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ORIGINAL PAPER

Voice, exit and efficacy: dealing with perceived neighbourhood decline without moving out

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Abstract Residents of deprived urban neighbourhoods with a changing population often experience an increase in insecurity. If they judge the change as decline, they are likely to become less satisfied with their residential situation and exhibit coping tactics. This paper combines Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty theory with insights on personal and collective efficacy drawn mainly from the work of Bandura and Sampson in order to describe and interpret three coping tactics: (partly) withdraw, accept and adapt, and show voice. Neighbourhood loyalty can partly explain why residents choose a particular tactic. This loyalty relates to residents' place attachment and local social ties, but can sometimes be more or less forced when it results from of a lack of possibilities to move away. Those who cannot or do not want to move tend to exit by withdrawing from places or people in the neighbourhood. Their coping tactics contribute to feelings of personal efficacy but might harm collective efficacy. Exit-based tactics are often accompanied by a high degree of distrust towards other residents and/or local formal institutions. The more residents deploy exit-based coping tactics and the higher the degree of distrust among residents, the higher the pressure on collective efficacy and social control mechanisms in the neighbourhood.

Keywords Housing choice · Coping tactics · Efficacy · Deprived neighbourhoods · The Netherlands

1 Introduction

For the last 10 years or so, many deprived neighbourhoods in the Netherlands have been witnessing a growing sense of insecurity and unease among the residents. This insecurity is partly due to a combination of factors, some of which are related to the neighbourhood—for instance, physical restructuring and demolition, or a high turnover of occupants—and

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others which have no specific neighbourhood origin, such as unemployment or negative media coverage of a neighbourhood and its inhabitants. What many of these factors have in common is that they manifest themselves overtly in the residential environments, e.g. through nuisance, criminality, feelings of unsafety, or lack of trust. Insecurity relates not only to what happens here and now but also to what people expect to happen in the future (Innes and Jones 2006: 2). As a result of increasing insecurity and unease, long-standing residents might want to leave the neighbourhood they recognize less and less as their own and weigh their dissatisfaction against their social and emotional ties with the neighbourhood. When deciding whether moving out is the right thing to do, it matters to what extent the factors creating feelings of anxiety and unease develop into a increasingly negative long-term future for the neighbourhood and to what extent people believe that related problems can and will be solved.

This paper looks at the way residents who have grown increasingly dissatisfied with their neighbourhood but who feel they have few possibilities to exercise housing choice or who want to stay in the neighbourhood for other reasons deal with the perceived problematic character of the neighbourhood. Staying, and not moving out as a reaction to residential dissatisfaction, has rarely been considered in mobility studies (Kecskes 1994). The focus in this paper is precisely on those residents who feel that exiting the neighbourhood by moving out is not a viable option. The residents we will give a voice to in this paper, those who feel negative about changes going on in their neighbourhood, feel they do not have any other real possibility than to stay and cope. The paper investigates how perceived negative changes in deprived neighbourhoods relate to the way residents cope with the problems they experience in their daily residential environment. The next section sketches the dead-lock of a group of residents who cannot or will not leave the neighbourhood that imposes high levels of stress on them. Section 3 a combines Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty model with Bandura's and Sampson et al.'s work on self- and collective efficacy to form a frame which we will use to understand the tactics of residents who have to deal with neighbourhood-related stress. Section 4 presents the methodology as well as some basic empirical results. Section 5 describes three different forms of such coping tactics, based on in-depth interviews with residents in four deprived neighbourhoods. Section 6 analyses and discusses these coping tactics.

2 Insecurity in deprived neighbourhoods

Our approach in this paper is not to ascertain what causes insecurity in the four poverty neighbourhoods under study, but to take it as given and defined by residents themselves. Three major factors in the most deprived urban areas of Dutch big cities have increased a sense of insecurity and unease among residents. First, in many parts of these areas severe restructuring involving demolishing and renovating dwellings has taken place or will take place. Relatively cheap social housing in many cases has been or will be replaced by more expensive rental or owner-occupied dwellings. Particularly the future of small dwellings of relatively poor quality and their occupants is unsure. Besides the possible decline in control over the individual life course that restructuring entails, also the cohesion of social networks that exist in these neighbourhoods is at stake when many of their participants have to involuntary move out (cf. Kleinhans 2005). Second, besides the insecurity caused by restructuring, these neighbourhoods have also witnessed a strong inflow of migrants of several non-western origins among the newcomers settling in the area. The fast pace at which the composition of the population in many of the poor urban neighbourhoods has

changed has created a very heterogeneous mix of residents with different lifestyles, household compositions, cultural backgrounds and perspectives, but often homogeneously low income levels and degrees of economic inactivity. Many of the residents who have been living in these areas have experienced these changes as a kind of displacement, resulting in feelings of envy towards the new residents and embitterment (cf. Burgers and Engbersen 1994; Reijndorp 2004). Feijten and Van Ham recently showed that an increase in the proportion of non-western ethnic minorities in the neighbourhood and a high level of population turnover increases the probability that residents want to leave the neighbourhood (Feijten and van Ham 2007: 1). Third, many residents settling in deprived urban areas in the Netherlands are house seekers in desperate need of a dwelling as a result of an unstable personal situation. This might range from a change in household situation (e.g. a divorce) or a weak socio-economic position (laid-off or medically unfit for work), to being placed in a dwelling by an organization (e.g. an asylum or psychiatric institution) or having moved in with friends, partners or family members. According to a brochure by the Ministry of Housing, in a semi-regulated market like the social housing market, house seekers in such urgent need for a dwelling seem more easily to end up in areas of low demand, as they will often be prone to accept the first dwelling they can get into (VROM Inspectie 2008).

