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CHAPTER 6

DISPLACEMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION*

Citizen participation is often regarded as a means to increase local democracy. Seldom is participation viewed as a means to legitimate disruptive practices of states. However, participation can become a tool for the effective implementation of policy rather than a means to enhance justice, if no power is transferred to citizens. Displacement in Amsterdam is a case in point. Here the local council together with housing corporations yearly forces over 2,000 households to leave their houses, a consequence of an ambitious policy of state-led gentrification. Following Foucault, I explore the rationalities and techniques employed to ensure compliance. The promise of influence lures tenants into lengthy discussions with power holders. Investment choices are presented as objective facts and so provide a rationale for the disruptive interventions. Participation thus provides government a platform to impose its views in a context of severe power asymmetries, while alternatives are marginalised and dissent is disciplined.

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6.1 Introduction

In discussions about citizen participation it is often assumed that the goal of such practices is to enhance local democracy. This research shows it can also be used to ensure co-operation of citizens without allowing them any meaningful influence. In Amsterdam, during the past five years for instance, over 10,000 households have been forced to leave their houses as a result of the city's policy of state-led gentrification. (Amsterdam Federation of Housing Corporations 2008, 2010, 2011). However, no serious contestation against this displacement¹ exists and it is not an item in public debate. It seems to be invisible. That is strange, since displacement is a very invasive, large and mainly negative change in people's lives. This led to the following research question: How is displacement in Amsterdam being legitimated? Following Johnson *et al.* (2006), I define legitimation as the process by which state interventions come to be seen as normal, as just, accepted as 'the way things are'. In particular, I was curious how displacement is legitimated to the to-be-displaced people. The answer lies in the promise of citizen participation. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that citizen participation plays a large role in generating tenants' compliance with their displacement. By engaging tenants in a deliberative process, power holders create the opportunity to effectively shape and limit the discursive space concerning displacement.

As a result of progressive policies, Amsterdam's housing stock consisted for the last thirty years predominantly of affordable rental housing, distributed through local government. Since the mid-1990s, however, the city has adopted a neoliberal² agenda of delivering the majority of all housing to the forces of the market as quickly as possible (Uitermark 2009). This project is carried out in partnership with Amsterdam's six housing corporations, not-for-profit organisations that own more than half of all Amsterdam housing, by demolishing or renovating the latter's existing blocks of houses, causing displacement of the current tenants. Together they have developed a bureaucratic routine that streamlines this practice. Before going into more detail, I summarise this process briefly.

In line with classical gentrification theory, the transformation process starts with disinvestment (Smith 1996). During this period the housing corporation ceases to invest money in maintenance. This leads

to problems such as leaking roofs. The local council does not interfere. Every time somebody leaves, the house will be left empty or let out on a temporary basis. When tenants ask the housing corporation about future plans they obtain no clear answers. This period of abandonment and uncertainty prepares tenants for an upcoming change while leaving them in the dark about actual plans. After ten or more years without maintenance, tenants are informed that given the bad state of their houses, demolition or a total overhaul of the block is needed, so they have to leave. They are offered replacement housing, a financial compensation and formal participation. According to Dutch law, at least 70 per cent of all households have to agree with the plans before the housing corporation can execute them. This seems to sufficiently safeguard the interests of the tenants.

However, housing corporations present their plans as the only viable option. The poor technical state of the houses is used to justify the conversion into owner-occupied apartments or free-market rentals. In reality, the level of proposed improvements such as the size of the new apartments and the quality of the amenities are subject to choice. A very high quality upgrade, as intended, results in high rents unaffordable for the current tenants as well as the necessity to sell some of the apartments to cover the investment, resulting in displacement. In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, also a discourse of the necessity to increase social mix prevails. Because they lack specialised technical and financial knowledge, tenants often assume there is indeed no alternative and comply. Negotiations with the housing corporation subsequently continue in a constructive atmosphere. All parties have come to understand participation as tenants obtaining some influence on how they will be displaced, not whether. When tenants on the other hand do not accept this framed reality, they find out that participation does not grant them any power. What follows then is a struggle of many years, ending with the housing corporation pushing its plans through, or punishing the tenants by returning to the phase of disinvestment. In the remainder of this chapter, first some relevant strands of literature are touched upon, in particular theories of citizen participation and governmentality. I continue by providing a rationale for my ethnographic case studies, a research method well suited to examine rationalities and techniques of governmentality. Then the source of the displacement, Amsterdam's trans-

formative housing policy, is examined. Subsequently, I elaborate on my argument through two contrasting case-studies. The first case demonstrates how tenants are made to comply, while the second case explores what happens if they resist. I conclude that the institutionalised practice of participation serves mainly to efficiently implement and legitimise displacement, not to give those directly involved voice.

