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HOUSING POLICY AND COMMUNITY: A DUTCH PERSPECTIVE
Netherlands

Summary
It is widely acknowledged that housing conditions have an enormous influence on the health of residents. Poor housing is consistently associated with high rates of mortality and morbidity, specifically with an increase in infectious and chronic diseases, stunted development in children and poor mental health (Krieger and Higgins, 2002). The importance of housing in assuring both physical and mental well-being is further underlined by the fact that adequate housing is considered a human right and as such is protected by numerous international laws including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Thiele, 2002). In the Netherlands, the right to adequate housing is considered a fundamental right and as such is protected by the Dutch Constitution.[1]
While the bearing of housing conditions on health is unattested, the potential negative impact of housing, though adequate, but nevertheless not meeting the needs of residents, is poorly understood. This gap in our knowledge has resulted in districts and neighborhoods filled with houses that are adequate but also unimaginative, monotonous or both. The recognition of the importance, not only of sufficient housing but above all of housing that corresponds with the needs of the residents lies at the heart of this article. In the coming paragraphs I will sketch the current state of (public) housing in the Netherlands, focusing on the role of housing associations in creating and maintaining communities that comply with the needs of modern housing consumers. Whilst the focus of the article is on the Dutch context, I believe that lessons can be drawn for Ukrainian housing policy all the same.

1. Latent discontent
In the Netherlands the housing stock has increased dramatically since the 1970s. Generally speaking these houses are well built and are situated in well kept surroundings. Increased mobility has given people greater freedom in choosing where they want to reside. Despite all of this, a latent discontent with regard to the variety and quality of the available housing is undeniable. The housing domain is technocratic by nature, focusing on problem solution rather than problem analysis, whilst the general public dissatisfaction is expressed on the level of society, manifesting itself in politicians demanding more houses be built and residents openly criticizing new housing developments. Affordable owner occupied housing remains vacant on the property market for long periods of time, while the waiting period for rental houses gets longer by the hour.
Housing associations are increasingly involved in the maintenance of public spaces and the living environment of neighborhoods. Various new housing projects setup by housing associations aim at building both high quality and out of the ordinary housing. Unfortunately, public participation in creating high quality living environments is still limited thus increasing the risk that, regardless of the good intentions of those involved, future housing will not live up to public expectations. What is desperately needed is a better balance between, on the one hand governmental and commercial initiatives, and on the other hand, an appreciation by the public for these initiatives.

2. Challenges and questions in housing
The Netherlands is essentially a welfare state, a fact that has shaped both the social relations in society and the built environment. Dating back to 1901, Dutch housing policy has ensured that there is an amble supply of high-quality housing. Three factors have been particularly important in this regard. First of all, the constant growth of the number of social rental properties, particularly in the twentieth century. Secondly, the large number of owner-occupied houses that have become available to middle income families due to the introduction of temporary governmental financial assistance. And thirdly, the introduction of housing subsidies for rental housing.

Due to the greater geographic range at their disposal, the age old question 'where to live' is increasingly being influenced by personal housing preferences. More and more, individuals can afford to seek out housing and living environments that suit their own particular needs, desires and lifestyles. Unfortunately, the appreciation by the general public of the available housing is low, partly because of the unvaried nature of the houses being built in major building locations and the capacity of the supply side of the housing market to respond, in cooperation with the public, to these changing demands seems constrained. The current housing stock in the Netherlands is estimated at 6.5 million properties. The annual net growth in housing (new housing minus demolished houses) is 50.000 properties, a net increase of 1% of the total housing capacity. These figures show that, even if all new housing developments complied with consumer demands, the overall improvement in the total housing stock would still be marginal. Clearly, if we are to take the task of developing qualitatively good housing seriously, we need to look elsewhere, for instance at the quality of the current housing stock.

Housing statistics show a tremendous increase in the number of relocations in the Netherlands during the past couple of decades. When residents became dissatisfied with their current housing situation, they remedied this by moving away instead of consulting with the contractor, the landlord or the municipality. As a result, the responsibility for the neighborhood environment fell squarely on the shoulders of the official authority. This situation has changed dramatically during the past five years or so. In the year 2005 9.5% of the total population of the Netherlands (approx. 1.550.000 persons) relocated, compared to 11.5% (approx. 1.850.000 persons) in 1995 (Ekamper and Van Huis, 2002). If we take into consideration the declining number of new homes being built, then it is foreseeable that the number of relocations will continue to drop.