3 Voice, choice and efficacy

Coping tactics are seen here as ways of dealing with negative externalities in the residential environment in a situation when residents are not able to or do not want to move out of the neighbourhood. Many dissatisfied residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods complain about the fact that other people exhibit types of behaviour they disapprove of. Such changes in the social and cultural domain impinge on the ways residents shape their life worlds or 'effective environments' (Gans 1993). Often authors dealing with issues regarding reactions of individuals towards external change refer to Albert Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty framework (Hirschman 1970; see also Dowding et al. 2000). Simply put, his claim is that consumers react to a decline in product quality by either voice or exit. Voice refers to an active tactic, either individually or collectively, to express discontent verbally. Voice includes active appeal or protest and an attempt to change circumstances rather than to escape from them (Hirschman 1970: 30). Vertical voice takes place between people and formal institutions, whereas horizontal voice happens between neighbours, friends, or relatives. It is not a dichotomous concept, but can vary from quiet murmurings to collective action. Contrary to voice, people can also choose exit and leave a neighbourhood where a change has occurred with unfavourable outcomes for them. Exit in principle is a dichotomous variable, according to Hirschman: you leave or you do not.

In this paper, 'exit' does not need to mean actually moving out of the neighbourhood. Many of the respondents we interviewed do not feel they have a real possibility to improve their living circumstances by moving out, or they do not want to leave for other reasons, despite the fact that they are dissatisfied about the neighbourhood. In the latter case, they might have a possibility to move away and even improve their residential circumstances but still be hesitant to actually do so. Costs of moving and practical troubles as well as attachments to the neighbourhood and social ties they have developed during their residency can be good reasons to stay. If they are dissatisfied with the neighbourhood they will therefore not easily 'vote with their feet'. Instead, many of them 'exit' by withdrawing from the neighbourhood in a social sense or by avoiding particular places. In accordance

with Laver (1976: 463), who claims that “deterioration has the effect of making the consumer less inclined to buy the product”, we could similarly claim that perceived decline of the neighbourhood has the effect of making a resident less inclined to ‘consume’ the neighbourhood in its current state. A resident ‘exits’ when he terminates his use of the neighbourhood by moving out, or reduces his use by withdrawing from it. Because it is possible to withdraw in various ways and degrees, we will not treat exit as a dichotomous variable like Hirschman does but acknowledge different degrees of exit.

What explains why some people choose voice and others choose exit, according to Hirschman, is ‘loyalty’: a loyal person is likely to choose voice. If he is not loyal, then it is more likely that an exit tactic will be chosen. Paraphrasing Graham and Keeley (1992): 192, loyalty implies some sort of positive affective attachment that binds participants to a neighbourhood. Such an attachment discourages moving out of the neighbourhood, even when there are possibilities to do so. Hirschman’s favourite definition of loyalty refers to a more active type of loyalty, as he is mainly interested in exploring the ways organizations can recuperate from decline (ibid.: 194). His loyalty concept includes a high level of tolerance which at the same time is likely to activate voice by exerting pressure on those who can influence a change for the better. Loyalty is perceived as a factor that discourages exit and stimulates voice, “holds exit at bay and activates voice” (Hirschman 1970: 78). In support, Barry (1974, in Graham and Keeley 1992: 195) describes loyalty as a positive commitment to making change happen. Other types of loyalty, also described by Hirschman (1970), are more unconscious, silent and passive types of loyal behaviour. Loyalty need not include an inclination to act, as Birch and Farell claim (in Graham and Keeley 1992: 195), when residents would accept changes in their neighbourhood without uttering complaints. For analytical purposes all variations of loyalty are important, whether they are more likely to activate voice or instead suppress voice. Graham and Keeley (1992: 196) further argue that the effect of loyalty on voice is mitigated by other factors: organizational (in our case: neighbourhood) characteristics, situational features and individual differences. An important organizational characteristic is defined by formal means to exercise voice, which would in our case translate into resident community organizations and tenant organizations of housing associations. The atmosphere in the neighbourhood and its formal institutions with regard to receiving critical signals from residents is another such characteristic. Situational characteristics refer to the importance of the issue at hand and the pervasiveness of harm that it causes. Finally, individual differences refer to distinctive individual competences to communicate, express criticism, exercise trust or patience. But they also refer to affective ties that bind people to neighbourhoods and the time horizon that people have with regard to their future as neighbourhood residents. Graham and Keeley suggest that the longer the time span, the more likely it is that voice will be chosen instead of keeping silent.

Although Hirschman’s concepts and Graham and Keeley’s elaboration of them are useful to describe some of the dynamics of urban neighbourhoods (see e.g. Permentier et al. 2007), and helpful to understand why people make a choice to use exit or voice, they do not help much in understanding the effects of such choices or the success of a chosen coping tactic. Therefore we complement the EVL model with theoretical insights which have become known as efficacy theory (Bandura 1997) in order to understand how coping tactics can lead to a regained feeling of control and security. This complex of ideas rests on two concepts, that of self-efficacy (ibid.) and that of collective efficacy (Sampson et al. 1997).

