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Verlaan, Tim; Couperus, Stefan

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# 4 From the ‘scientised’ to the ‘sociocratic’ city: The politics of knowledge and norm change in post-war urban planning in the Netherlands

*Tim Verlaan and Stefan Couperus*

## Introduction

This chapter centres on the role of knowledge and expertise in the post-war planning of Dutch cities, primarily relating to the agenda of urban re-development. The period under discussion was one of rapid urban change: economic upswings and downturns, rising car ownership, growing population numbers, suburbanisation and the coming of age of the baby boom generation all left their stamp on the physical and social urban fabric. It was also a period of rapid democratisation, as exemplified by the rise of social movements and mounting conflicts between local authorities and community action groups. These broader developments in society were in need of guidance by expert knowledge, or so was the consensus on national and local state levels. At the same time, these developments also produced new forms of knowledge about how cities functioned and how they should be governed. While the historiography of post-war urban planning in the Western world in general (Hall, 2002; Ward, 2002; Klemek, 2011; Logemann, 2012) and the Dutch context in particular (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994; Van der Cammen and De Klerk, 2002; Wagenaar, 2011; De Liagre Böhl, 2010) has been tremendously insightful for how particular forms of knowledge have informed urban planning practices, and how planning as an expertise has developed into an independent profession, we know much less about how and why particular kinds of knowledge have become accepted and eventually contested in the context of urban planning.

With this chapter we propose to move our focus away from knowledge as such to the politics of knowledge and the underlying hegemonic socio-cultural and political norms that determined which knowledge was deemed acceptable and desirable in urban planning, and in what way it had to be incorporated in the broader framework of urban governance. In order to do so, we have divided our contribution into four different subsections. Taking cue from social constructivist notions of power and knowledge, the first section elaborates how the lens of social norm change and norm entrepreneurship helps us to empirically analyse

transformations in knowledge regimes in post-war urban planning in the Netherlands. The second section will then outline the prevailing and hegemonic knowledge regime in Dutch urban planning and its underlying norms and values for the immediate post-war period. We argue that this 'scientised' knowledge regime of urban planning was informed by socio-spatial essentialism and elitist governance norms. The third section will, subsequently, discuss the norm entrepreneurs who actively challenged the 'scientised' post-war constellation from the mid-1960s onwards and the alternative norms they introduced to articulate and legitimise new forms of urban knowledge. In the fourth and final section we will sketch the contours of the new knowledge regimes that were gradually established by focussing on the cities of Utrecht and Amsterdam.

In comparison to other Western countries during the post-war period, the Dutch transition to a permissive and more democratised society occurred rather smoothly and consensually. Urban planning was an integral part of the rationalisation of the country as a whole, made possible by its relatively small size and a consensual determination in local and national politics to reconcile change and stability (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994: 7). Planning elites were quickly convinced of the need for modernisation and even saw 'being modern' as a moral imperative, whether this concerned implementing the urban renewal agenda of the 1950s and 1960s or heeding the calls for participatory planning during the 1970s (Verlaan, 2015). In the words of planning historian Stephen Ward, the Netherlands boosted 'a planning movement that was highly developed in terms of technical expertise, and an articulate and questioning civil society' (Ward, 2002: 277). When modernisation was disputed by critical citizens or political parties, planners were prone to adapt their schemes to their demands and wishes. Seen in this way, civic resistance was a productive force that was quickly incorporated into the Dutch planning system (Schuyt and Taverne, 2000: 25). In addition, the Dutch system was and is much more decentralised than its European counterparts, with the future of urban societies firmly in the hands of elected city councils and local planning departments (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994: 126–127). Thus, the Netherlands serves as a insightful case study for examining a broader trend in the Western world, in which urban planning transformed from a scientised practice into an ongoing experiment in joint decision-making.

### **Conceptual framework: Urban knowledge regimes and norm entrepreneurs**

Foucault's conception of power-knowledge (1980) has been highly influential in how the politics of knowledge have been studied. Knowledge, in Foucault's reading, is inseparable from the ways in which power is exerted and, thus, from how social relations and inequalities are shaped in society at large. The access to information and the underlying hegemonic discourses

of what is desirable and 'true' translate into techniques of social disciplining and control – ultimately acted out by authorities and their agents. This forms the backdrop against which particular forms of knowledge are constructed, (re)produced and legitimised. Aligning with the spatial turn in urban history, recent studies have attested to the complex confluences of knowledge regimes, governmental techniques both enabling and disciplining social conduct, and the significance of the use and production of urban space for practices of political rule and social control (Gunn, 2002; Ewen, 2016: 70–74 and 94–102). The work of Patrick Joyce on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain, for instance, illustrates how liberal knowledge regimes render a particular mode of governmentality in urban societies (2003). A knowledge regime, or *knowledge-control regime* to borrow the term coined by Stephen Hilgartner, then amounts to 'a socio-technical arrangement that constitutes categories of agents, spaces, objects, and relationships among them in a manner that allocates entitlements and burdens pertaining to knowledge' (2017: 9). Yet, much less analytical and systematic rigour has been dedicated to the question of why a certain knowledge regime might change or collapse and how this might affect existing social and political practices of rule and control in urban society. This lacuna in the current historiography implies the need to conceptualise and identify drivers of knowledge regime change within the context of urban governance.