The challenge facing us is to build qualitatively outstanding houses that also allow residents to realign, i.e. *reset*, the living space available to them with their changing life styles and housing demands. The likelihood of climbing up the housing ladder via a succession of relocations is becoming increasingly unlikely and tenants will increasingly have to find other opportunities to *reset* their current home.

3. Attachment, housing assertiveness and community

More often than not, a positive bond with a home also results in a positive bond with the neighborhood. A bond with the neighborhood also develops if residents are only concerned with the property itself, although the bond consists in that case primarily of blocking out unwanted outside influences.

Van der Land (2004) has identified four bonding types that residents typically have with their living environment: a) Bonding due to close *proximity* and *history* with a location. In this type of bonding family roots in a particular location is of importance. b) Bonding through *consumption*. This type of bonding occurs in the presence of shops, theatres etc. and is typical of post-industrial societies. c) Bonding through *participation*, through involvement with the city or town. This type of bonding is often seen during the early stages of industrialization. d) Bonding as a result of being part of a *community*. In this type of bonding, which is essentially passive, we see a strong desire for safety and wellbeing.

Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (2000) assert that human beings cannot help but *communicate*. A variation on this would be that human beings cannot help but *socialize*. Human beings function in various social groups that are in turn arranged in a social network (Weick, 1979). These social groups are loose or fixed in nature, depending on the stance of the individuals forming the group and strong social bonds demand an active attitude from its members. In the housing context, we might ask ourselves whether individuals are always aware of *their* position and that of others in their living environment and neighborhood. Are individuals sufficiently aware of their own demands with regard to housing, and what is the capacity of individuals to formulate their housing aspirations? In short, what do we know when it comes to the housing assertiveness of the public at large, with housing assertiveness defined as *the potential of individuals and groups to be aware of their own intrinsic housing needs and to work towards realizing those needs.* Housing assertiveness, furthermore, assumes that *individuals and groups have a high degree of freedom, both with regard to their housing needs and in the practical opportunities available to them to fulfill those needs.*

Sometimes it seems as if the majority of housing associations are unaware of the dramatic transformation that is taking place in their housing stock. It is predicted that the number of rental properties will decline from 45% now to 30% in 2025. This transformation can be attributed to three sources, that is to say (i) the low numbers of rental properties that are currently being built, (ii) the large number of

rental properties that are being sold in order to finance new property developments, and (iii) overdue maintenance of the remaining housing stock. These developments represent a unique opportunity to improve not only the quality of housing but also to stimulate citizen participation in new property developments but also with large scale investments in the current housing stock. Housing associations should seize this opportunity to address difficult questions dealing with issues such as social cohesion, neighborhood bonding and housing assertiveness. Only then can they maintain their current position in the housing domain.

