social rented sector while discussing aspects of change concerning the level of social cohesion was made once more while discussing matters of liveability.

Again, a clear distinction was experienced between the new-build developments and the renovated areas in which the respondents themselves resided. Most residents indicated that the different demographic characteristics of the newcomers had resulted in a different attitude towards certain social problems, threats and nuisances. Even though many of the social renters had stated that they did not agree to their neighbourhood being labelled a *problem area*, since their sense of order and disorder differed from that of the authorities, the residents indicated that they had experienced an improvement in terms of liveability in those parts of the neighbourhood that had first been torn down and afterwards were rebuilt.

The original residents (of the social rented sector) claimed that the fact that the new residents predominantly were homeowners was the cause of this change. Homeowners were witnessed to be more responsible, careful and thoughtful of their own belongings, but also those of the neighbourhood or the community, since they would, in one way or another, always hurt themselves if they would act irresponsibly towards the neighbourhood. As we have seen already, this did not induce a greater level of social cohesion, but it nevertheless attributed to an increased experience of liveability in the reconstructed areas.

The residents of the social rented areas stated that the new-build developments appeared cleaner and better taken care of, as for instance litter was actually put away in trash cans and was not blatantly disposed of out on the streets, as well as being more quiet and less perilous for children, especially regarding the car usage of the newcomers. Social problems also seemed less prominent, again as a result of the homeowners' need to work, according to the social renters.

In the renovated areas, however, the residents did not experience an effect of the government effort to eradicate social problems and to increase liveability. This has two primary reasons. First, the social renters often had alternate views on what were considered to be social problems and therefore could not always say if there was an actual effect in that regard. Second, they said that what they personally experienced as social problems, nuisances and threats had not been affected by the restructuring projects in their part of the neighbourhood for the same reason as for why they had not experienced a change in the level of social cohesion. The residents had remained the same.

Along with the residents, the mentality had also remained the same. Most of the residents claimed that their perception of the liveability indicators had not changed and would not do so as long as the mentality of their neighbours would

not either. The fact that their dwellings were renovated did not matter, because most of the residents had found a way to bring up the rise in rent and still were not the owners of the dwelling in which they resided. It thus had not meant as significant a demographic change in their part of the neighbourhood as it had had in the new-build developments. Still, the streets occasionally were used as racetracks and residents continued to lack snow shovels to clear up after snowfall and make the streets just a bit more liveable.

Again, the results show a duplex of experiences with urban restructuring. On the one hand, residents of the social rented sector express rather positive experiences when it comes to the effects that the urban restructuring projects have had according to them regarding the liveability in the areas that have been demolished and rebuilt. On the other hand, the impact that the projects have had on liveability in the renovated areas of the social rented sector was experienced as very limited or (close to) none. Overall, the effects of the urban restructuring projects might be experienced as slightly more positive when it comes to the liveability of the entire neighbourhood. According to the residents, the difference between the two (renovated and new-build) areas is the result of whether there has been a change in the demographic character (new-build) or not (renovated).

*SRQ 3: To what extent do the residents of social rented dwellings feel that the processes of urban restructuring have an effect on the neighbourhood quality?*

The effects of the urban restructuring project on the neighbourhood's physical quality show less of a division between its renovated and reconstructed parts. The physical upgrade of the neighbourhood is apparent and is also appreciated as such by its inhabitants. As a result of incorporating the architectural trademarks of the traditional working-class building style into the design of the new, owner-occupied houses and apartments, most of the residents do not experience the newer areas as being 'out of sync'. In fact, regardless of the differences that are experienced between them and the newcomers, the original residents of the neighbourhood seem to agree that, physically speaking, the neighbourhood has remained somewhat the same, much to their rejoice. Even more so, the quality of the new housing was unmistakably experienced as an improvement.

In the renovated areas, the experiences were a bit more mixed. Even though a qualitative improvement was often regarded as evident, since double-glazing and new window frames did let in a little less wind, most residents did not feel that this could cover up the fact that their dwellings were originally built in 1924. Not only did this mean that qualitative flaws might still remain subcutaneously, it also meant that the relative positioning of the dwellings and their interior division were unaltered. Many residents therefore indicated that they did not experience enough improvement from what they considered to be a 'superficial' intervention after decades of deferred maintenance.