If indeed we assume, with Foucault and Joyce, that power and knowledge are inextricably linked in the context of urban rule and regulation, knowledge is by definition political, in the sense that the construction, articulation, negotiation, legitimisation and use of knowledge is contingent on prevailing hegemonic socio-cultural and political norms. Here norms should not be primarily understood in a Foucauldian vein, i.e. the notion that norms pertain to desirable conduct as 'engineered' by techniques of social disciplining. Our conception of norms in the context of modern urban planning is not about the confluence of 'norm', 'form' (spatiality), and conduct as Paul Rabinow expounds (1995: 7–11). Rather, norms, in the context of the dynamics of the politics of knowledge, entail 'social attitudes of approval and disapproval, specifying what ought to be done and what ought not to be done' (Sunstein, 1996: 914), institutionalised as the prevailing moralities, mores, and legal rules and regulations. Consequently, social norms are at the heart of what is the political in post-war urban planning: they are a key object of (de)contestation that precede and presuppose particular forms of knowledge. Thus, norms should not be equated with urban epistemologies; whereas epistemologies determine the substantive nature of knowledge, social norms enable forms of knowledge to resonate in urban society as part of a wider competition between discursive claims about how urban governance and planning ought to be conducted. The politics of knowledge, then, revolves around the contestation and decontestation of social norms in

order to enable particular kinds of knowledge to become accepted or rejected. Consequently, if we want to understand why and how particular knowledge regimes change, we need to conceptualise and operationalise norm change to allow for in-depth empirical scrutiny.

Informed by this understanding of the politics of knowledge, our analysis adopts a decentred approach to the change in underlying norms enabling certain knowledge regimes in urban governance in general and in urban planning in particular. Urban governance is understood analytically as ‘a wider system of government by encapsulating the complex range of actors, interests and resources, which straddle the public, private and voluntary sectors, each with a vested interest in the way that political power is organised and practised’ (Couperus, 2010: 322). A decentred approach localises particular social and political practices in urban governance contexts, stressing situated agency rather than a priori accepting reified notions of the local state or monocausal explanations of political conduct based on constitutionally defined hierarchies and mandates (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010; Couperus and Ewen, 2015). Situated agency refers to the contextual interpretation of how orientations and beliefs of historical actors render change in social and political practices.

In order to operationalise the situated agency of historical actors who engage with the normative foundations of a knowledge regime, we adopt the notion of norm entrepreneurship. This notion stems from transnational activism and philanthropy scholarship but has been most influential in the field of international relations (Finnemore, 1996). In essence, norm entrepreneurs should be understood as ‘agents of normative change’ (Risse and Sikkink, 1999: 5): historical actors ‘who break away from the established’ (Sjöström, 2010: 180) by promoting alternative social attitudes to, in our case, particular kinds of knowledge in urban governance. In their conceptualisation of norm change through norm entrepreneurship, Finnemore and Sikkink theorise a sequential dynamic that begins with the emergence of new norms and culminates in the adoption and gradual internalisation of these norms by historical actors, after which new norms consolidate (1998: 893 and 896). Throughout this process, the situated agency of norm entrepreneurs is key to the contestation of existing norms and the promotion of alternative ones, in most literature referred to as a norm ‘bandwagon’ or ‘cascade’.

In the fields of urban studies and urban history, this approach to norm change has only been applied to a limited number of cases, most of which relate to the role of cities as norm entrepreneurs in the global governance of human rights and environmental politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Toly, 2008; Galceran-Vercher, 2019; Oomen and Durmus, 2019). However, a decentred approach to norm entrepreneurship that highlights historical actors as change-agents who operate in a specific structure of political opportunity, rather than cities or local authorities as a whole, has only been tentatively applied

(Couperus and Wolffram, 2020). Here norm entrepreneurs are historical actors that 'negotiate the moral and epistemological framework, and its boundaries, within which rules, regulations and policies become feasible, acceptable and legitimate' (Couperus and Wolffram, 2020: 111). Also, Domaradzka has recently conceptualised norm change and norm entrepreneurs to investigate the mobilisation of urban social movements (2018: 614–616). In what follows, we operationalise these concepts for the post-war context of urban planning in the Netherlands by applying a contextualised and decentred approach to social norm change brought about by norm entrepreneurs.