4. Searching consumers, searching producers
In *Atlas van de Nederlandse steden* [*Atlas of the Dutch cities*] (NRC Handelsblad, 1999) more than two thousand neighborhoods are compared. One of the most eye-catching results of this comparison is the considerable differences between the neighborhoods in the number of relocations. In the thirty three largest municipalities there are a hundred neighborhoods where a quarter of the households move each year. In the media, a high number of relocations is viewed with suspicion which is surprising when one considers that similar figures are not out of the ordinary in neighborhoods with large student populations.
A great deal has been written on the topic of so-called *fragile housing environments* meaning environments where a significant proportion of the houses are of poor quality. In the *Woonverkenningen MMXXX* [*Housing exploration, housing in 2030*] (VROM, 1997) these environments are specifically discussed. There are in total 6.200.000 million homes in the Netherlands of which 750.000 fall into this category. In Hoogvliet, a neighborhood in the city of Rotterdam with approximately 18.000 houses, a large reconstruction project which started in 1999 will see the demolition of five thousand homes and the rebuilding of 5.750 houses by 2015. Low rent apartment buildings will be replaced by more expensive apartments and family homes. Policymakers are optimistic that the introduction of the concept of *lifestyles* will act as an incentive to increase the quality of housing in the renovated neighborhood which will in turn attract new residents. The *lifestyles* used in this regard include categories such as '*private residential area*', '*housing plaza*', '*individuality*' and '*at home in the city*'. It still remains to be seen whether this and similar investments (in the case of Hoogvliet approximately 1.5 billion euros will be invested for a population of 35.000 people) increase the livability and quality of life in the neighborhood. Smeets (2006) argues that in the course of life, individuals go through various life styles and frequently switch from one living environment to another. We life in a culture where individuals have to multitask their life. Smeets is then also suspicious of the current hype surrounding the lifestyles concept and questions the usefulness of the concept, speculating that the concept might have been invented by professionals in order to come to terms with the resident as consumer.
In 1993 new legislation, the so-called *Bruteringswet*, came into force which effectively uncoupled housing associations from the central government. The new legislation also effectuated a change in the way all parties regard the housing stock; investments in and the management of housing stock became intertwined. In the Housing Memorandum *Mensen, Wensen, Wonen* [*What People Want, Where People Live; Housing Policy 2000–2010*] (VROM, 2000) the focus of the Dutch government shifted from new housing developments to inner-city reconstruction efforts. The demolition and rebuilding of rental housing and the sale of rental properties by housing associations had to make an end to the surplus of rental properties and the shortage of owner-occupied properties. Figures from the Centraal Fonds Volkshuisvesting [Central Fund Public Housing] show that roughly a quarter of the housing stock in the Amsterdam area will not meet the housing requirements of residents in the foreseeable future. In the past, housing associations responded to pressure from the central government by concentrating on housing quantity instead of quality. It was not until the end of the 1990s that the socio-cultural dimensions of housing started to receive the attention it deserves.
A good example of this change in policy is the publication of the book *Trots van de plek* [The *Pride of the Place*] (TRS Ontwikkelingsgroep, 2001) in which number of experts in the field of housing discuss their views on the correlation between feelings of pride that people harbor for their living space and the physical qualities of the housing in a neighborhood. The book represents a major paradigm shift in our thinking; not only with regard to the way ethnically mixed neighbourhoods are viewed but also neighbourhoods containing a kaleidoscope of housing types and the grouping together of like-minded individuals. In his contribution to *Trots van de Plek* Van Engeldorp Gastelaars proclaims that the interest in related lifestyles has increased considerably at the expense of the territorial commitments of

individuals. In the same book, Noordanus argues that the emphasis should be on binding households to neighborhoods and on maintaining these networks by building houses that the current residents make a positive choice for. As a final point, Kleijnen argues that by cultivating the uniqueness of a location and by facilitating involvement, feelings of pride can be discovered or created.

In *Bouwen in de Wederopbouw Stad* [*Building in the reconstruction city*] (Hebly and Boekraad, 2004) a number of concepts applicable to future cities are discussed, including the concepts *compact city*, the *metropolitan city* and the *closed city*. The message of the authors is that we need to find a new balance between the private, the collective and the public domain in order to create lasting mixed residential areas. The main problem with the use of space in contemporary cities is that while it belonged to everyone before, it belongs to no one now. The authors' campaign for the inclusion of more historical and landscape elements in city planning. In another recent publication, a case is made for the *landscape city* in which concepts such as *traffic* and *transportation*, *multitasking*, *open space* and *recreation* play a central role (Bouwfonds MAB Ontwikkeling, 2005). In short, there is no shortage of publications dealing with the search for the planned city but the more fundamental question as to the extent to which cities are plan able, remains unanswered.

5. Liberalization of the housing market

Between the city of Den Bosch and the river Maas, landscape architect Paul van Beek is creating a new housing project featuring nine castles. Architect Sjoerd Soeters is designing something similar for the city of Heerenveen. 'Seniorenstad' [Senior citizens city] is another unusual project initiated by a number of consulting agencies, project developers and Stichting Experimenten Volkshuisvesting [Foundation for Experimental Public Housing] to investigate the possibility of creating a town exclusively for senior citizens. The town is intended for healthy and socially active senior citizens that enjoy socializing and value their individuality but also want to function in a group. 'Seniorenstad' is a good example of the growing number of initiatives in which the personal preferences of the inhabitants are taken seriously. More and more, the intentional city of city planners has to compete with residential areas that have incorporated the personal preferences of the inhabitants.