Self-efficacy refers to the degree to which people are competent and capable, or see themselves as such, to achieve certain goals, i.e. to be effective. An individual’s efficacy increases when some degree of control can be exercised over the course of events, without

limiting personal freedom, exacerbating dissatisfaction, increasing stress, or aggravating the problems that cause that stress (Bandura 1997). Primary control refers to being able to change exogenous factors and in that respect compares to 'voice', whereas secondary control refers to a change in the mindset of an individual and adapting the perception of reality. In the context of this paper we deal with efficacious residents when they are able, or believe themselves to be able, to deal with change in the neighbourhood that is perceived as negative and stressful by doing something about the source of stress or change (primary control) or by changing their own mindset (secondary control), and so doing reduce the stress they experience and become more satisfied with the neighbourhood.

Exerting primary control over events in the neighbourhood is often impossible without a collective element, because the social and neighbourhood bound structures in which residents participate might emerge from individual actions, but also occur in the context of social structures in and beyond the neighbourhood. If residents exercise primary control together with other residents we would consider that to be contributing to collective efficacy. They are able to address other residents to take action in order to regain a sense of control over events and detrimental changes in the residential environment (cf. Sampson et al. 1997: 919). Lack of trust in other residents reduces such collective efficacy. Social relations and contacts reproducing trust in other residents are therefore important drivers for developing collective efficacy. In neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation as well as ethnic heterogeneity chances for collective efficacy are low in comparison with more homogeneous well-to-do neighbourhoods.

4 Methodology and some basic results

We used both a survey as well as qualitative interviews to investigate the main questions set out above. In 2005 and 2006 we carried out our Housing Choice Survey among 1,098 households in four deprived urban neighbourhoods, located in The Hague (Transvaal-Midden and Moerwijk-West) and Amsterdam (Indische Buurt-Noordoost and the Van Lennepbuurt). The final response from the random sample totalled 28%. Following the survey, in 2007 we held in-depth interviews with 38 residents in these four neighbourhoods. The interviews enabled us to study the meaning of some of the correlations we found in the survey between variables dealing with housing choice and variables dealing with the way residents experience and evaluate the neighbourhood.

The neighbourhoods were selected on the basis of the following criteria: the urban context, mean level of income, the mean degree of residential satisfaction, type of neighbourhood, and the absence of large restructuring projects.

To start with the urban context, we limited ourselves to neighbourhoods in cities of 50,000 inhabitants or more. Some of the country's poorest neighbourhoods are in the rural North, but we expected that the issue of housing choice would be very different there compared to the high density and tight housing markets in the urbanized West of the Netherlands. This added up to 1,287 postcode areas.

Of these neighbourhoods, 69 (5.4%) belong to the category of poor neighbourhoods as we defined them, i.e. in which 40% or more of the households belongs to the first and lowest income quintile. The upper limit of this quintile is €13,160 disposable income per household, based on the income distribution in 1998 from RIO data (regional income distribution), being the most recent data at the time of the analysis. To give a rough idea of how much that is, the gross minimum wage of an employee of 23 years or older was €12,565 per year in 1998.

Also, we wanted to compare two neighbourhoods from the same city in order to learn more about the importance of neighbourhood satisfaction for the housing choices people make. In one of the neighbourhoods satisfaction would have to be relatively high, in the other relatively low. This requirement further restricted the neighbourhoods that could be included in the survey to cities in which at least two neighbourhoods belong to the category of poor neighbourhoods as defined above.

Finally, the four neighbourhoods were also chosen for lack of immediate or short-term restructuring activities (although in all of them restructuring will take place in the future) in order to avoid respondents whose future life in the neighbourhood will soon end because they will have to move out.

The four neighbourhoods selected were: Indische Buurt and Van Lennepbuurt in Amsterdam, and Moerwijk as well as Transvaal in The Hague. The Indische Buurt in Amsterdam can be classified as a neighbourhood with relatively many large migrant families in social housing. Transvaal in The Hague is quite similar in terms of households, but has a more equal mix of social housing, private tenure and owner-occupation. Moerwijk can be characterised as a neighbourhood with more elderly people, who are often long-standing residents, and less migrants. The Van Lennepbuurt has a mix of tenure, with more young people and also less migrant residents. Transvaal, Indische Buurt and Van Lennepbuurt are pre-WWII neighbourhoods; Moerwijk is a post-war neighbourhood. Some basic characteristics of the four neighbourhoods are summarized in Table 1, in order to give an impression of the kinds of neighbourhoods the respondents were drawn from.

We decided not to draw a sample, as it would be hard to compose one (Dutch local governments do not simply provide data about residents, especially ethnicity), but instead to approach about 1,000 residents in each neighbourhood. To do so, we picked an area in each neighbourhood which was well demarcated by 'obvious' landmarks such as large streets, parks etcetera. All residents in these areas received a questionnaire. To increase response, these residents were personally asked by students one week later to send in their questionnaires. The questionnaire included items about the current residential situation, the degree of housing choice residents experienced and reasons to choose their particular neighbourhood. Most questions had fixed answering categories or had to be answered on a 4- or 5-point scale. The overall response rate was 28%. In qualitative terms, however, the response was good, though there was a slight underrepresentation of non-western immigrants in all neighbourhoods and an overrepresentation of residents in social housing in the Van Lennepbuurt. Because the field research was conducted in only four poverty neighbourhoods in two cities, we should not try to draw general conclusions about these cities. However, in our opinion the results do represent urban poverty areas with regard to the mechanisms at work on the low end of the housing market, including social housing, affecting the way concentrations of poverty are reproduced and experienced in everyday life in urban poverty areas.