### **Urban expansion and redevelopment as a scientised practice (1950–1965)**

From its emergence in the interwar period onwards, the proponents of urban modernism have always been fascinated with the quality and promise of scientific knowledge. An early figurehead of urban modernism in the Netherlands was Cornelis van Eesteren, who, as a former chair of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) and head of the Amsterdam planning department during the 1950s, was a strong believer in the functionalist dogma of light, air and openness as well as in the merits of technocracy. Under his supervision, urban planning in Amsterdam evolved from the domain of civil engineering into a self-standing discipline. As the spiritual father of the city's General Expansion Plan of 1934, he introduced a more comprehensive view on how cities should function, in which municipal planners became responsible for elevating the urban masses. According to Van Eesteren and his local allies, planning decisions were to be taken by a centralised administrative apparatus based on input generated by professionally trained specialists from the social sciences and design disciplines. Scientific surveys, demographic calculations and economic studies were to lay the groundwork for the design of housing developments, a strict zoning of urban functions and the separation of traffic streams, which would guarantee a healthier, safer and more efficient living environment for people from all walks of life (Van der Woud, 1983: 54–58, 110–155; Bosma, 1993: 197–184).

After the immediate post-war years of recovery and reconstruction, Dutch planning elites, of which Van Eesteren was an influential member, quickly switched to a higher gear in their modernisation efforts. The 1950s and 1960s were decades of 'creating order and purification' (Schuyt and Taverne, 2000: 25–26), of which the tandem developments of urban expansion and redevelopment are prime examples. Knowledge on how cities functioned came to be gathered by a rapidly expanding army of professionally trained architects and planners in civil service, as exemplified by the setting up of a national planning agency that infused planning with insights from the social sciences (Wagenaar, 2011: 457;

Groenman, 1958: 3), and the establishment of formal educational tracks at polytechnic and technical universities (Hall, 2002: 10). The convergence of growing affluence, increasing standardisation in the building industry, and a managerial revolution in planning circles led to the emergence of a powerful planning apparatus, for which long-term thinking became the norm. While the consensus was that anticipative and consciously modern policies should steer the Netherlands in the right direction (Kennedy, 1995: 25; Van Vegchel, 1995; Andela, 2000), planning was neither a unilinear nor an undisputed process (Couperus, 2015: 517; Schuyt and Taverne, 2000: 26). Still, when compared to the social and political turmoil of the 1970s, planning was initially a relatively technocratic undertaking and seemingly less prone to emerging agendas of participatory decision-making. Local officials and administrators could easily brush off calls for public accountability by emphasising the need for swift decision-making (Bosma and Wagenaar, 1995).

Two notions stood central in the Dutch planning agenda of the 1950s and 1960s: expansion and redevelopment. Expansion schemes were based on the outlines of an arithmetically planned urban society in which architectural notions of functionalism and modernism spilled over into governmental aspirations of social disciplining and control, attempting to instil middle-class socio-cultural values revolving around the nuclear family, community life, labour and consumption. Redevelopment was obviously a more difficult undertaking. Traditionally, the conversion of housing into offices and the replacement of older structures with new-builds was left to the market, with the state only providing infrastructure and transport facilities. Before the war this had often resulted in haphazard demolition works and massive displacement of local residents (Wagenaar, 2003: 23). With the expansion of the local welfare state, urban redevelopment was increasingly seen as subject to government control. According to its contemporary definition, the programme entailed the clearing of central urban areas to accommodate its residents with better living conditions or new urban functions (Rijksplanologische Dienst, 1966: 96). In the post-war context of ever-growing mobility and affluence, the redevelopment of central areas often resulted in the construction of car infrastructures, shopping facilities and office blocks at the expense of housing, which was relocated to the expansion areas on the fringes of cities and towns (Zonneveld, 1991: 45).

Instead of practical solutions for the wants and needs of the immediate future, the expansion and redevelopment schemes of the first post-war decades were based on holistic socio-spatial concepts with timespans covering up to half a century (Cammen and De Klerk, 2002: 174). These planning concepts epitomised the confluence of the modernist planning-oriented knowledge regime and governmental techniques, a conflation of spatial planning and socio-cultural imperatives that was supported by a firm belief in the constitutive capacities of the built environment in

determining social behaviour. The essentialist socio-spatial norm – later critically referred to as spatial or physical determinism – prompted architects and planners to proclaim their responsibility for collective well-being and the public good. Supposedly, spatial design should not revolve around aesthetics but was key, first and foremost, to the amelioration of society at large. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, this notion was eagerly embraced by local authorities hoping to create long-term social order and stability (Couperus, 2013; Lawhon, 2009).

Dutch planners learned about new planning practices through their international networks and professional journals covering their field, which became increasingly oriented towards foreign affairs. Consequentially, their horizons expanded significantly in terms of both time and space. Study trips to the United States led the Dutch to believe that the American dream, and its sprawling suburbs and gargantuan shopping malls, was not the way forward (Verlaan, 2019b: 7). Instead, British and German examples were followed, in particular with regards to traffic engineering. One influential socio-spatial concept that did make it across the Atlantic was the neighbourhood unit. Coined by American planner Clarence Perry in 1929, the concept was translated into a series of national adaptations that became instrumental to the Western-European planning practices of the 1940s and 1950s (Johnson, 2002). Translated as the *wijkgedachte*, in the Netherlands the neighbourhood became popular during and particularly immediately after the Second World War and was at the heart of post-war urban planning. It centred on a pre-defined layout of a semi-autonomous residential area that included amenities, recreative spaces, schools, churches and shops. Socially, the neighbourhood unit aspired to create mixed-class neighbourhoods in which the nuclear family and community life would thrive (Greenhalgh, 2018: 138–139; Doevendans and Stolzenburg, 1988: 33). This template informed the municipal planning departments throughout the Netherlands already from the late 1940s onwards and was, for instance, instrumental to the residential expansion schemes of post-war Rotterdam (De Boer, 2001: 30–31).