In the Housing Memorandum *Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra* [*Fourth Memorandum on Spatial Planning – Plus*] the Ministry of Housing, Social Planning and the Environment recommends more building lots be made available for private persons to build their own homes (VROM, 1999). In 1996, city planner Adriaan Geuze gave home buyers in the new housing development *Borneo-island* in the eastern harbor district in Amsterdam the opportunity to participate in the design of their own home. Around the same time, the Dutch architect Carel Weeber introduced the idea of '*Wilde Wonen*' [Wild Living] which specifically propagates the design of homes by private persons. Now, years later, a number of housing developments in which the wishes of both home owners and tenants were taken into consideration have been completed. One example that stands out in this regard is the Roombeek district in Enschede which was devastate by a fireworks disaster six years ago. During the entire rebuilding process, it was the explicit objective of all parties to entice the original residents to return to the district. This was achieved by setting up an open design process whereby the residents worked together with the architect Pi de Bruijn in designing the 65 hectares spanning neighborhood including 1.500 houses. The project was unique because of the large number of houses involved and the limited previous experience with resident participation in the design process. Since then, similar initiatives have been undertaken in other cities. In the Nieuw Leyden district in Leiden, for example, both home owners and tenants are encouraged to participate in the design of the 800 new houses. Another smaller housing development is De Laat Vathorst in Amersfoort were individual home buyers are given the opportunity to design their own homes. And then there is IJburg, a large housing development project to the east of Amsterdam, where buyers can assist in the design of their homes through the internet. Buyers can virtually add and remove doors, housing levels and terraces and with the press of a button see the impact these alterations will have on the house price.

In the Housing Memorandum *Mensen, Wensen, Wonen. Wonen in de 21e eeuw* [*What People Want, Where People Live; Housing Policy 2000–2010* (VROM, 2000) the Dutch government estimates that 30% of all new houses will be built by private persons. Currently, approximately 50.000 new homes are built per annum which would imply that each year 15.000 houses will be built by private persons. At present, this estimate is not met. We should, however, not underestimate the amount of influence the government has when it comes to promoting new trends in housing. The last couple of years has

seen a striking increase in the number of building locations for private persons and more and more property developers are bending over backwards to accommodate the modern housing consumer. The examples and trends just mentioned apply primarily to new housing estates in the upper market sector; how the liberalization of inner city housing will play out for low income families is, on the other hand, still uncertain.

Nationwide a tremendous amount of research is done to get a better fit between the supply and demand sides of the housing market. The *Woningbehoefte Onderzoek* [*Housing Needs Study*] (VROM, 2003) is a good example of the type of research that is done in this regard. It tells us, amongst other things, that there is a desperate need for more housing projects that combine housing with long term care. It does not, however, tell us a great deal about what consumers themselves want when it comes to housing, nor does it tell us how much money consumes are willing to spend in order to get the type of housing they desire.

RIGO, a Dutch consultancy agency has done research on neighborhood profiles in the municipality of Rotterdam. For the research, residents were asked to describe how they thought their neighborhoods should look like, using such parameters as *prosperity*, *scope to develop*, *level of education* and *attachment to the location*. A question that immediately comes to mind is 'for whom is this type of research done, for the municipality concerned about the observed discrepancies or for the housing associations and welfare organizations'? RIGO has also studied initiatives that combine housing and care. The number of rooms available in nursing homes is declining whilst the demand for care in the local area as a result of the aging Dutch population is greater than ever. As a result, local governments are increasingly working together with care providers and housing associations to ensure that elderly residents can stay longer in their own homes and living environment. At the moment, the home based care that this segment of the Dutch population depends on is paid for primarily by health insurance companies and the government. It is anyone's guess how much individuals would be willing to pay for these and related services, especially those with a low income. In the year 2003 the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Social Planning and Environment started with the so-called *'56 districts'* approach after analysis showed that in fifty-six districts the locale environment had deteriorated to such an extent that government interference and extra federal subsidies were called for. According to the Ministry, "*cities are constantly changing; residential areas and public space degenerate and recover. Changing housing needs and increased mobility necessitates intervention by local government and sometimes financial assistance is needed in order to step up city renewal efforts*". What we should ask ourselves is how, with this much government interference, can residents ever evolve into critical and independent consumers?