The survey was followed by in-depth interviews with a selection of the respondents picked randomly from two categories: those who indicated to have experienced little housing choice and those who did experience housing choice. All 38 interviews (about ten in each neighbourhood) were literally transcribed, coded and analysed by using ATLAS-ti.

Although the deregulation in the allocation of housing has overall benefited house seekers by an increase in their degree of housing choice (cf. Kullberg 2002), our Housing Choice Survey shows that there is still a large proportion of residents who experience little choice. These residents stated that they did not choose their dwelling consciously or that they did not have any other choice than to accept the dwelling they were offered (van der Laan Bouma-Doff and van der Land 2007). More specifically, the survey shows that 30%

Table 1 Socio-demographic, socio-economic background characteristics and neighbourhood evaluation (census data)

	Indische Buurt (Oost)	Van Lennepbuurt	Moerwijk (West)	Transvaal (Midden)
Household				
Couple w/o children	18	18	21	18
Couple with children	16	8	30	21
Single parent	10	7	9	12
Single household	47	64	40	49
Other	9	4	0	0
Ethnicity				
Dutch	33	53	46	20
Surinamese	14	8	9	29
Antilleans	1	1	5	3
Turkish	12	4	7	21
Moroccan	19	10	9	11
Other	21	24	24	16
Tenure				
Social housing	78	64	95	60
Private rental	12	28	1	13
Owner-occupation	10	8	4	24
Income				
% low incomes	43	43	42	43
Evaluation of the neighbourhood (rating out of ten points)	5.7	7.3	6.4	4.1

stated they had deliberately chosen the dwelling, 10% chose the neighbourhood, and 23% claim they chose both the dwelling and the neighbourhood. The remaining 37% of the respondents claimed not to have made a deliberate choice at all. A little less than half (49%) also claimed they did not plan to stay for a long time when they accepted their current dwelling.

Another strong indication that lack of housing choice is a real and experienced issue in poverty neighbourhoods is provided by answers given to a question also used in the national Housing Demand Survey, i.e. if residents feel they had a choice or not when they accepted their dwelling. In our survey 46% claimed they did not. This perceived lack of housing choice is not by definition perceived as a problem by residents themselves. Some residents just do not have particularly strong housing preferences and do not value choice so much. Others are just content, or even grateful, with the dwelling they were offered (but did not choose), and they do not really consider the issue of choice.

The Housing Choice Survey also revealed that 54% of the respondents find the quality of life in the neighbourhood to have declined to some extent, against 31% who think the neighbourhood has improved. Another indication that housing choice plays a role in the way residents evaluate the neighbourhood is the correlation of the survey variable 'had no other choice than to accept this dwelling' with the level of expressed satisfaction with the neighbourhood. Those who did experience choice rated the neighbourhood on average at 6.5

out of 10, those who did not rated it at 5.4.[1] The combination of a perceived lack of housing choice with a negative evaluation of the neighbourhood, which is the main problematic background for this paper, appears to be present among 28% of the respondents.[2]

In the interviews we did not explicitly ask the residents how they coped with the problems they encounter in their daily routines while living in a deprived neighbourhood. As the survey results suggest, not all interviewees view the neighbourhood as ‘problematic’ and feel they have to ‘cope’. Most often, residents of these areas do have a degree of choice and are overall rather satisfied with the neighbourhood they live in. However, we did ask all residents for examples when they talked about different aspects of the neighbourhood and their evaluation. This provided us with enough detail to start trying to define tactics of residents on how to cope with troubles in daily neighbourhood life. The names mentioned with their quotes are fictional.

5 Coping tactics in the four deprived neighbourhoods

In this section we explore the issue of exit, voice and efficacy in the coping tactics of residents in four poverty neighbourhoods, in order to be able to derive more general insights from the residents’ reactions to unwanted neighbourhood developments. We start out with tactics which are mainly (but not only) based on exit in which residents partly withdraw from the neighbourhood. This is followed by a section in which residents accept and adapt to change. We end with residents showing strong voice.

5.1 ‘Your world shrinks’

A substantial part of the respondents in the Housing Choice survey experience little housing choice, but even when they do experience choice, that does not mean that moving out is a viable alternative to facing problems in the neighbourhood. There are many practical hassles connected with moving house, there are social motives to stay, and besides that, moving often is not cheap. Also, many interviewees are wary of the alternative neighbourhoods that they might choose from, expecting that the same decline in quality of life they experienced here might happen to them there. Beside all this, often people have developed strong attachments to the place where they live. Place attachment usually refers to an affective link between a person and a place, is highly correlated with length of residence, and not necessarily absent when characteristics of that place are valued negatively (cf. Brown and Perkins 1992; Hernández et al. 2007: 310). Place attachment among our interviewees sometimes proves to be so strong that leaving a neighbourhood is not really an option for many of them, despite their dissatisfaction. Observing that the neighbourhood has serious flaws need not mean that residents do not feel at home where they live.