6.2 Displacement, legitimation and citizen participation

The literature on citizen participation does not often approach its topic from the angle of legitimation. Rather, it tends to focus on the idea that giving people a say about their direct environs and making them co-responsible in the process is a way to make governance more democratic (Delli Carpini *et al.* 2004). Related to this, there exists a tendency to favour abstract normative stances over empirically informed analyses (Marrinetti 2003). For instance, the ideas of Jürgen Habermas motivated many writers to envisage what form citizen participation ideally should take.

Habermas argues that in current society self-interest rather than rational arguments determines the outcome of political discussions (Mansbridge *et al.* 2010). Authors following Habermas thought about how to devise spaces (*fora*) in which people can exchange opinions in an open, respectful atmosphere without power distorting debate (Mendelberg 2002). This ideal is grounded on the idea that power exists independently and outside of people and can be blocked from discussions by applying certain procedures. It is hoped that through the resulting egalitarian communication new mutual understandings between people develop, leading to their opinions to converge into a consensus (Healey 1992). The assumption is that people will be convinced by the 'better' argument, supposing an objective hierarchy between arguments based on some kind of rationality (Healey 1992). People's interests are thought essentially to coincide so much that they can reach full agreement on most salient topics.

The Habermasian approach has become the dominant model in planning, although it has received (and partly incorporated) much critique (Bächtiger *et al.* 2010). Pluralists, for instance, point out that citizens are not one generic category, but a heterogeneous group of people with different opinions, interests and resources (Amin 2005). In her influential critique of deliberative democracy Mouffe (1999) argues that no ratio-

nal standard for judging arguments can be devised: politics consists of struggles between sometimes irreconcilable interests and only temporary compromises between different groups are possible. The problem with the deliberative democracy model is furthermore that it tries to eliminate power. But for Mouffe, power is ubiquitous and ineradicable, and constitutive of social relations (cf. Foucault 1980 [1976]). Purcell (2009) contends that because of the insistence on locking out power rather than transforming it, deliberative democracy does not challenge existing power relations but reinforces the status quo and as such (inadvertently) functions to legitimate neoliberal projects.

Another analytical dimension concerns space and time. In particular, institutionalists alert us to the influence that place-specific historical pathways exert on the form and practice of participation schemes (e.g. Silverman 2009). Indeed, it is difficult to fully understand participation in present-day Amsterdam without looking at its history. The current participation model originates from successful grass-roots resistance against modernistic large-scale urban renewal plans of the 1970s (Uitermark 2008). But the power base underlying this mobilisation has disappeared, as with other social movements of the 1970s (Mayer 2000). The remaining tenant organisations have become professionalised, institutionalised and co-opted by the government (Galesloot *et al.* 2009). Furthermore, the goals of the urban renewal policy have changed profoundly (see below), but are implemented through a new use of the old, still existing participation structures. As such, the participation process has become a negotiation between two parties whose interests are diametrically opposed. Most tenants want to stay and the housing corporation wants them to leave. The Habermasian ideal of creating open, egalitarian fora for deliberative democracy seems far removed from this reality. Following Mouffe (1999), I argue that in the case of Amsterdam displacement, the interests of both parties seem irreconcilable, and a consensus based on the better rational argument seems unlikely.

Much attention has been devoted in the literature to the significance of socio-economic differences between (non-)participating citizens (e.g. Mendelberg 2002). Unless efforts are made to empower disadvantaged groups currently not well represented in representative democracy, existing patterns of social inequality will be repeated in citizen partic-

ipation (Silverman 2009). Indeed, in my research the highly formal, bureaucratic and technical character of the participation process gives better educated, middle-class residents a distinct advantage. However, it is emphatically the lack of power transfer to citizens that is decisive in the case of Amsterdam displacement, because it limits all tenants regardless of their social status.

For Marxists, exactly the fact that in many participatory schemes citizens do not receive any decision-making power, exemplifies that citizen participation functions merely to legitimate top-down policies, rather than to improve democracy. This approach was strongly influenced by Arnstein (1969). She argues that people are lured into participating by the promise of obtaining influence. In the process, they find out that no power is transferred to them, and they lack the knowledge and experience to have any impact. Participants become disillusioned and frustrated. Meanwhile, local government uses this 'illusory form of participation' (Arnstein 1969:218) to claim their policies are supported by the community (cf. Amin 2005).