6. The modern housing consumer and housing assertiveness

In *Stedelijke transformatie* [*Rural transformation*] (Noordanus, 1999) a former city counselor in The Hague describes how logical it is, in his opinion, that residents behave as consumers when it comes to housing. He argues that the marketing of houses and housing areas will become a new instrument in public housing policy which also entails a greater emphasis on the quality of city planning and a keener awareness of the housing preferences of (groups of) housing consumers. It is unclear if this appeal for increased consumer activism is a manifestation of impotence on the side of housing professionals and how realistic these expectations really are. Another pertinent question concerns the role of marketing, or better said the various types of marketing in activating consumer behavior.

White and Guest (2003) argue that, contrary to popular belief, urbanization can in many instances be a driving force for social behavior. Urbanization encourages the segmentation of social ties by discouraging density or interconnectedness. Urban neighborhoods, whether they consist largely of immigrant populations, low income households or a heterogeneous group of persons, regularly have surprisingly positive social dynamics. The social fabric of these neighborhoods is more often than not strengthened by the large scale maintenance plans of housing associations when tenants commonly organize themselves in tenant organizations. The initial contact between these tenant organizations and housing associations is often antagonistic but usually ends in constructive cooperation. Housing associations should use this phenomenon to their advantage in neighborhood renovation projects. Instead of presenting tenants with well thought-out reconstruction plans which usually elicits nothing more than a complacent response from residents, housing associations could take a more confrontational approach. This way, housing associations can be assured of fervent tenant participation and by and large produc-

tive deliberations between tenants and housing association. *Emotions* and *commotion* are often viewed as the undesirable but inevitable by-products of neighborhood renovation projects, while in fact they should be regarded as a source of free opinions and advice, if only the professionals involved in such projects would take notice. The intensive contacts and communication established during renovation projects is seldom maintained once a project is completed. This is regrettable because constructive and open communication between housing producers and consumers is essential if the housing demands of a continuously changing tenant population are to be met.

Van Zoest (2006) confirms the view that discontent with current housing conditions can lead to a greater awareness of one's housing needs. Van Zoest observes that a qualitative housing shortage can be caused by increased prosperity, which in turn leads people to question the livability of cities and experience a general lack of meaning in life. Van Zoest distinguishes between two types of bonding residents commonly experience with their living space: *place attachment* in which case the bond is created by habituation and *place-identity* which entails a cultural sense of belonging. If these bonds are threatened, residents go into action but that does not mean that the residents are also assertive when it comes to housing.

Housing assertiveness can also take on less attractive forms when consumers become overly focused on their own wellbeing and express antisocial housing behavior as is discussed by Steyaert (2006). Housing associations and welfare organizations play an important role when it comes to countering this type of behavior. Specific measures that can be undertaken in this regard include the installation of living rules that residents must abide by, setting up neighborhood mediation schemes to deal with conflicts between neighbors and the introduction of a regard system for good behavior. In order to manage the problem of antisocial housing behavior, Steyaert makes an appeal to the classic concept of citizenship whereby citizens are held responsible for the upkeep of their living environment whereby an exaggerated supplier-client between citizens and the government is avoided.

7. Man as an individual in several social groups

In *Dynamiek in Leefvormen* [*Dynamics in ways of life*] Weeda (1983) describes the process whereby the living and housing units of people becomes increasingly smaller until the majority of adults live alone and have little to no contact with the outside world, a process called atomization. For many, the trend of increasing atomization is very disturbing but it is by no means inevitable and housing associations have an important task in preventing it from occurring. Atomization should, however, not be confused with individualization simply because growing individualization does not per se mean living alone. Oftentimes, greater self awareness leads to individuals having a broader range of meaningful relationships. According to Weeda, the importance placed by society on the nuclear family has reduced the number of interpersonal relationships types. Partly because of the dominance of the nuclear family, various communities (elderly, disabled, and women) within society have had to struggle for the right to lead autonomous lives.

Weeda (1982) identifies seven idealized images of ways of life in society, all of which consist of combinations of, on the one hand individualization, and on the other the need for safety and social structure. The first idealized image is that of the married couple in the nuclear family and the last image is that of the androgynous individual living in a network of friendships. These seven idealized images correspond to the radical changes Western societies have gone through during the past three centuries. When individuals loosen themselves from their family ties, i.e. when they strive for individuality, they gain freedom of choice in society. Modern man functions in numerous social networks simultaneously and the increasing pluralism in housing culture is irreversible. This freedom of choice does not exclude family life but broadens the spectrum of choice. More and more, our conception of man will be that of the constantly switching individual operating in different social networks depending on his or her particular needs and phase of life. What is worrisome is that both the current housing stock and planned new housing developments act as obstacles for this important societal transformation. One of the most difficult challenges facing society is finding the right balance between, on the one hand, resisting the atomization of society and on the other hand, leaving enough room for individualization and the growing desire for privacy. At the moment, housing caters primarily to the needs of the nuclear family when it should instead reflect the diversity within an individual live and in society.