Despite the reliance on scientific planning, Dutch planning elites often greeted the modernisation tendencies in society with mixed feelings. The developments that made urban expansion and redevelopment necessary in the first place – increasing car ownership, growing population numbers and the advent of a post-industrial economy – were extremely difficult to control. Despite their embrace of technocratic solutions, planners often saw themselves merely as the facilitators of progress, which necessitated painful sacrifices for the social and physical fabric of Dutch cities, rather than self-assured masterminds planning and designing a better urban future (Verlaan, 2015). As the next section will demonstrate, there was an increased awareness of the inability of experts to steer processes of modernisation from the mid-1960s onwards. New norm entrepreneurs





*Figure 4.1* Planners standing over the Hoog Catharijne scheme: a clear example of how the ‘scientised city’ regime promoted a technocratic approach to urban planning.

Source: Nederlands Fotomuseum.

unremittingly scrutinised the scientific legitimisation of planning practices and political decision-making. In addition, the economic downturn that set in from the early 1970s onwards made the grand schemes of the preceding decades financially unviable. Combined with mounting protests from urban social movements, the door was opened for a younger and more critical generation of planners, architects and social scientists.

### **Norm entrepreneurs challenging the ‘scientised city’ (1965–1975)**

The first two post-war decades witnessed the consolidation of a knowledge regime in urban planning that was presupposed by social norms of the ‘scientised city’. Scientific knowledge produced by planners

and the politico-administrative techniques to govern and discipline urban society both rested on the prevailing norm that planning expertise, technocratic governance and top-down government in a 'disciplined democracy' had the responsibility, if not the obligation, to build and govern affluent cities under the aegis of the welfare state (De Jong, 2014: 70–73). Yet, this norm did not remain uncontested for very long. From the late 1950s onwards, and accelerating around the mid-1960s, the knowledge regime underpinning the modernist redevelopment and expansion schemes was actively challenged by three core groups of norm entrepreneurs: planners, architects and social scientists. While all groups worked towards the ultimate goal of dismantling or at least reforming the modernist planning regime, most of the time they were working parallel to each other rather than in close harmony. Thus, while all norm entrepreneurs were aware and appreciative of each other's arguments, they seldom worked on the same projects or showed coordinated efforts to collaborate. Instead, they incorporated new viewpoints, which they learned about from planning journals or reformed educational tracks, into their individual thinking or design practices. This work context is significant in order to grasp the particular situated agency of norm entrepreneurs and the ways in which they addressed pre-existing norms and promoted alternative ones.

In comparison to architects and social scientists, planners were most prone to self-reflection and policy feedback. Throughout the latter half of the 1960s, the flexibilisation of future scenarios, democratisation of planning procedures and the knowledgeable of laypeople became central points of contestation in the columns of architecture and planning journals. Whereas planning professors Laurent Angenot and Willem Steigenga considered local politicians and citizens (still) too unknowledgeable to join in the conversation in the early 1960s (Angenot, 1963: 18; Steigenga, 1964: 13), their colleague Gerrit van den Berg proposed to let residents draw plans themselves, with his profession simply handing out tools (Wolff, 1991: 60). Whether in favour or against participatory planning, all shared an outspoken paternalistic worldview, or as two participants in the debate put it: 'The parents [the government, TV/SC] need to recognise that their children [citizens, TV/SC] can also have healthy ideas and initiatives that are at least worthy of contemplation and discussion' (Muntinga and Elfers, 1970: 151). An important voice in debates on the merits of participatory planning was the *Werkgroep 2000* collective, which in a series of articles and opinion pieces in the influential *Plan* journal called for a thorough reform of decision-making processes (Kalk, 1972: 3–9; 1972: 19–24; 1972: 8–16; 1972: 3–13). A central point of contestation for the advocates of participatory planning was the Second Planning Memorandum of 1966, which despite the looming criticism was still very much a top-down blueprint. In the Memorandum, planners

operationalised planning theories of the interwar period and pierced these together into a model resting on an analogy between urban development and living beings as ‘complex systems’ (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994: 116).

Only in response to the social turmoil of the late 1960s did planning become subject to politicisation and polarisation. Inspired by the emergence of so-called process planning in Britain, the Dutch national planning agency advised to divide local planning procedures into different phases:

There needs to be leeway for those who come after us. Our generation would be overplaying its hand if it wants to make its judgment decisive for a too distant future. Each plan is a link in a chain, or rather a phase in a process. Following generations need to realise that this process is never ending and that targets are always moving.