This Marxist view of citizen participation as a legitimisation of top-down policies does indeed resonate with the Amsterdam situation. Plans for demolition or renovation and the resulting displacement are already given from the outset of the participation process (Uitermark 2008). Given the crumbled power base of the tenants, negotiations are characterised by a severe power imbalance. Tenants do not receive any meaningful influence. As a result, some participants experience it as an empty, obligatory exercise on the part of the housing corporation, facilitated by the local council. However, this legitimisation-through-participation works not only as a front to the outside world, in many cases it also makes the tenants comply without resistance. To explain this, we need to go beyond classical Marxist theory and dive into Foucault-inspired ideas about participation as a strategy of government. Such writers emphasise that modern governments, broadly defined as any 'conduct of conduct' (Dean 2010:266) govern through governmentality (Foucault 2006 [1978]). Rather than issuing decrees from a central command point, policy is created and implemented through complex interaction between discourses and techniques involving several actors. Such 'ruling at arm's lengths' (Rose 2006 [1996]) shapes the way people see themselves and how they decide

what should be done. Through such existential politics, selective narratives; ways of thinking that are both descriptive and prescriptive, are formed and mobilised (Raco 2009). Governments together with other actors influence people's ideas about what is proper conduct, and this has a profound effect on material practices.

Citizen participation is a specific form of governmentality (Blakeley 2010), steering the population to think and behave in specific ways. As such, it 'is an effective means of social regulation' (Marinetti 2003:104). Most citizen participation is organised by the government, as part of a larger agenda, which significantly influences the form and content of engagement (Raco 2003). The government imposes categories concerning the nature of the problem, its causes, the scope, and possible tools to address it. Participation therefore is by its very necessity a process of narrowing the scope of issues and reducing alternatives available to actors. The predominant role of local government in organising participation means that 'participation itself can act as a mechanism of control' (Blakeley 2010:139).

My case studies show that such ideas make sense in the context of Amsterdam displacement: the participatory framework, co-produced by the city council and the housing corporations, functions as a technique of governmentality. The formal participation shapes and limits tenants' space for action. The process demands constructive, frequent contact between the tenants and the housing corporation. This gives the housing corporation the opportunity to constantly present its agenda as the only objective and realistic option. This resembles what Dodge (2009) calls a technical-rational discourse; when problems originating in policy analysis and solutions dominate discussions, rather than ideas of citizens. The large involvement of government and housing corporations provide them a platform to impose their specific views on matters, while subjugating other discourses (Blakeley 2010). Any attempts by tenants to propose alternatives are disciplined. This is brought about by requesting that tenants behave reasonably and exhibit common-sense (cf. Fung & Wright 2001). When necessary the housing corporation (backed-up by the council) will correct the tenants by referring to the hard limits of the participation; they emphasise the primacy stemming from their position as economic owner of the building.

6.3 Method

On the surface, all actors in the displacement process seem to work together to reach the best outcome possible. It is only through extensive participant observation, by observing tenants, house-owners, tenant supporters and local politicians interact that the underlying mechanisms can become clear. Displacement, and its legitimation, is a process that happens through interaction, mainly in meetings. Surveys or interviews are then of limited use since they yield reflexive, individual accounts of events from the past. I performed ethnographic fieldwork for nineteen months. This consisted of making observations, noting them down, analysing what I had seen, relating it to existing theory, coming up with new ideas and questions, going back in the field armed with these, making more observations and repeating the whole cycle until arriving at an analysis that explains for all observations (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

To observe how the process of displacement unfolded over time, I selected cases at the very beginning of it (see Table 6.1). Each year, the displacement process starts for approximately 30 groups of tenants. Through the Neighbourhood Support Centres for Housing, an organisation that facilitates tenants, I obtained access to seven such groups of renters. They were chosen for their geographical spread over the city, which also meant socio-economical spread. In terms of ownership, three of the six Amsterdam housing corporations are represented in my sample. Six of the groups consist each of 50 to 100 households living

Table 6.1

Sampling method

Criteria for selecting cases	Reason
At the beginning of the process	To be able to study the whole process
Geographical spread	Explanatory leverage
Socio-economic spread	Explanatory leverage
Different housing corporations	Explanatory leverage

in apartments in a block owned by a housing corporation. The seventh group is different, because it is part of a whole neighbourhood threatened with displacement in the long run. It is comparable with the other groups, though, because at the moment only 100 households are directly being forced to leave.

I observed at more than 30 meetings between tenants, most lasting over 3 hours. I was present at negotiations between tenants and housing corporations and attended meetings of the borough council where the displacement was debated. I had many informal conversations, with tenants, temporary renters, housing corporation employees, tenant supporters, civil servants and local council members. I was included on email lists of tenants, and studied policy documents, newspaper clippings and correspondence. I observed what people discussed and in which way and how they took on different roles. I was curious about the strategies people decided on, what information they had access to and whether they were able to use it. I continued my fieldwork until I felt I reached a point of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss 1967); I felt my analysis did not gain substantially any more from new materials.

In this chapter, rather than going into ethnographic detail, I generalise my findings and present two contrasting cases that represent the two main routes of compliance and resistance. One of these cases is in the South of Amsterdam, an affluent borough of which the population is predominantly Dutch (Amsterdam Department of Statistics 2011). My second main case lies in the North, a poor borough. Half of the population in the specific neighbourhood is of non-western ethnic descent, while the other half mainly consists of old-time Amsterdammers with low income (Amsterdam Department of Statistics 2011). This shows that perhaps contrary to expectations, displacement in Amsterdam is not limited to working-class neighbourhoods: three of my seven cases lie in affluent areas. Nor is, as we will see below, socio-economic status the factor that determines whether tenants comply or resist. Before proceeding, however, it is first necessary to understand something of the policy background that underpins Amsterdam's programme of state-led gentrification.