During his life, the American sociologist David Riesman studied the way in which population growth influences our conduct towards each other (Riesman, 1950). He described the transformation of a *tra-*

dition-directed culture to an *other-directed culture* by way of an *inner-directed culture*. During this transformation, individuals develop an acute awareness of the activities and needs of others. Riesman observed a process whereby individualization leads to the desire for new and diverse social units.

All of the scholars referred to in this section paint a picture of society in which individualization does not necessarily lead to isolation but rather to the creation of new forms of coexistence. Increasingly individuals are functioning concurrently in numerous social groups that can vary from *group housing* and *campus life* to more porous social groups such as *online game communities* or a group of early-morning *commuters on the subway*. There is no hierarchy between these communities, individuals simply switch from one community to the other just as our preferences for one community over another changes over the years. Communities can take on many forms; they can be sparsely-knit and spatially dispersed or loosely-coupled and even virtual (Weick, 1976) but in general, the trend is from "*little boxes to loosely-bound network*" (Wellman, 1998).

8. Planned living in an unplannable society

The book *Bouwen in de wederopbouwstad* [*Building in the reconstruction city*] (Hebly and Boekraad, 2004) ends with a reassuring conclusion: in the reconstructed city we find many architectural concepts that have stood the test of time and with which we can still create practical, modern and imaginative buildings. This verdict seems to imply that the built environment has not changed much over the years. At the same time the authors also insist that in reconstructed neighborhoods the architecture should be less prominently visible, it should take a step back and create space. This demand for space immediately raises questions concerning the scope and nature of the space in question. If we want to create space for new ways of living and for demographic developments, then we also need to create space in the current housing legislation and room for creative individuals.

In order to create space, is has to be available to start with which brings us to the question: how changeable is society really? And even if we are able to predict the dynamics of the housing market that does not automatically mean that we can respond adequately as well. If we are to believe the nineteenth century writer Ralph Waldo Emerson we have a challenge on our hands (Eiseley, 1979). No matter how ambitious our plans for the future are, we still live in the present and the future is hard to predict just as our wishes of the future. Long before Ralph Waldo Emerson, church father Augustine (354-430) spoke similar words of wisdom when he said that that we can distinguish between three stages in time: the past time, the present time and the future time. What is present of the past time is the memory, what is present of the present time is the witnessed and what is present of the future is simply the expectation.

The Council for Spatial, Environmental and Nature Research advices the Dutch government on what types of research should be performed in the fields of spatial planning, environment, nature and landscape management. In a recent publication titled *Gekrulde ruimte: gesprekken over beleving in ruimtelijke inrichting* [*Curled space: conversations about the experience of spatial organization*] the council discuss the way in which individuals experience space and ways in which individual space can be accommodated in design and planning processes (In't Veld et al., 2005). The overall aim of the publication is to improve the dialogue between those giving assignments and those carrying them out but it also demonstrates once more how difficult it is to bridge the gap between producers and consumers in the housing domain.

In *Megatrends Nederland* [*Megatrends in the Netherlands*] the demographic developments and the trends that will accompany these developments in the Netherlands in the near future are discussed (Bakas, 2005). The most significant developments predicted are a shift to *high expectations* and *quality demands*, a move from *individualism* to *collectivism* and from *subculture* to "*sub clubs*". Future generations will be more acutely aware of the limits of the idea of a planned society, the credence of the pragmatic individual will be strengthened and a return to clear cut and well defined consumer categories is highly unlikely. For marketers the 'new collectivists' are still a mystery, making the planned society from a consumer marketing perspective an unattainable utopia.

The switching consumer described here seems at first both positive and active but it also has a less pleasant side namely that of the acquiescent consumer with no knowledge of or control over the supply side of the housing market. Everyday consumers are bombarded by an array of consumer goods yet in the housing domain choice is still limited and suppliers are inexperienced in anticipating the

demands of the modern housing consumer. Still we have to ask ourselves whether the situation is really as dire as it seems; are we not perhaps on the brink of a major breakthrough in the housing domain?