In their gardens the residents witnessed a further physical change. New-build developments were often fitted with a front and a back garden, which differed greatly from the original situation. Having front gardens decreased the likelihood of accidental neighbourly contact, while simultaneously decreasing the size of the garden at the back of the house. Despite the genuine improvement in quality, the residents did not experience the layout of gardens as such.

Regarding public green spaces and parks, the division between renovated and reconstructed areas set in yet again. Even though the new-build developments did not leave a lot of room for the expansion of public green spaces either, the residents had in fact experienced a slight improvement in their availability and particularly in their quality. Again, the presence of homeowners was mentioned as the cause for that, as the resident commission (*bewonerscommissie*) had taken responsibility for the quality of public green in their sub-neighbourhood's.

In the renovated areas, a pre-restructuring absence of public green naturally did not leave room for an increase in the availability during the projects' execution either. Even though there had been some initiatives from the social renters too, for instance flowerbeds and flower filled buckets hanging from street lanterns, while the municipality had planted a few extra trees in certain streets, most residents seemed unimpressed. Regarding public green, the restructuring project was experienced to have brought little to no improvement to the neighbourhood.

Now, once other amenities and services were discussed, it turned out that the effects of the urban restructuring project were experienced to be more or less similar throughout the different areas of the neighbourhood. Well before the upgrade had begun, smaller shops were forced to shut their doors as the dawn of the supermarket had taken them out of business. This had happened throughout the neighbourhood and was unrelated to the urban restructuring project. It must be noted that the nearest shopping mall, which includes a supermarket, was part of a different, small-scale restructuring project within the neighbourhood that preceded the later large-scale restructuring. Nevertheless, the current projects mean that also the last of the smaller, family-owned shops are now closing down. Even though the residents see it as a loss for the social fabric of the neighbourhood, since an excellent opportunity for small talk with others has disappeared and chances of running into familiar people at the supermarket are smaller, they do appreciate the improvements in availability, convenience, accessibility and quality of the new shopping amenities that they have experienced.

However, as a result of increased government attention to the wellbeing of the residents, which was (partly) responsible for the ignition of the entire project and has ever since remained an important aspect, a number of public services that had not been available before restructuring had now opened up within the confines of the neighbourhood. Residents experienced this as an improvement of the availability of services, but also admitted that they still had not maximized the utility of these newly gained services.

In general, the residents of the social rented sector experience the effects of the urban restructuring projects on the quality of the neighbourhood as slightly positive. Even though in most of the indicators there has been little to no change according to the residents, there are a few where the restructuring projects have resulted in a fairly significant improvement. These include the quality of new-build developments and the quality, availability and accessibility of services and amenities.

*MRQ: In what way do the residents of social rented housing in gentrifying areas experience the effects of state-led urban restructuring projects, and in addition, what could this mean regarding urban restructuring policies?*

The resident experiences with the effects of urban restructuring projects on the three main variables, each of which was the subject of one of the sub research questions (SRQs), have illustrated that there is no simple, unilateral answer to the main research question.

On a neighbourhood scale, the experienced effects vary between slightly positive and slightly negative on each of the variables. On a sub-neighbourhood scale, the residents' perceptions of the effects of urban restructuring projects seem to be rather dependent on the particular plans of the project. The residents that now live in social rented housing and had also done so prior to the restructuring of their neighbourhood managed to do so because their particular section of the neighbourhood was planned to be renovated and to remain part of the social rented sector. The effects of the projects that they experienced in their streets therefore showed a clear distinction with how they had experienced the effects in other areas of the neighbourhood, where the urban restructuring project had meant demolition, reconstruction and with it a drastic change in tenure form. In those areas, almost a hundred percent of the dwellings had been turned into owner-occupied units. As said, this resulted into a distinctive set of experiences with the effects of urban restructuring projects.