6.4 Amsterdam's transformative housing policy

As can be gleaned from Table 6.2, over the last twelve years, Amsterdam's housing stock has changed substantially. The volume of own-

er-occupied housing has almost doubled from a marginal 17 per cent to a more robust 31 per cent. This increase has mostly taken place in the large regulated rent sector, that decreased from 80 per cent to 61 per cent. It is a result of the ambitious policy of state-led gentrification that the city is pursuing since the late 1990s.

The transformation of the housing stock not only involves a change in tenure, but also an upgrade of the quality of the houses in terms of size and amenities. Larger, better equipped houses are hoped to attract the middle class to the city (Amsterdam Department of Housing 2009). The goal is to change the composition of the population so that the proportion of affluent people increases and that of lower-income groups

Table 6.2

Amsterdam housing stock 1999, 2011 and goal 2020

	1999	2011	2020 goal
Owner-occupied	17%	31%	51%
Regulated rent	80%	61%	35%
Free-market rent	3%	8%	14%
	100%	100%	100%

Source: Based on numbers from: Municipality of Amsterdam et al. (2003), Municipality of Amsterdam & Amsterdam Federation of Housing Corporations (2011), Amsterdam Department of Housing (2009).

decreases. Although the policy is implemented city-wide, disadvantaged neighbourhoods are a focal point. They are supposed to improve by creating more so-called 'social mixing', the dispersal of concentrations of low-income people, mainly of ethnic descent, to counter 'neighbourhood effects' (Ostendorf *et al.* 2001). Replacing part of the neighbourhood population by more affluent people is based on the hope the latter will function as a role model to their worse-off neighbours,

as well as stimulate the local economy (Van der Graaf & Veldboer 2009). Apart from this social-engineering aspect, it is deemed necessary to attract the middle class to stay economically competitive (Amsterdam Department of Housing 2009).

Following the recommodification of the Dutch housing market that started in the first half of the 1990s (Ronald & Dol 2011), Amsterdam is one of the last cities to deliver its housing stock to the market. Since the 1960s, the scarce good of housing had been allocated by the local council, who distributed all affordable rental apartments across the city through a waiting list accessible to large sections of the population, including the middle class. To alleviate the scarcity, the city council, together with housing corporations, focused on the production of rental housing. The result was a decommmodified housing market consisting almost completely of affordable rental apartments, distributed by the state (Uitermark 2009). When neoliberal ideas made their entrance in Dutch politics in the mid-1990s, Amsterdam's progressive housing distribution system came under attack. It was described as 'not of this time' as well as untenable. While affordable rental housing used to be available to large sections of the population (only people with very high incomes were barred), according to the new ideology it should become only a sober safety-net for the temporary inconvenienced, such as students and recent divorcees, and the permanently disadvantaged, those living long-term on scarce means (Amsterdam Department of Housing 1998). The bulk of the stock should be distributed through the logic of supply and demand, not by government.

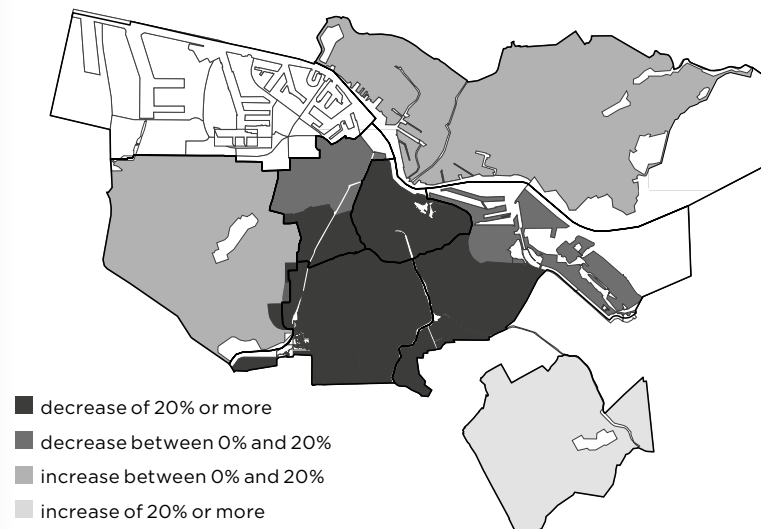
Another rationale for transforming the housing stock is the proclaimed financial unfeasibility of producing and maintaining affordable housing, caused by low rents. In the Netherlands, most rents are not determined by market mechanisms, but by the state, as a function of the size and amenities of a house. When in the mid-1990s housing associations, quangos that own the majority of houses with regulated rents, were privatised into foundations (another result of the new ideology), their overhead costs rapidly increased. Directors of housing corporations now maintain that because of rent regulation, social housing does not yield sufficient incomes (Gruis 2010).