If these flaws occur and if they experience these as severe enough, residents have to find a way to deal with them. Issues that we noted during our interviews were e.g. litter and garbage in the street, noisy neighbours, feelings of unsafety in public space as well as in the

[1] A logistical regression analysis controlling for a range of variables influencing housing choice, such as age, gender, household composition, ethnicity, education, paid labour, tenure etc., underscores the likelihood that constrained choice has an independent effect on the way that residents evaluate the neighbourhood (van der Laan Bouma-Doff and van der Land 2007).

[2] These residents say they did not have any choice but to accept the current dwelling and they give their neighbourhood 6 or less points out of 10.

semi-private apartment stairways, verbal abuse, lack of contacts with others, etc. Coping tactics of residents often have elements of both exit and voice. The latter shows up moderately in the reactionary statements and verbal disapproval of the neighbourhood expressed to us as interviewers, especially with regard to newly arrived migrant residents. Many interviewees wanted to talk almost exclusively about the way the neighbourhood had changed for the worse over the last five to ten years, and blame new migrant residents for that. More than once interviewees, like Mr. van‘t Hek in the Indische Buurt, pointed out to us where the last white Dutch people were living, as if they were the last symbolic strongholds in the neighbourhood:

> I do not think I have the social skills to get in contact with Moroccan and Turkish people, in the sense that friendships … There are some Dutch people, who I greet, or whose cat you will take care of. Well, that is very worthwhile, that they are here. And then I hope that they will stay. Last year some [Dutch] people on the other side left … no, 2 months ago. A small family, they went to IJburg [a new neighbourhood]. Well, that is really a loss.
> - Why is that a loss?
> Well, it is a loss because, you know, you connect more easily. People like you, so to speak. (…) There is a Spar [supermarket]. It is an old fashioned Spar with a Dutch owner and, well, that is familiar territory, the same way of doing things, or better, an old fashioned way of doing things, an old fashioned grocer, polite and saying hello, that to me is important and precious.

To further illustrate how the dynamics in neighbourhood population can result in a shrinking life world, we highlight the case of Mrs. van Zweden, who lives in Moerwijk. She explains how neighbourhood change has made her retreat from the neighbourhood in several ways. Her tactic mainly has elements of exit, but she does also voice some of her distress to others. It seems that most coping tactics have elements of both exit and voice, although in this case exit is dominant.The job Mrs. van Zweden holds, administrative work for a foreign embassy, allows her to spend many office hours at home behind her desk, which is placed next to a window at the front of her apartment. From where she sits she is able to overlook the street and observe the poor state many of the front gardens are in. Her street, like most in the neighbourhood, has three-storey apartment buildings on both sides, with social housing consisting of small two-bedroom apartments. At the back, the apartments face the inner garden—a well-kept strip of green with trees, planting and play facilities for kids. From her balcony she often observes neighbours getting rid of leftovers by throwing the refuse from the balcony into the collective garden. In the early years of this neighbourhood, she claims, such behaviour would not have occurred. To her it symbolizes the indifferent attitude of neighbourhood residents towards other residents. In earlier days, she says, people took pride in a well-kept front garden, the inner gardens were tidy, and the streets were kept clean. Based on her observations other residents make a mess of public space. She discriminates between ‘Dutch people’, people who behave in a stereotypical 1950s Dutch way, and foreigners, meaning those people, mostly but not necessarily migrants, who behave differently.Her annoyance with the way some residents behave expresses itself partly in exit behaviour. She has stopped visiting local shops, and after having visited the neighbourhood centres to look for community activities she never went back because all the participants were migrants. Excluded from neighbourhood amenities, she feels forced to withdraw from social life in the neighbourhood, be it much against her will:

> Your world shrinks a lot. I once took a visit to the neighbourhood centres, well, there are only … eh. They do give courses, but I do not have to learn Dutch. Belly dancing does not interest me much, no. I have known how to ride a bicycle for a long time. (…) I do understand though, neighbourhood centres in a neighbourhood full of Ali's, things must be adapted to them. But we are excluded! Shops are adapted to them, activities in the neighbourhood centres are adapted to them. What about us?

She consciously avoids particular places in public space:

> You should not go there, because you will find a Pitbull in your … well, I own two Dachshunds who are no match for these dogs. So I do not go there anymore. It is a shame, because in one of the gardens close to the water there was always this Dutch man, handicapped, (…) who loved petting the dogs. He has also left the neighbourhood. He was born here!

The current state the neighbourhood is in does not suit her one bit. The pitbull dog she mentions symbolizes the indifference and rudeness of other people in the area. If she gets the chance, she says, she will move out of the city to live somewhere else in the The Hague region. Lack of housing choice prohibits her from doing so in the short run. The only way out is to retreat from the neighbourhood. Her main social contacts are targeted towards other native Dutch people, and especially poor elderly people, who adhere to the norms and values she herself finds important too. She brings evening meals to the shrinking group of 'Dutch' pensioners who she knows are poor and cannot (afford to) take care of themselves, as was common in the 1950s. Nowadays, with so many foreigners around, some of whom she blames for disturbing daily life, she feels increasingly alone:

> Saïd is a nice boy and that Turkish neighbour … despite that it irritates me that he has a big satellite dish … is a decent man. But, if everyone [Dutch] leaves, your world shrinks and I think that is a waste.