In the end it often came down to the prevalent form of tenure in a particular area of the neighbourhood on which the effects were experienced to be different. Although luring owner-occupiers into the neighbourhood had been welcomed by the residents of the social rented sector because of their greater contribution to the area's physical condition and their greater sense of responsibility towards the neighbourhood and community, especially in terms of liveability indicators, that altogether positive experience was somehow compromised by the absence of social cohesion in the owner-occupied dwellings. With pre-restructuring levels of cohesion and other social characteristics being experienced as very high, the influx of newcomers into the neighbourhood as a result of the restructuring projects was felt to do almost irreversible damage to that, according to the residents. The owner-occupiers' employment obligations were seen as the cause of –what was experienced by social renters– their reluctance to invest in the social fabric. However, as employment also had provided them with the opportunity to own a house, it simultaneously increased the involvement in the physical condition.

Out of a number of explanations for the overall lack of effects witnessed in the social rented areas, two stand out. First of all, no alteration in tenure form meant no alteration in the residents and subsequently no alteration in public mentality. This meant that the level of social cohesion was experienced to have remained, as well as certain social problems, threats and nuisances present among social renters and their general lack of interest in the physical condition of the neighbourhood. However, secondly, many of the events and actions that were labelled 'disorderly' by the government, were not experienced as such by the residents to begin with. Therefore, it had not occurred to them to specifically pay attention to the effects of the projects –if there were any– on these indicators. As a result, the

urban restructuring project was not experienced to have had a significant effect on most of the indicators within the social rented areas.

In particular when a large-scale, state-led urban restructuring project involves the complete demolition and reconstruction of a (part of the) neighbourhood, its effects are experienced to be both more evident and more distinct by the residents of the social rented sector. However, when a target area is the subject of a large-scale renovation project, which usually does not involve a drastic change in tenure form, the residents hardly seem to experience a clear effect of the project. Nevertheless, in either one of these situations or, as more commonly happens, in a combination of the two, the effects of large-scale, state-led urban restructuring projects are generally experienced as being fairly limited. Naturally, the changes in certain indicators –i.e. physical quality, availability of amenities, liveability– are met with a more positive judgment, whereas others are experienced to have a less satisfying result –i.e. social cohesion– according to social renters.

It appears, however, that resident experiences with the effects of large-scale, state-led urban restructuring projects and gentrification, especially concerning issues of social cohesion, liveability and neighbourhood quality, indeed are more nuanced than one might expect when familiarizing oneself with the bulk of the available literature on this topic. Both positive and negative experiences with the effects of the projects have been witnessed, but neither side seems to outweigh the other in the eyes of the social renters.

Regarding urban restructuring projects this conclusion carries a relevant view to bear in mind for the implementation of future projects. While Dutch policy on urban restructuring projects is based on a belief that residential mixing in a neighbourhood will contribute to a general improvement in various measurable fields –including the level of social cohesion, liveability and neighbourhood quality– (see Van Kempen & Priemus, 2002; Uitermark, 2003; VROM, 2004) its effects might not be as profoundly visible as hoped for, in particular when residential mixing results in segregation after having been put in practice.

Residents for whom the area's restructuring was originally intended are quick to find out what are the actual benefits regarding the physical and social character of the neighbourhood, easily identifying the spatial segregation of their living area as the divider of those benefits. Often the residents of the social rented sector recognize more major changes in an area within their neighbourhood that does not belong to the social rented sector. As such, the renters feel that they miss out on the general improvement of their neighbourhood and therefore fail to recognize the successful effects. For them and in their smaller geographic area, the effects are experienced less dramatically.

Based on the results of this research it can be said that planners should be careful about the spatial implementation of –future– urban restructuring projects. Especially when residential mixing is used as a means to upgrade the socio-economic characteristics of a neighbourhood<sup>20</sup>, it can easily lead to segregation

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<sup>20</sup> In this way we can speak of gentrifying practices, as an upgrade of the socioeconomic characteristics implies that there is less room, for instance, for those with lower levels of income or education.

within it. This does not exclusively apply to merely spatial segregation, as residents also experience forms of social segregation. Regardless of the different faces that it has, in the end it could very easily render the urban restructuring projects less effective, as has been shown throughout this research.