Given Amsterdam's continuing economic success (Raspe *et al.* 2010), delivering its housing stock to market forces is leading to a concentra-

tion of affluent people in the most popular neighbourhoods, while less prosperous people are dispersed and concentrated to less favourable locations, a phenomenon known as residualisation (Schutjens *et al.* 2002). An example is the effect of the sale of social housing on households of non-western ethnic descent, on average the poorest inhabitants of the city (Amsterdam Department of Statistics 2011). Figure 6.1 illustrates how such sales dispersed a proportion of such households to the least popular parts of the city between 2002 and 2003. In the most popular areas, the Centre and the South, the proportion of non-western ethnic households decreased by 20 per cent or more. In the least popular parts, notably the Western Garden cities, the North and the

Figure 6.1

Change in proportion of households of non-western ethnic descent after sale of rental housing in different boroughs in Amsterdam 2002-2003



Source: Amsterdam Department of Housing (2005)

Bijlmer satellite city in the South East, the percentage stayed the same or increased.

Amsterdam's housing market is tight: more people want to live in the city than there is living space. The construction of new houses to add to the stock is heavily restricted by national regulations (Vermeulen 2008). The proposed transformation has to take place within the already existing housing stock. It is essential to note that, given normal mobility rates, it is unrealistic to attain this transformation in a short period. And this is where the displacement occurs, because the policy is executed by block-by-block renovation or demolition of tenanted houses, euphemistically called 'urban renewal', forcing the inhabitants to leave. This approach yields economies of scale and time compared with a house-by-house approach, whilst not being too large to manage. The city council executes the policy in partnership with Amsterdam's housing corporations, who own the houses and share the goal of the city council of attracting the middle class.³ Transforming their stock into larger, higher quality housing will also strengthen their financial position because it yields higher rent incomes, and the sale of some houses creates a temporary financial boost. I will now turn to the role participation plays in implementing this transformation agenda.

6.5 Two cases: compliance and resistance

In this section, I narrate the stories of two cases that exemplify the two main routes of tenants accepting or rejecting their forced moving. In the case of Southstreet, displacement is implemented by letting tenants choose between two evils. The tenants 'choose' displacement as the lesser evil, since it is framed as the only viable option to them. Let us look at this first case more in detail. The 60 apartments on Southstreet⁴ owned by the housing corporation Domus are slowly subsiding. Such bad foundations and the nuisance that comes with repairing them, is usually the rationale given for a total overhaul of a block, resulting in displacement. But in 2009, when the credit crisis was already firmly consolidated, Domus decided on the cheap option of repairing foundations while the upper-floor tenants would continue to live in their apartments. When the housing corporation announced this, the tenants protested vehemently against the forecasted months

of nuisance ('It promises to become an out-and-out hell', they wrote), as well as at the assertion that apart from the foundations, their houses were fine. Following a call-out from the housing corporation, five tenants enlisted for a representative committee, that was to negotiate with Domus, assisted by two tenants supporters.

When it became clear that maintenance beyond the foundations was urgent after all, the housing corporation developed a conventional conversion plan to make the larger investment worthwhile. More than half of all apartments, currently all social housing, will be sold or become free-market rentals. Since the block lies in an affluent neighbourhood, the discourse of social mix is absent. In this case, the housing corporation deemed the conversion necessary solely to make the larger investment worthwhile. A less costly alternative, for instance foundation repairs and maintenance combined with a compensation for the nuisance was not considered. The committee of tenants agreed with the conversion plan, because this would give all households the opportunity of rehousing. Given the options the housing corporation presented them with, it seemed the only viable solution. They lack formal power to demand compensation for the nuisance. They do not even try to mobilise the other tenants to protest, because they do not believe this will have any impact. In fact, the committee is lacking a mandate from the rest of the 55 households. They simply assume that the other tenants share their opinions: they have never called a meeting to gauge the opinions of the people they are supposed to represent.

The committee is tagging along with the increasingly invasive plans of the housing corporation because matters are persistently presented as non-binding. But over time, the committee has actually agreed with quite a lot; they are currently negotiating details of the renovation plan rather than whether the plan should go forward or not. Whether to agree with this was never discussed with the rest of the tenants. The latter will be able to vote about it once negotiations are concluded, but there will be no alternatives. Tenants either vote in favour or against, but there will be no opportunity for them to suggest changing the plan; it has been prepared by the committee that is supposed to be the representative body of the tenants. The plan will include that people have to leave. At most half will be given the opportunity to move back after spending more than a year in tempo-

rary rehousing, while the renovated apartments will have significantly higher rents. The chosen format of participation leads to them not being able to influence whether they have to leave. Rejection of the plan is not considered a realistic option: the technical necessity, after years of negligence, has become pressing. An alternative, such as less costly renovations, is not considered.