(Rijksplanologische Dienst 1966, 16)

Each phase was contingent on political decision-making and citizen participation, with the phase of the formulation of problems, norms and values soon becoming the most important one. The opposing interests of different parties in urban struggles were to be explicated instead of covered with a cloak of consensus. Thus, planning transformed from a primarily technocratic into a ‘sociocratic’ undertaking with consultation groups consisting of a wide range of stakeholders, elected officials and (semi)government bodies discussing the desired outcome of local planning processes (Van der Cammen and De Klerk, 2002: 241–242; Van Doorn and Van Vught, 1981: 261–282). This indicates a clear shift away from, and contestation and delegitimisation of, the paternalistic norm in urban planning. Stemming from the milieu of planners, an alternative social norm about incorporating more pluralist (social) knowledge into the politics and design of urban planning thus gained momentum. Already in 1973, a report by the national planning agency suggests a definitive blow to the scientised city: ‘No longer is planning a purely technical enterprise, no sterile making of plans independent of what is happening in society’ (Hazelhoff, 1973: 10).

Architects, the second group of norm entrepreneurs, were much more susceptible to generational conflict and polarisation. The younger generation, which had mostly grown up in the post-war years, was informed by the critical urbanism developing in neighbouring countries and in the United States, amongst others in the work of Jane Jacobs, Paul Davidoff, Kevin Lynch, Hans Paul Bahrdt and Alexander Mitscherlich. Their knowledge of how cities functioned was informed by pre-existing street patterns, historical structures, everyday urban life and street-level observations. By the early 1970s, it became increasingly clear that the state-led expansion and redevelopment schemes of the post-war period could not live up to their lofty ideals. On the contrary, urban modernism had

led to feelings of alienation and a lack of belonging, which was attributed to ignoring the needs and wishes of residents and bureaucratic tunnel visions blurred by the socio-spatial essentialisms in planning and architecture. In 1970, a collective of critical students at the Delft University of Technology – a breeding ground for the Dutch architecture and planning professions – called for more awareness about the implicit norms and values of their senior colleagues: 'The architect thinks he can shape society by design, without realising that he is a product of society himself' (Stielos, 1970). This was a conscious critique of the spatial determinism that had been prominent in the hegemonic discourse on urban planning during the 1950s and 1960s.

The aforementioned observations chimed with criticism coming from the structuralists, an architectural movement that came to oppose urban modernism. Structuralist architects, who had already distanced themselves from CIAM principles in the late 1950s, believed that the human scale should be central to the design of buildings and cities. Not the separation of urban functions and traffic streams, but the human desire to meet others and the intrinsic relationship between residents and their everyday living environment were to determine the shape of newbuilds in expansion and redevelopment areas. Such thinking, which was obviously still infused with spatial determinism, required careful consultation with the users of buildings rather than their clients or investors. The structuralist movement was spearheaded by Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, who became one of the most ardent opponents of comprehensive redevelopment and scientific planning (Verlaan, 2019c, 89). In the case of urban redevelopment, the architect advocated the repairing of historical street patterns damaged by the tabula rasa principles of the modernists as well as in situ rebuilding that would honour the complexities of urban fabrics still untainted by modernisation.

During the early 1970s, Van Eyck and his allies gained support from both residents and a growing number of social scientists. As such, their alternative norms for knowledge-based planning gained critical mass, amounting to a 'norm cascade'. Again, professional journals provided the platform for knowledge exchange here. In 1974, an editorial collective made up of architecture critics, planners and residents gathered a comprehensive amount of data on property development in Amsterdam, which they presented in graphs, tables, diagrams and maps in the left-leaning *Wonen/TABK* journal. Their objective was to teach residents how and where to find information on neighbourhood change, thus breaking the information monopoly of municipal planners and the property sector (Bijlsma et al., 1974: 1–2). *Wonen TA/BK* was an important voice for sociological and structuralist critiques on the planning profession. Its contributors scrutinised planners for not acknowledging the normative foundations of their work (Deben, 1974: 5–9), called citizen participation and cautious urban renewal a 'necessary, just and

revolutionary cause' (Brouwers, 1975: 2–3), and stated that only 'do-it-yourself planning' could improve individual and collective well-being (Brouwers, 1976: 6–8). This illustrates the fundamental break with the spatial determinism that previously reified individuality and social diversity into homogenous social classifications amenable to techniques of social control and disciplining.

The third group of norm entrepreneurs comprised a new generation of social scientists. Amidst disciplinary and generational conflicts about the nature of the social sciences in post-war academia and society, this new generation stressed the significance of inductively studying social relations and social cohesion in cities (Jonker, 1988: 97–111) and, in the case of geography, the search for a new post-war planning 'frame' (Van Meeteren, 2020: 2–3). Although they intermingled with planners, architects, and citizen groups alike, the sociologists' interventions in discussions about the role of knowledge in urban planning are analytically distinct. Rooting in pre-war debates about the relationship between the individual and society in modern cities, young sociologists began questioning the assumptions of post-war urban planning and government. In 1955, Jacques van Doorn, one of the leading post-war social scientists in the Netherlands, presented a fundamental critique of the neighbourhood unit, which at that point was being implemented all across Western Europe. At a conference on social cohesion and new urban districts attended by planners, administrators and scholars, Van Doorn argued that the neighbourhood unit rested on a 'vague, rather romantic or ideologically wrenched, conviction about the integration of citizens in neighbourhood life' (1955: 243). Instead, Van Doorn continued, planning and governance should build on 'analyses of real social relations' between people (1955: 243). He believed that the mixed-class ambitions of neighbourhood planning actually neglected the post-war compartmentalisation of Dutch society into separate ideological 'pillars'. Predominant deductive social axioms amongst planners and administrators were at odds with existing social realities – ranging from the home to communal life.