Changing the form of tenure in a neighbourhood might be an effective method to achieve a neighbourhood upgrade in those parts. However, this evaluation is based on the opinions of non-residents: planners and policy-makers who themselves are not involved in that particular neighbourhood as social renters. Due to that, it primarily serves an audience different from the original residents, which could create a follow-up problem.

During an interview about the effects of the urban restructuring project with a 50-year-old single mother an interesting discussion started that can help reflect on this. After the interview had finished, her 25-year-old son –who was soon to graduate from business school– started thinking out loud about the actual use of these large-scale projects for the residents in a neighbourhood such as Ondiep.

According to his ideas, the interventions that were planned and executed by the governments did not serve the original population of Ondiep in any way. Most of the improvements merely benefitted the new residents, since the original residents could not afford to live in newly built dwellings and thus reap the benefits. Furthermore, he added, because of the relatively large influx of new residents part of that original population was displaced to other ‘cheap’ neighbourhoods. That combination, of displaced residents and interventions that are, as this thesis has shown, experienced positively only to a small extent by the non-displaced residents, led him to believe that the large-scale urban restructuring project was merely displacing the label of ‘*problem area*’ to another area, one that was located less conveniently for the new (target) audience of young, middle-class resident. In Utrecht, these ‘overflow’ areas would include newer *problem areas* such as Kanaleneiland and Overvecht.

Bearing in mind the many remarks of the interviewed residents about how the problem is not in the neighbourhood itself, but in the minds and mentality of the people, it might be advisable to increase the attention going out to the social restructuring of a neighbourhood rather than the urban restructuring. Of course, the urban restructuring project aims for certain social effects too, but –as this research shows– these are hardly experienced as positive by the residents of the neighbourhood. Naturally, it is not easy to incorporate these different aspects into urban policy; however, if the governments and housing associations genuinely want to increase the effectiveness of their policies regarding the conditions of their social rented areas and its residents, it would be good to take a closer look at how the projects of urban restructuring would undeniably be in the best interest of that social rented sector.



## VII EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of matters that, during the process of completing this thesis, have sprung into the mind of the author. Problems that occurred, thoughts that did not necessarily need to be incorporated within the main text, observations that might be interesting and recommendable for other (academic) purposes, *et cetera*. This final text chapter provides a brief opportunity for these matters to be presented and discussed.

At the end of this thesis, it can be said that overall it went quite well. The period of reading and writing that preceded the data collection went by rather quick and smooth, through which a proper base was laid for the empirical part of this thesis to rest on. The entire process of conducting and transcribing interviews seemed to pass by in the blink of an eye, as the interviews were –contrary to the expectations– far from uncomfortable. They actually provided a very pleasant experience, which has certainly contributed to the enthusiasm for this research.

However, as a research of this magnitude solely based on qualitative data and its analysis was a first for the author, the post-fieldwork period provided some difficulties. Even though there are 130 pages of interview transcriptions and the author managed to get a very clear general idea of the respondents' reactions, it has not always been easy to transform these into pleasantly readable material. Although the author is aware of his inexperience with this form of research and its possible effect on the final thesis, the result is nevertheless considered to be very satisfactory in his eyes. Hindsight allegedly is a beautiful thing, however, it makes quick judgment fairly easy. As has just been shown this research naturally has its shortcomings, but what is important is that it still succeeds to answer its main research question both adequately and sufficiently.

Of course, there were some interesting ideas that came up during the fieldwork period of this research that could definitely add a useful contribution to future research on resident experiences with gentrification.

As was already mentioned in a footnote in the methodological chapter, a focus on those residents that have managed to take a step up on the housing ladder during the time the process of gentrification took place in their neighbourhood, whether as a result of a small-scale private form or the large-scale state-led project that is the subject of this thesis, would be such an addition. Albeit on only a few occasions, residents who had already lived in Ondiep prior to the time when the restructuring had begun were mentioned to have moved into the demolished and reconstructed sub-neighbourhoods upon their completion. Their experiences might be very different from those of the residents who remained living in social rented dwellings. However, as this goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it will be an interesting perspective for future studies.