I now turn to my second case-study; the Van der Pek neighbourhood. Here the tenants first seemed to have succeeded in preventing displacement. However, their victory turned out to be the starting point for a struggle lasting years. If we take a closer look, gentrification in Amsterdam has been spreading out from the city centre and the Van der Pek garden village lies at its newest expansion frontier. Since the 1970s, low-income migrant families have increasingly become part of this traditional White working class neighbourhood. The houses are small and the rents low. Such neighbourhoods are a focal point of the gentrification policy, and the discourse of the necessity of increasing social mix prevails in such areas.

In 2003 housing corporation Ymere, the house-owner, announced they wanted to demolish all 1,500 houses. The composition of the population was pronounced 'overly homogeneous' (Ymere 2005:1) and the houses deemed to be in a bad technical state. The majority of tenants opposed the plans: 71 per cent indicated they did not want to leave (Ymere 2006). After years of campaigning, in 2007 the residents, organised in a committee, reached agreement with Ymere and the city council. There would be no demolition and no forced moving. The southern part of the neighbourhood would become a pilot area. The 367 households there could choose to stay or to move out and receive replacement housing. Vacated houses would be renovated promptly. Afterwards, it would be decided whether to continue this approach in the rest of the neighbourhood.

This victory turned into defeat when from the end of 2007 all tenants in the pilot area were visited in their houses by employees of the housing corporation. Heavy pressure was put onto them to leave:

With or without appointment, one or two employees of Ymere drop by at tenants' houses. During such talks, several times it is asked or insisted upon that people move out, and even houses outside the offi-

cial system are being offered. This also happens to people that have clearly expressed they wish to stay. Information is given at length about moving, but not about the possibility to stay. [. . .] Consequently, tenants experience this possibility as a fake choice.

Letter from the committee of tenants.

As a result, by September 2009, 200 of the 367 households had left. But the vacated houses in the pilot area were not renovated.⁵ Ymere pronounced them to be in a worse state than expected. Demolition and forced moving of the remaining households were again considered. After more than a year of fruitless negotiations with Ymere, in autumn 2010 the tenants addressed the local borough council. The council members agreed that the tenants should be taken seriously. But they also felt a need to 'diversify' the neighbourhood and relied on the investments of the housing corporation to make this a reality.⁶ They urged the tenants to partake in mediation. The committee felt forced to comply for fear of otherwise being depicted as unreasonable. During spring 2011, a professional mediator and an alderman from the council tried to reconcile the parties. Ymere refused to commit to anything until the technical investigation, by now already lasting four years, was finished.

Although the committee has many active members, consults the residents often and regularly delivers its newsletter by hand door-to-door to all 1,500 houses, the housing corporation now started questioning the representativeness of the committee. Ymere demonstrated this by organising informal brainstorming sessions on its own, thus bypassing the committee. During the summer of 2011, tenants were invited to 'dream' about their neighbourhood in 'round table conversations'. Questions concerning displacement or demolition were consistently ignored during these workshops; there was no opportunity for tenants to formally exercise influence. Nevertheless, in November 2011 the housing corporation presented its new plan for the pilot area, claiming it was inspired by the 'participation', referring to the open-ended brainstorming sessions. But while the tenants had expressed that they like their neighbourhood and wish to stay, the housing corporation maintains a radical intervention is necessary: 'The neighbourhood is slipping away: there is a negative selection: weaker people go to live there'. (manager

Ymere at a meeting of the borough council in 2011). By transforming the stock through demolition as well as renovation to free-market rent and owner-occupied housing, they want to attract more affluent people (Ymere 2011). While currently all houses are within the regulated rent sector, only 28 per cent of them will remain so, and even those rents will more than double.

For the tenants, the actions of the housing corporation have become the problem. For ten years, they have been threatened with displacement, while their houses are not maintained. The social fabric of the neighbourhood is falling apart, since every free-coming house is left empty or rented out on a temporary basis. The tenants fear large-scale demolition will destroy the character of their neighbourhood. Given that Ymere broke all earlier agreements, they do not hold much value in the recent promise that some can come back afterwards. Even if this would be possible, they would have to spend at least two years elsewhere, and then return to a completely transformed neighbourhood for a much higher rent.