9. Living places, communities and segregation

Jan van Hooff, Professor Emeritus of behavioral biology describes the ideal living environment as a place where you feel at home and which reflects your identity, in short '*cherished places*' (Betsky and Van Hooff, 2004). Such a poetic approach to the concept of living places is a delight and it also captures perfectly what a community should be.

Schram defines a community as a small scale spatial component which is both self-reliant and isolated with regard to culture and traditions; a definition grounded on extensive research on city planning in Central America (Schram, 2006). Although one might question the extent to which these traditional communities are relevant for post-modern urbanized environments, she also describes new forms of community such as communes, internet communities, academic networks and interest groups. In her work she uses the distinction introduced by Wellman between *community lost*, *community saved* and *community liberated*. The *saved community* is well represented in traditional city planning with its emphasis on restoring the community, whilst the *lost community* refers to the view that thinking in terms of community is outdated. Schram is primarily interested in the *liberated community* according to which the city gives rise to various spontaneous initiatives, not all of which are bound to a specific location. Schram uses the spontaneously arrived at communes of San José as an example in the regard. The existence of these communes demonstrates that the unplannable city can be a driving force for original and unplanned communities and that there where the built city stands in the way of new developments, flaws in city planning give rise to new initiatives.

The contrast between the communes of San José and Dutch initiatives such as Haverleij in Den Bosch where developers are trying to recreate the perfect community by building modern day castles could not be greater. It is then also doubtful whether these initiatives will achieve their objective which is the construction of a community that meets the demands of the residents. Smeets (2006) defines *life phase durable housing environments* as environments that have certain physical, functional, social, cultural and institutional qualities whereby residents have during their entire life span not only ample choice but also various combinations of activities and transitions from one activity to another is possible. Such housing environments might approximate the elusive concept of community we have been searching for. One thing is sure, new housing developments such as Haverleij with their bias towards monoculture and specific life phases do not meet the requirements for *life phase durable housing environments*. This monoculture also does not go well with the image of switching consumers, each with his or her own array of housing needs.

Based on what we have seen so far, we can now define the *ideal community* as a) a place which instills pride in its residents, b) a place where residents want to reside for a substantial period of time because it meets their personal demands and wishes, c) a place where residents do not have to be concerned about the maintenance or the quality of the housing environment, d) a dynamic place that is full of surprises and allows the residents to fulfill new needs, e) a place that is relatively small in size so that the residents have the opportunity to meet and get to know each other.

Examples of places that fulfill these conditions are old neighborhoods with historical artifacts, housing blocks with central facilities, neighborhoods consisting of likeminded residents with plenty of neighborly interaction and combined housing-care zones with a wide selection of facilities and services. Communities can sprout in both new and existing residential areas, with either a mixed or a homogeneous resident population. The community concept might no longer be relevant to city planners with respect to the content; it is still nevertheless pertinent in an expressive-aesthetic context (Doevendans, 2006).

Setha Low has investigated the phenomenon of *gated communities* and the unintended consequences, principally social segregation of these types of communities (Schram, 2006). We should, however, ask ourselves whether these and other perceived negative effects of gated communities are really as grim as they are made out to be or whether this is the natural consequence of increasing consumerism and a decreased willingness of residents to invest time and money in the neighborhood they live in. Are the concerns voiced by Setha Low and others regarding homogeneous communities the result of observed problems in these communities or are they rather speculated outcomes based on theories dealing with homogeneous communities (see, for example, Gowricham, 2003 and Karlis, 1998)?

Research on *ideal* neighborhoods, i.e. mixed neighborhoods, has revealed that that level of acceptance in a neighborhood depends more on the level of physical presence than on ethnicity (Gowricham, 1997). Furthermore, in order for neighborhoods to function properly, shared norms and values are vitally important. Ethnically mixed neighborhoods are not always superior to homogeneous neighborhoods, especially in regard to the threat of social disintegration (see Saharso, 1992 for a discussion of the development of youth subcultures in ethnically mixed neighborhoods). In the United States ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods are often viewed as a source of social integration (Schnabel, 2000) and even if ethically homogeneous neighborhoods would reflect limited social integration, they could nevertheless be a reflection of the consumerism propagated in this article. Being open to new forms of community demands that we re-examine the doctrines and presuppositions we have concerning neighborhood and community life.