Also, as this research focuses on the long-term effects of large-scale, state-led urban restructuring projects, it should be said that its results are considerably less negative than what they would have been, had it focused on short-term effects. The majority of the respondents clearly showed their discontent with the troubles the project caused on a more immediate basis. Especially the rent

increase, the compensation for the inevitable expenses following the renovation of their homes and the nuisances (noise, dust) that the execution of the project provided, were experienced to be respectively too high, too low and too much by the residents of the social rented sector.

Naturally, financial matters are delicate matters, as a man's wallet is very dear to him. However, this does not mean that the residents' discontent is merely the result of their own avarice, since it might quite frankly be the result of the state-led joint venture's avarice as well. It might not be concluded from the interviews that were conducted for this research, as its aims and interests lay elsewhere, but there seemed to be a general consensus among the residents that a higher financial compensation might have led to less initial resistance against the plans for restructuring. Not to say that the residents should be 'bribed', however, it would certainly be advisable for the project leaders to pay utmost attention to each household's situation, as complaints ranged from "I already applied double-glazing myself, so I don't want the municipality to wreck that again" to "I'm 81 years of age, how am I to move my belongings and redo my living room after the renovation for a mere €550?"

Another observation was that, perhaps due to the aforementioned critique, the respondents became increasingly eager to express their opinion once they realized that the author was not doing his research on behalf of any of the parties responsible for the urban restructuring project. This showed that a proper introduction of (the impartiality of) both research and researcher could open doors and thus provide ways to obtain a larger quantity of useful information. In the case of this research, it certainly seems to have worked.

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N.B. In Dutch, names and last names that include affixes are to be found at the initial of the first non-affix when alphabetized. For instance, *De Boer* is to be found at the letter **B** and *Van Kempen* at the letter **K**.

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## IX APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### *Interview structure*

During the interviews the respondents were asked about their subjective experiences with each (or a number) of the points of interest that follow hereunder. The interviewer has incorporated the terms that have been categorized within the three variables that are relevant for this research in the question, as to support the respondents' understanding of what is asked and to trigger a response. The author is perfectly capable of translating the entire interview procedure, as he is a native Dutch speaker as well as fluent in English.

#### Social cohesion (*sociale cohesie*)

- Common values and civic culture  
*Gedeelde waarden en cultuur*
- Social order and social control  
*Sociale orde en toezicht/controle*
- Social solidarity and reductions in welfare disparity  
*Solidariteit en welvaartsnivellering*
- Social networks and social capital  
*Sociale netwerken en sociaal kapitaal*
- Territorial belonging and identity  
*Gebiedsverbondenheid en identiteit*

*(Other) useful terms while interviewing (Dutch): Atmosfeer, contacten, omgang, normen en waarden, controle, solidariteit, verbondenheid, identiteit.*

#### Liveability (*leefbaarheid*)

- Noise nuisance  
*Geluidsoverlast*
- Pollution  
*Vervuiling (lucht, milieu, afval, et cetera)*
- Traffic nuisance  
*Verkeersoverlast*
- Traffic safety  
*Verkeersveiligheid*
- Vandalism  
*Vandalisme*
- Social nuisance  
*Sociale overlast (hangjongeren, probleemgezinnen, sociale problemen, et cetera)*
- Insecurity  
*Onveiligheid*
- Dwelling satisfaction  
*Tevredenheid met de woning*
- Environment satisfaction  
*Tevredenheid met de buurt/omgeving*

*(Other) useful terms while interviewing (Dutch): Overlast, tevredenheid, veiligheid, vervuiling.*

### Neighbourhood quality

- Relative positioning of the dwellings  
*Relatieve positionering van de woningen*
- Physical condition of the dwellings  
*Fysieke conditie van de woningen*
- Occupation-level of the dwellings  
*Aantal bewoners per woning*
- Availability of basic amenities  
*Beschikbaarheid van basisvoorzieningen*

*(Other) useful terms while interviewing (Dutch): Staat/kwaliteit van de huizen, van de buurt, aanwezigheid en kwaliteit van voorzieningen.*

### General information about respondent

- Gender  
*Sexe*
- Age  
*Leeftijd*
- Household composition  
*Huishoudenssamenstelling*
- Nationality / ethnic descent  
*Nationaliteit / Etnische afkomst*
- Inkomen  
*Income*