6.6 Displacement through Participation

Based upon all my case-studies, I will now present a generalised account of how tenants are made to comply with their forced moving. *The Amsterdam Framework Agreements for Social Plans in Case of Renovation and Demolition* (Municipality of Amsterdam *et al.* 2009) define the rights of tenants. The document is couched in friendly language leaving the impression that tenants are important stakeholders. However, upon close reading, it is revealed that tenants hardly have any rights at all: housing corporations decide on the necessity of demolition, renovation and displacement. Tenants that are forced to move obtain rehousing and a compensation for moving costs of 5,000 euro, as well as the formal right to consultation. Combined with Amsterdam's transformative housing policy and the discourse of the necessity of costly renovations or new construction, it is this institutionalised practice of compensation and consultation that helps the legitimisation of displacement. Displacement is seen as the only option, while the tenants are seen as amply compensated. Unfortunately, even these minimum conditions are not so good as they seem. People are still displaced. The replacement housing is often suboptimal, while it is hard to obtain a house of the same size at the same price.⁷ Most tenants will be

worse off, especially the elderly who will have to spend all of the financial compensation on a moving company and redecorating. But it is the promise of consultation that needs further examination.

The only room for participation is the so-called 70 per cent-rule. This rule, originating from Dutch national law (BW 7:220 part 3) implemented in the 1970s, states that at least 70 per cent of all tenants have to agree with the plans of the corporation. This seems to safeguard their interests. If a majority does not like the plans, they can refuse to agree. This creates a space for negotiation. The housing corporation tries to limit this by presenting their plans as the only possibility. 'There is no alternative': the technical necessity of the proposed renovation or demolition and the financial consequences are presented as given. This discursive depoliticising of the conflict is helped by the professional support tenants obtain from the local Neighbourhood Support Centre for Housing (NSCH). This quasi-governmental organisation is financed by the city council to facilitate tenants, while the work they do for residents threatened with displacement is sometimes directly paid for by the housing corporation. The NSCH claims to have complete independence, but in practice fulfils an ambiguous role. Most professional supporters have become cynical over time. They assume a 'realistic' approach: the tenants are encouraged to focus on the best deal possible for them within the given framework of displacement. Consider for instance this typical dialogue between a critical member of a committee of tenants and a tenant supporter about the proposed sale of half of all apartments in the block:

Tenant: So much social housing has disappeared from the city already. Should we really be wanting this?

Tenant supporter: You should only consider your personal interests here, and the personal interests of the tenants of your block. Such larger questions have no role in these discussions, if you want to address them, you should join a political party.

Field note meeting committee of tenants Southstreet
January 2012.

To obtain support, the housing corporation prepares the plan that is put to the vote together with a delegation of tenants. If the members of this committee accept the proclaimed unavailability of the displacement, the negotiations take place in a constructive atmosphere. The housing corporation is willing to give in to some demands, such as lowering the rent until the displacement. These small victories give the committee a feeling of ownership. When the negotiations have finished, they will encourage the other tenants to vote in favour of the plan, since they feel it is the best deal possible. Giving in to small demands of the committee of tenants is not the only way through which housing corporations obtain compliance. They also engage in personal visits to tenants' houses. In one-on-one conversations, the housing corporation emphasises the necessity of the intervention, and sometimes offers replacement housing already before the plan is put to the vote of the tenants. Some tenants accept for fear they will otherwise end up without a house.

Committees that doubt the necessity of the proposed intervention try to use the 70 per cent rule to gain influence beyond agreeing to or refusing the specific plan. For them, the rule creates a window of hope, that it will be possible to exert some influence over their situation. Perhaps they can prevent their displacement. They come up with alternative plans and calculations. They approach their local council members. As a result, they are urged to behave reasonably or else be branded as unreasonable activists. The housing corporation openly starts questioning whether the committee truly represents all tenants. This reflects the power of the housing corporation to establish lines of legitimacy – who is unreasonable or not. As in the case of the Van der Pek neighbourhood, housing corporations often by-pass committees by inviting tenants to stipulate their wishes in informal workshops or surveys. The results are used to justify the plans of the corporation. Wishes that were formulated without context are equalled with 'what people want'. That tenants for instance dream about having more space, becomes a rationale for constructing larger houses that they cannot afford.

In case of resistance, time is on the side of the housing corporation. Talks between the committee and the housing corporation are often continued for years, while the housing corporation refuses to commit to anything. Lengthy technical investigations have to be awaited or the housing corporation is deliberating internally. Such delays exhaust and

demoralise tenants. In the meantime, through normal moving dynamics, more tenants move out and their houses stay empty or are let out on a temporary basis, weakening the position of the remaining tenants. The problems caused by the lack of maintenance become worse. The local council also stops investing in the public space. The street begins to look abandoned.

6.7 Conclusion

It was shown how in the case of Amsterdam displacement citizen participation creates legitimation for a disruptive policy. The policy of state-led gentrification aims to rapidly transfer the previously decommodified housing stock to the market. By converting affordable rental dwellings to higher quality owner-occupied apartments and free-market rentals it is hoped that the middle class can be attracted to the city. Amsterdam's transformative housing policy provides housing corporations ample arguments for their plans of displacement and conversion. Technical conditions are invoked to justify far-reaching renovation or demolition plans which will displace current tenants; investment choices are presented as objective technical facts. In poorer neighbourhoods, the urgent necessity of increasing social mix is emphasised as well. Under these framing conditions, tenants are invited to participate in discussions with their house-owner concerning the future of their dwellings.