This may be understood as an inversion of the then hegemonic norm of knowledge-based planning: rather than using undisputed socio-spatial templates to enforce desirable social conduct from above, social relations should be the object of empirical study in order to understand the diverging needs and desires of urbanites. 'One does not come very far by adhering to "forced manifestations of community" [and] uniform "blocky" rational building in new neighbourhoods that lack any sense of singularity', stated Van Doorn (1955: 246). He concluded by stressing that profound sociological enquiry in collaboration with other experts should precede all urban policy and planning.

Though Van Doorn's criticism was still a minority voice in the mid-1950s, it was the starting point of a broad-fronted attack on the elitist

and essentialist nature of urban planning. It also provided leeway for other urbanists to begin promoting inductive sociological understandings of urban space and society, particularly by means of empirical enquiries and surveys to map social relations and the daily use of urban space (Van Doorn and Lammers, 1958). In 1962, reputed sociologist Piet Thöenes added to this emerging 'norm cascade' by castigating the 'administrative-technical activities and invisibility of a new elite of dignitaries', which could lead to frustration among citizens to whom modernisation seemed an uncontrollable juggernaut (Thöenes, 1962: 189–190; 229–236). According to sociologist Kees Schuyt, scepticism about the utopian ambitions of the 1950s and 1960s was actually desirable 'in a society where planning is in the hands of a scientific elite who use their authority to dictate reality' (Schuyt, 1972, 276).

These academic, to some extent non-committal, sociological critiques gradually entered the corridors of town halls and planning agencies. From the 1950s onwards, Dutch municipalities began commissioning sociological enquiries, starting with ethnographic work in perceived 'anti-social' neighbourhoods in Maastricht (Litjens, 1953). Utrecht was the first municipality to ban the neighbourhood unit and its social axioms from its planning policies, claiming that this planning tool falsely projected urbanites as 'lonely people who are lost in the masses' in need of guidance (Doevendans and Stolzenburg, 1988: 48). Throughout the 1960s, sociological surveys and studies became more comprehensive and informative for municipal policymaking, resulting in a critical reassessment and, ultimately, a rejection of the essentialism of 'scientised' urban planning (Jonker, 1981).

Notwithstanding the relative absence of structural collaboration between planners, architects and social scientists, the attack on the technocratic underpinnings of modernist expansion and redevelopment was still a group effort. Although all three groups usually operated independently of each other, they worked in close consultation with or on behalf of local residents and social movements. While historiography has set the members of such movements aside as romantic daydreamers or even conservative counterforces (Mamadouh, 1992: 34–40; De Liagre Böhl, 2010: 71; Rooijendijk, 2005: 33), their aims and objectives reveal a tacit knowledge and an extremely rich understanding of the city, informed by alliances with norm entrepreneurs. Grassroots movements gained access to urban knowledge by visiting political meetings, consultation events, and administrative institutions such as the local land registry, and promoted a citywide and consciously countercultural agenda against modernist expansion and redevelopment schemes.

Despite the rapprochement between the norm entrepreneurs and social movements under examination in this chapter, some remained sceptical of the merits of sociological knowledge. 'Common sense, human dignity and political insight as well as significant knowledge of his own craft are



*Figure 4.2* An action group meeting attended by two young architects: a clear example of how the ‘sociocratic knowledge regime’ came to protest the ideas underpinning the scientised city.

Source: Het Nieuwe Instituut.

better beacons to set one’s course after than a jumble of number of figures that will only worsen the chaos’ (Bakker, 1972: 11), was the conclusion of one activist on collaborations with architects and sociologists. Nevertheless, coalitions between planners, architects, sociologists and grassroots movements were instrumental to reverberating new social norms, both in terms of accumulating a critical mass to sustain a ‘norm cascade’ as well as in terms of exemplifying knowledge pluralism. By examining the local case studies of Amsterdam and Utrecht, two cities that devised far-reaching redevelopment schemes for their city centres, the next section will investigate the interplay between norm entrepreneurs and the pre-existing knowledge regimes they came to confront.