Her dissatisfaction with other people in the neighbourhood is accompanied by a decrease of trust, not only her trust in many other residents, but also her trust in official regulating institutions. Like so many other residents, Mrs van Zweden explained her feelings of discrimination and victimization by pointing at the influx of migrants in the neighbourhood. She claims that the authorities allow migrants to behave in ways indigenous Dutch are not allowed to. Her distrust in other people and institutions reflects her insecurity about her future in the neighbourhood. Mrs. van Zweden voices the problems she experiences, together with other residents, by calling upon the police as well as the housing association when there is trouble somewhere, but she doubts if it is worth the effort:

> When we (…) call the police, they will come. They will stand there, not only where I live but also with other Dutch neighbours (…) They stand and watch. They acknowledge it (…) but nothing happens! Really, nothing happens!

Mr. Grasman from the Indische Buurt in Amsterdam is another resident who has started to retreat from the neighbourhood. Grasman's mother had been living close to his house up until her death a couple of years ago. Although he increasingly disliked the way his neighbourhood changed, being born and raised in the neighbourhood he found it hard to move elsewhere, besides the fact that he would also have to leave his mother behind. His work kept him occupied however and he was happy to be able to look after his mother. Ever since his mother died and he lost his job as a typesetter, he has started to dislike the

neighbourhood and the uncivilized behaviour of many people that he encounters on the streets and in the supermarket. He connects that to the increased presence of migrants in his neighbourhood:

> If I go into the Albert Heijn [supermarket], then somebody comes out, then I let them go first and then I go in. No, I come with two bags and they will just walk into you and they will call you names (…) And if you say something in return, it is like "yeah, because I am black huh?" And I find that so mean. (…) I just do not feel comfortable there, because I am not like that. I am more like easy-going, and polite, and norms and values. And then you see that around you, you see that changes.

Having developed a keen interest in building activities all over Amsterdam, he goes out for a walk a lot, but never in the neighbourhood itself. Increasingly, he avoids people on the streets in his neighbourhood and other social contacts in the area:

> It happened only this week. Someone was acting very clumsy with his bike. (…) They use the sidewalks for biking, which I do not approve, and they will tell you to go out of their way and say 'Watch out! (…) I came walking towards him with two large shopping bags, so he wanted to jump off his bike and fell. You know he could just have stepped off his bike normally and walk. So he fell down. And I am not going to help anymore and pick up his stuff. (…) It looks like each for his own.

Like Mrs. van Zweden, his tactic of retreat from contact with others in the neighbourhood goes hand in hand with a great deal of distrust towards the official institutions, like the police, the local government and community organizations:

> I volunteered to join Parent Watch. That is a project to keep an eye on loitering youth. (…) I was the only Dutchman. There was a Russian and a couple of Turkish and Moroccan people. And the woman [in charge] said 'I want you to speak Dutch to each other'. I said 'That is fine with me'. But when she left the Turkish began speaking Turkish to each other and the Moroccan did the same. And I was the only Dutchman, so I said 'What is this about?' 'Well, we find this is easier' [they said]. So I went to the woman [in charge] and I told her about it. She said 'Come on, it is not that bad' and 'Aren't you being a little bit racist?' So I said 'OK, I quit'. (…) And we spend millions on projects like that.

In order to avoid spending time in the neighbourhood, he goes for walks elsewhere and also finds retreat at home, where he keeps his collection of statues of the Virgin Mary. His small house is well kept and decorated and functions as a kind of sanctuary for him. The same goes for Mrs. van der Hoop from Moerwijk, who has been living in the neighbourhood for more than 15 years now, but who has also gradually retreated from the social domain into her own dwelling. She feels she has little in common with many of her migrant neighbours in the same apartment block. She acknowledges that she has been using the car increasingly to go shopping, even when it is to the local grocery. Her house, which to us as interviewers was proudly presented, is like a small palace, rightly decorated, and well locked:

> No, it is in my house where I feel good. It is not that I go into the streets and think "oh what a nice neighbourhood" or something like that. (…) I always say: I have a fine place. I am happy with my dwelling. I lock the door, I have a … I am like the Bank of England. I have several locks on the door. Nobody comes in who I do not want to.

By retreating into the private sphere of the house, the process of retreat and privatization can also be carried out on the internet. Chatting on the computer can also be an effective tactic to avoid the neighbourhood and expand a social network outside of the neighbourhood. We encountered the example of Mr. Brancatelli, a second generation Italian immigrant who divorced and ended up in Moerwijk. Pictures of his Filipino girlfriends hang in smart photo frames on the walls of his living room and much of his spare time is spent keeping in close touch with his social network located on the other side of the world. His social world in the neighbourhood might have shrunk, but not so in the virtual world:

> I leave work at four o'clock, so at 10 min past I am home, because I work close by. (…) Then you have a long night ahead. And then I immediately start chatting. (…) They will wait for me and otherwise leave an e-mail saying "I waited but you were not there.

To summarize, in response to the perceived changes in the neighbourhood many interviewees have started to avoid particular aspects of the neighbourhood. This often involves withdrawal from social contacts with others in public space by spending more time in the house or outside the neighbourhood. In spatial terms, this can translate into taking particular routes in the neighbourhood, avoiding the places where the supposed agents of change, often migrant newcomers to the area, can be encountered.