This formal participation shapes and limits tenants' space for action. The process demands constructive, frequent contact between the tenants and the housing corporation. This gives the housing corporation the opportunity to constantly present its agenda as the only objective and realistic option. Any attempts by tenants to propose alternatives are disciplined. The housing corporation owns the houses, has extensive resources and routinised knowledge and ultimately can decide to terminate tenants' contracts. Non-complying tenants try to obtain support from their local council. Local politicians play their part in the disciplining by downplaying their own role. They insist on both parties reaching a reasonable compromise. In several of my cases, they offered mediation, sessions that try to reconcile parties whose interests are diametrically opposed: the tenants want to stay and the housing corporation wants them to leave. Tenants lack power and knowledge and

tenant supporters as well as local council members disempower them. Faced with such restricted options tenants either accept the discourse of displacement, thus gaining some minor influence on how they are displaced in a constructive atmosphere, or resist to discover that they are powerless. The latter group do not experience their forced moving as legitimate, but they simply lack the power to successfully resist it.

I have approached the literature on citizen participation from this perspective of conflicting interests within a context of severe power asymmetries. Deliberative democracy theory then has limited use, since it is a normative ideal of eradicating power rather than a tool for analysing empirical reality. Recognition of ineradicable conflicting interests (Mouffe 1999) is an important step forward. However, because Marxist and Foucauldian writers have analysed participation from a critical but decidedly more analytical perspective, these approaches proved to be better suited for my research problem. Marxists view participation as a means to gain legitimacy for top-down policies, and this view is supported by my research. To understand how governments succeed in gaining compliance without open conflict, I drew on writers who identify citizen participation as a form of governmentality. It indeed creates a space for repeated contact between citizens and government which facilitates the transmission of specific rationalities. Through such engagement, tenants are made co-responsible for the policy that is being implemented.

Let me briefly touch on an issue that emerged during my fieldwork but which was beyond the scope of this chapter. Specifically, why do some tenants resist, and others not? Although it is true that higher educated, wealthier tenants do have an advantage in the participation process, class does not seem to be the determining factor in whether tenants comply or resist. Two factors do however seem important: the already-existing social cohesion within the group of tenants and the approach of the specific housing corporation. Concerning the first factor, groups of tenants that share a culture of regular intensive contact, appear more likely to resist than those who only experience superficial contact. They seem more able to create an internal counter-discourse and to translate this into action. The second factor relates to the internal organisational culture of the housing corporation. In my cases the harsh and blunt communication style of several such organ-

isations seemed to spawn resistance. The more social and understanding tone of other housing corporations was more conducive to creating a compliant atmosphere.

Finally, let me conclude by emphasising that theory could benefit from examining the impact of the discourses and institutional practices that surround participation in reality, since many authors fail to ask what is at stake and who is in control. The only viable alternative to displacement-through-participation is to change the goals of the policy. As long as the pre-ordained goal is the displacement of tenants for more affluent inhabitants, tinkering with the process will yield no results, and meaningful participation will remain impossible.

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Notes

- 1 Following Marcuse (1985) I define displacement as housing-related involuntary residential dislocation. Such forced moving is not a result of individual actions as defaulting on the rent or causing nuisance, but caused by more general developments such as gentrification or abandonment.
- 2 Neoliberal ideology has been defined as the believe that 'open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development' (Brenner & Theodore 2002:350). This ideology, in which the role of the state is mainly to facilitate the market, has gained global significance (although this ascendancy has been necessarily uneven and context-dependent) and can clearly be tracked in Amsterdam's shift in housing policy.
- 3 The policy is also executed by the sale of tenanted privately owned housing. Displacement in these cases is often harsher, involving more intimidation and even physical violence (Hotline Undesirable Landlord Behavior Amsterdam 2009). I focus on housing corporations since they own the majority of affordable rental housing in Amsterdam.
- 4 To protect the privacy of my respondents, I changed the name of the street and the housing corporation of the first case to non-existing ones. I kept the real names in the second case, because since I ended my fieldwork, it has received much media attention, which makes it easily recognisable even if I change names.
- 5 Instead, they were left empty or rented out on a temporary basis to students, boutiques and art projects.
- 6 While local politicians agree with the transformation in abstracto, they are also directly confronted by the reality of their own constituents being displaced. Faced with this, many politicians downplay their own power. Others genuinely believe they lack power, due to deficient

expertise, and this has a self-reinforcing effect.

- 7 This is a result of changing Dutch rent policies that only affect new renting contracts. The system of rent subsidies for low-income households only partly compensates for these increases.