### **The emergence of a new ‘sociocratic’ knowledge regime (1975–1990)**

In local politics, urban redevelopment had become a social-democratic project par excellence during the 1960s. The planning offices of larger Dutch cities were firmly held by Labour politicians, who shared a strong belief in a scientific approach to urban planning and welfare state interventionism. In addition, the social democrats were keen to settle a bill with the built legacy of nineteenth-century laissez-faire urbanism, which had resulted in dreadful living conditions for the working classes. At the

same time, these social democratic aldermen often had little to no experience in planning, making them dependent on the knowledge of their civil servants (Verlaan, 2019a, 422: 427). In particular the Amsterdam planning department was notoriously powerful and proud of its autonomous expertise (cf. Jager, 2002; Couperus, 2009: 154–160 and 192–198), illustrated by one planner's warning to freshly-installed alderman Han in 1970: 'Our department is here to stay, the aldermen are but an incident' (De Liagre Böhl, 2015: 118). This technocratic pride also prevented outside experts, including American planners David Jokinen and Oscar Newman, from influencing Amsterdam's planning agenda (Jokinen, 1967; Verlaan, 2020). Eventually, in all larger conurbations the emergence of new norm entrepreneurs backed by contentious local residents would break the power of planning departments as technocratic. The persuasiveness and strength of these departments varied from city to city. Even in 1970, when the Dutch planning fervour had reached its zenith, only 27 out of a total of 900 Dutch municipalities boosted their own public works departments (Schuiling, 1972: 53). Thus, it should come as no surprise that less experienced municipalities were inclined to listen to advice from external experts.

This was particularly the case in Utrecht, which during the 1950s and 1960s called on the knowledge of a foreign traffic engineer and local property developers to find cures for the ills of the affluent urban society. Rising car ownership and office expansion had jeopardised the viability of the city centre, persuading planning alderman Wim Derks in 1955 to ask renowned German traffic engineer Max Feuchtinger for advice. The 100-page report he produced was an extremely detailed blueprint for the car-centred city, filled with diagrams, maps and statistics on car movements, local demographics and employment (Feuchtinger, 1958). Defending the work of Feuchtinger, Derks responded to his critics by stating that '[t]his diagnosis has been made by an expert, wholly objective, as if a doctor has diagnosed a vital organ with a serious infection' (Derks, cited in Verlaan, 2019a: 11). The likening of the work of planners to the methods of general practitioners was a common trope to validate the formers' knowledge claims, or as Dutch traffic expert Hendrik Goudappel explained in 1965: 'Traffic is entitled to a full treatment. Careful observation, diagnosis, prognosis, and a curing therapy are all intrinsic elements of traffic planning' (Goudappel, cited in Verlaan, 2019a: 8).

Instead of a comprehensive traffic plan, Utrecht eventually opted for the implementation of the 'Hoog Catharijne' redevelopment scheme. In 1962, the Bredero construction company convinced the municipality to clear a nineteenth-century district between the city's railway station and its historical core to make way for a modernist shopping centre, offices and transport facilities – the ultimate product of scientific urban planning. The developer's expert knowledge was a convincing sales



# Verkeersplan Utrecht 1

## A Verkeersanalyse rijwiel- en gemotoriseerd verkeer 1

### Verkeersgegevens

Verkeersstratennet, telrayons, telpunten, doorsnedetellingen  
Angewen te resultaten: 12 uur = dagverkeer van de doorsnedetellingen op 10/7 en 11/7/1956, 7.00-19.00 uur

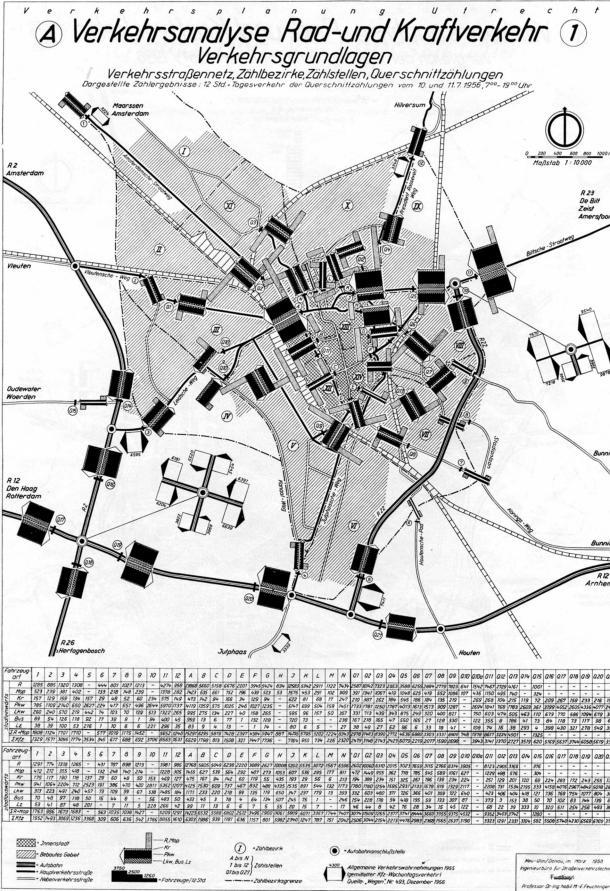


Figure 4.3 A schematised depiction of Hoog Catharijne’s traffic routes.