5.2 'It is better to adapt'

Beside retreating from people and places in the neighbourhood, another possible solution is to adapt to these flaws, or at least to accept them. Mr. van Haren, who lives in the Van Lennepbuurt in Amsterdam, both accepts as well as adapts. He is an artist with a work studio just outside the neighbourhood. He spends a lot of time there, not only for the lack of excitement and beauty in public space, but also because he has never felt accepted by his neighbours from the apartment block:

> I have a conflict with my neighbours. (…) They are always on at me. (…) I have not adjusted myself, but I have retreated from that part of public life. (…) My workplace is where I am free. That is where I do not have to explain to anybody what I am doing. Inside my house I have the feeling my neighbours are listening (…) [My workplace] is not as good as my house in terms of construction quality. The roof leaks and it is cold. (…) I have found a kind of balance.

He stopped thinking that he can change the way things are in the neighbourhood, especially his relation with the neighbours. His reaction is a mix of acceptance, but also retreat:

> At that time [when he moved in] I felt like a hostage here, and now I have … I have freed myself from that. I find it really hard to free myself from such a problem, because to me it is a threat. But well, it is one-sided, I cannot do much about it. The only thing I can do is not to take it personally. (…) I live here, they live there and so be it. Let us not do something about it anymore.

Mrs. Soedamah, from Moerwijk has a similar mix of retreat and acceptance, in which accepting is not positively motivated, but the result of an attitude of 'giving up' on others, reflecting a lack of hope that others will change their behaviour:

> When I came to live here I really had to get used to it [fighting in the street]. I had never experienced something like that before. But you get used to it. Really. First I wanted to move, but then I realized I had to wait at least 2 years. I had to put up with it. Assimilate. And that is what I have done.

Like many other interviewees, Mr. van Haren's dissatisfaction is not only directed at fellow neighbourhood residents, but also at official institutions. This distrust is partly based on the fact that he had to wait for a dwelling for many years, while raising two daughters, in a neighbourhood with a bad reputation. He has no illusions about his chances for moving out and finding a better neighbourhood:

> I am very suspicious about the housing association, because I believe they have a hidden agenda. You can notice that. In the case of [the particular housing association] you can see that. They are very open about it themselves. (…) The waiting lists are endless. I have been waiting for an offer [for a dwelling] for 8 years, with two small kids. (…) They offered me a house in the Spaarndammerbuurt. Well, you know what it is like over there! It is a garbage can. And there are such huge social problems.

Accepting the changed state of affairs in the neighbourhood need not necessarily be succumbing to circumstances which have become too heavy to bear. It can also take a more light-hearted form, as in the case of the De Groot family from Moerwijk:

> I can imagine that elderly people in their eighties are really very annoyed with what is going on in their neighbourhood. (…) She [a neighbour] has been living there for fifty-odd years and according to her the neighbourhood is rapidly deteriorating. And she is probably right, but well … Time is not standing still, things change. I mean, you can fight all that, but you can also try to adjust. And when it is really getting out of hand, you can say something about it … (…) It is a matter of give and take. You cannot change the situation, because you cannot change those people who have come to live there.

Their liberal and positive attitude has been supported by their social interactions with neighbours, which are in general harmonious and based on mutual respect. They focus on what is good in their neighbourhood:

> Sometimes I hear music and I think well that is not my kind of music. It is a special kind of music. But you know, they might not like my music either. It is their culture and then I think, let them, if that is what they like.

5.3 'Do not retreat or adapt, do something about it!'

Though not actively participating in formal neighbourhood institutions, Mr. Brancatelli puts effort into keeping Moerwijk under some degree of control. Besides the owner of the tattoo shop, he is one of the very few in his street, he claims, who exercises some social control. He spends much of his time on the couch in front of the window on the second floor, from where he can watch a large part of the street. More than once he intervened in life down below, by confronting others with his posture, like when his son got in trouble with other guys hanging around outside. Although he used violence during this confrontation, the police thanked him for having stood up for the neighbourhood:

> We put up a big fight, you do not want to know. The blood was on the walls. (…) That they escaped is their luck. Because my brother, I must be honest, my youngest brother would not mind putting a gun to your head.

Although his manner of speech is very tough, he has an eye for injustice. “If someone is done wrong, I go at it!”, he claims. His physical intervention is an act of resistance against the downward spiral he perceives his neighbourhood to be in. It is aimed at keeping control over life on the street where he lives, and he stresses it is not so much about actively restoring order for the sake of the community. Nevertheless, although not intended, when others see him expressing his disapproval of behaviour in public space, a collective effect might result from his individually motivated action of controlling public space. The example suggests that voice need not be directed at other possible supporters to gain their support. For Mr. Brancatelli his behaviour seems to be a way of sustaining his self-efficacy, which can have the possible side effect that collective efficacy is reinforced as well.

Another intervention based on voice instead of exit or acceptance/adaptation, of which we found only few instances in our four poverty neighbourhoods, is that of Mrs. Herandu from the Indische Buurt. Hers however is explicitly directed at the community level. Mrs. Herandu, of Surinamese origin, is very critical about the effects of changes in the population on public life in the neighbourhood. She has however consciously chosen to live in the Indische Buurt and is not about to leave, as she claims that moving out will not help solve the problems in the area. Instead, she puts a lot of effort into organizing a musical about slavery, for which she invites youth from the neighbourhood to participate. Her aim is to bring indigenous Dutch people and migrants closer together by looking into the shared history of the Surinamese and Dutch.