10. The impact of between group competition for the quality of housing
More and more often, cities are competing against each other to entice new business and residents to the city, a phenomenon called *city marketing*. The same techniques are also applied to new housing projects but sadly the neighborhood-marketing stops as soon as the houses have been sold when in fact neighborhood-marketing is particularly suited for the rental housing segment of the property market.

An example that demonstrates the power of neighborhood-marketing is the Bijlmermeer district in Amsterdam, built between 1965 and 1975. The original building plans for the Bijlmermeer were modern and exceedingly ambitious, consisting of 13.000 houses in 31 housing blocks. The first signs of more than average tension and conflict in the district became apparent in the 1970s and during the past several years, a number of housing blocks have been demolished and replaced by different types of housing. The involved parties have also invested a great deal of energy in improving the tarnished image of the district, drawing primarily on the landmarks of the district, positive happenings in the local neighborhoods as well as generating free publicity. Research into the way the Bijlmermeer is perceived has shown that this type of image promotion works and it has been argued that the technique should be applied more often in reconstruction projects (Wassenberg, 2004). The Bijlmermeer example also corresponds very well to a recent study done by Hastings (2004) on the impact of negative image of housing estates in Glasgow.

We should ask ourselves whether these positive effects of image promotion can also be applied to community forming. It is not inconceivable that in neighborhoods that struggle with a negative image there already exists a latent desire on the part of the residents to work at improving that image. What is important is that image promotion projects invest in the creation of a sense of belonging in a neighborhood for the long term and that the projects are not discontinued as soon as the first positive results are obtained. An interesting question is whether feelings of pride for a location or neighborhood can be activated or stimulated and the role of neighborhood marketing in that regard. Van Zoest (2006) has already pointed to the close association between image promotion and place attachment and in the book *Trots van de Plek* [*The Pride of the Place*] referred to earlier on, the authors explicitly link feelings of pride for a location to bonding with that location.

Very little is known about the utility of marketing in the public sector. In a study on the use of marketing in the context of the central government in the United Kingdom, it was concluded that the ethical concerns of civil servants regarding the application of commercial marketing techniques by the government in its communication with citizens hindered the successful application of the techniques in question (Kearsey and Varey, 1998). Even so, it was argued that a great deal of knowledge was needlessly being shunned because public services are defined by democratic processes and marketing is simply an operational tool.

City planners are increasingly using marketing techniques but it is still a long way from being as accepted as it is in business. Perhaps knowledge of product marketing could be communicated to the field of neighborhood and city marketing. Oftentimes, the competitive streak necessary for successful marketing is already present in cities as a whole; competition between neighborhoods is, however, more elusive whilst it is precisely in neighborhoods where marketing could be utilized for community forming. Research has already been conducted on the positive impact of competition on the performance of welfare organizations (Vickers, 1995) but more research is needed if we are to understand the potential for applying knowledge from the world of business to the housing domain. A good starting point in this regard would be to study the correlation between performance and intergroup competition

(see Conner, 2003 and Erev, Bornstein and Galili, 1993 for a discussion of the dynamics of intergroup competition).

11. Closing remarks: the housing association as an anchor

The last few years, Dutch housing associations have gone through a tremendous transformation due to changing legislation. As a result, the focus of housing associations has shifted from 'building' to 'developing', from 'house maintenance' to 'maintenance of houses and their environment' and from 'renting out' to 'providing services'. Originally, Dutch housing associations were initiatives set up by citizens and supported by the government, but their popularity amongst ordinary people has plummeted during the past few decades. Nevertheless, housing associations still have an important role to play in society, even if only because of their large housing stock. Housing associations can exert a tremendous influence on neighborhoods through reconstruction projects, easily eclipsing the influence of local government and welfare organizations. Both residents and the government see housing associations as businesslike developers when in fact housing associations were originally created to bring people together. Housing associations should return to this *fundamental instinct* which is the creation of communities.

Notes

[1] The text of the Dutch constitution is available in English from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs At   http://www.minbuza.nl/default.asp?CMS_TCP=tcpAsset&id=B883B79C05AC4421896B6D69823BC179

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