> I wrote a musical about slavery and my dream would be to embed it in the neighbourhood and show that there are also positive things coming from the neighbourhood. Because I can say that I want to move, but in my impression a lot has changed and it is a nice neighbourhood to live in. (…) By moving you do not solve the problems. You can also do something in another way I think, to show people … the positive. (…) So I approached Zeeburg [the local council] and said I wanted to do this, you know, an energetic whole, that there will be theatre, but also to shake up other cultures and say let us give the neighbourhood a boost …

She feels that some of the spontaneity surrounding neighbouring contacts has disappeared over the years and mutual social support among residents has diminished. She voices her ideas by stimulating youngsters to become culturally active, join her musical and revitalize the contact between residents of different ethnic backgrounds:

> That you can really … together with young people in the neighbourhood … make them aware, that you can turn negative into positive. Make them aware that we might be in a poverty culture but can be rich in understanding. (…) We will do everything ourselves, seek young people, older people, who want to help me build. (…) You involve everyone in it, you know? It is a neighbourhood thing.

6 Discussion and conclusion

Fast changes in the population structure, especially changes in the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood population, plans to restructure the neighbourhood and demolish dwellings, and increasing concentration of socio-psychologically problematic behaviours

in the neighbourhood can lead to insecurity among residents of deprived neighbourhoods. To understand the extent to which such insecurity influences personal well-being and overall satisfaction with the residential situation, it can be very helpful to study the degree of loyalty of residents with regard to the neighbourhood, including the degree to which residents are able to exercise housing choice. Dissatisfaction about the way the neighbourhood has developed can be deepened by the awareness that a real housing choice is lacking, especially if the area shows signs of serious decline. In the neighbourhoods we studied, many residents feel they have little housing choice, not only because that is objectively so, but also because they feel that moving out will not improve their housing situation or because they are tied and attached to the neighbourhood. The combination of being 'trapped' in the neighbourhood, so to speak, and dissatisfaction about the residential environment can lead to stress followed by coping tactics in order to deal with that stress.

Using Hirschman's famous concepts of voice and exit, and adding to this model some insights from the literature on both self- and collective efficacy, we have described and interpreted the tactics that those residents who perceive a decline in quality of life developed in order to become more satisfied with the neighbourhood. Because of our small sample, in this paper we have not taken account of the differences between the four neighbourhoods where our interviewees live. Common to all of the four neighbourhoods, however, are the many comments uttered by a wide range of residents, from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, about neighbourhood decline in relation to changes in population.

There did not appear to be much faith among residents that negative circumstances can be turned around by working together with fellow residents. We mentioned two examples of tactics involving initiatives that go beyond the individual domain. These voice-based tactics produce effects that can change part of the social climate in the neighbourhood, stimulate social control and reinforce self-efficacy as well as collective efficacy. Coping tactics can take many shapes, but most dominant in our neighbourhoods are tactics not involving voice. These tactics do not necessarily involve exit behaviour by moving out, but should not be taken as merely symbolic either: exiting here means actual withdrawal from the neighbourhood – socially, physically and mentally. These patterns of exit are not simply a matter of a lack of loyalty, as Hirschman claims, but must also be seen against the background of a lack of both personal and collective efficacy. Those who exit do not consider themselves disloyal to the neighbourhood, but they do often feel neglected and left behind, as they feel alienated from the social environment they live in. For reasons of strong place attachment, strong particular social ties, or for functional reasons these residents want to stay loyal to the neighbourhood but feel incapable of exercising control and effectuating their loyalty feelings. To them, exit does, however, seem to offer a way to restore some degree of satisfaction with the neighbourhood in a context of dysfunctioning collective efficacy. Even though exit-based tactics seem to curb the individuals' liberty to go wherever they like and to meet whoever they like, and should therefore not be seen as acts of self-efficacy, they do seem to have a function in reducing stress levels and increasing a sense of control over the residential environment. Similarly, in coping tactics based on acceptance of, or adaptation to, neighbourhood circumstances, it appears that both self-efficacy and collective efficacy are lacking. Non-voice-based tactics have little potential to contribute, or might even be detrimental, to the functioning of social control mechanisms. Due to the absence of trusted channels of communication between residents, it is difficult to address issues arising from tensions in the neighbourhood, and the communication is especially poor between residents from different ethnic groups (Hudson et al. 2007: 30). In the long run, the individual life worlds of residents in social environments

where residents retreat from instead of participate in the neighbourhood, and thus reinforce deficient social control mechanisms, might become even more insecure.

As we hope to have demonstrated, exit tactics are prone to have a detrimental effect on the functioning of social control mechanisms with regard to public space in the neighbourhood. This option will make it harder for a neighbourhood to collectively combat perceived decline. It is likely that this is exacerbated by the low level of trust in official institutions that we encountered. If the problems that the retreating residents mention are real, in terms of possible negative consequences for the liveability of the area, then informal mechanisms of social control should be connected to formal sources in order for the neighbourhood to recover (Innes and Jones 2006). For local area-oriented Dutch policymakers therefore, the exit tactics of residents in response to stressful circumstances in their environment are bad news. Their policies are increasingly based on expectations about active participation of residents. The fact that some of these residents withdraw from the neighbourhood and show distrust towards formal institutions like housing associations does not make it very likely that they will participate in projects originating from, or even supported by, these formal institutions. Unless there are other groups of residents (not encountered in our fieldwork) who will participate, breaking through this self-reinforcing pattern will be one of the major challenges confronting residents and policymakers alike in today's deprived neighbourhoods.

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