Source: ‘Verkeersplan Utrecht’ (Ulm: Ingenieursbüro für Straßenverkehrstechnik, 1958).

argument: in the preceding years the company had acquired a young team of academics with backgrounds in social geography, organisation studies and economics, who were able to calculate consumer demand, footfall and investment yields. Bredero's CEO, who himself was trained as a mathematician and physicist, believed that only scientifically gathered knowledge could serve as grounds for municipal decision-making: 'Fundamental research is just as important for the responsible production of space as it is for the production of industrial goods' (De Vries, cited in Verlaan, 2019a: 422). Around the mid-1960s this outspokenly technocratic stance, in which hints of socio-spatial essentialism resonated, was still commonplace in Dutch urban planning, as might be exemplified by the lauding of Bredero by a professional journal in 1964: 'Every realistic city council would be delighted when an initiator would come to the fore with the brains, money and pushing power, especially one who is convinced that he can do the job within a time span of ten years' (Petri, cited in Verlaan, 2019a: 421).

It was exactly within this time span that Utrecht's knowledge regime, which in this case had been consolidated and was embodied by a public-private partnership in urban governance, came under attack from a wide array of local stakeholders. After the signing of the contracts for the Hoog Catharijne scheme, Bredero became a powerbroker in local politics that would not give in to demands by urban social movements. The latter revolved around concerns over the liveability of the city centre, the future of small shop owners and fears of a capitalist takeover by a construction company solely interested in pleasing its shareholders. A relatively young architect became the figurehead in the protests against urban redevelopment. In response to an open call from the municipality in 1969, Herman Hertzberger had designed a cultural centre for a building plot close to Hoog Catharijne – a scheme that was eventually embraced by the city council and municipal executive. The city's social democratic alderman for urban planning, Theo Harteveld, remained firmly in the saddle from 1962 until 1978 but was not deaf to calls for participatory planning. Under the influence of Jaap Barentsen, the reformist head of the local planning installed in 1969, Harteveld had begun taking a more favourable approach to citizen participation (Verlaan, 2012: 193).

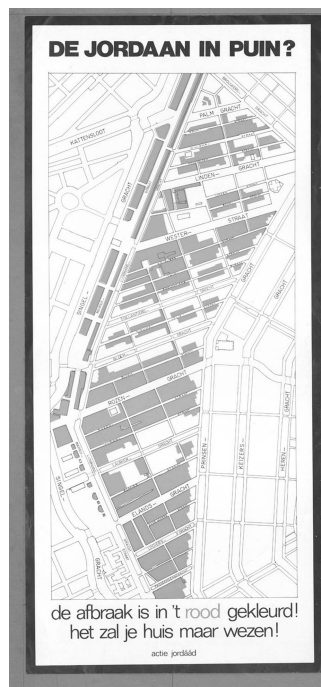
This turn of events caused much distress among the Bredero planners, who feared the alternative planning proposal by Hertzberger would thwart the Hoog Catharijne scheme. In discussions with local stakeholders, their CEO took an extremely technocratic stance on the growing influence of local residents in planning matters, who allegedly only acted out of self-interest and could not properly motivate their concerns (De Vries, 1974: 6). Political outcomes not in line with his company's views were supposedly the consequence of 'emotional' or even 'brainless' decision-making. According to one city councillor, the lack of knowledge and expertise on the side of

elected officials had manoeuvred Bredero in an all-powerful position. While alderman Harteveld would not go this far, he admitted that Utrecht had been much too blindsided by Bredero's planning bravado in the early 1960s. This could have been prevented if the municipality would have had the luxury of multiple plans to choose from instead of just one, and if the planning of the Hoog Catharijne scheme had allowed for more flexibility (Harteveld, 1972: 30–32; Soons, 1972: 33–35; Crince le Roy et al., 1972: 36–39). According to the reformist planner Jaap Berentsen, attempts to give citizens a stronger voice in the further planning of redevelopment were expected to fail due to Bredero's unreconciliatory stance (Wilbrink, 1971: 46). Ultimately, both Bredero's Hoog Catharijne and Hertzberger's cultural venue were more or less built according to plan, leaving a physical imprint of two clashing visions of the urban future.

In Amsterdam, the stalling redevelopment of the Nieuwmarkt area, a mixed-use district east of the city centre, gave Aldo van Eyck and his allies an opportunity to bring their ideals into practice. The neighbourhood was slated for demolition by the planning department to make room for offices, a metro line and a four-lane expressway connecting the modernist Bijlmermeer estate to the city centre. In response to mounting protests from local residents, preservationists and a budding squatting movement, the municipality decided to organise a design contest in 1970, in which its own planners were not allowed to participate. Van Eyck's submission, which he eventually retracted due to compromises he was forced to make, was an assault on the 'obstinate, sterile and undemocratic' planning practices of his time. The architect saw the lived experiences of local residents as indispensable to an alternative design process: 'A city that neglects the creative potential and spontaneous initiatives of its citizens and only reflects what people *do* inside the city rather than what they *add* and *change*, shuts itself off – and dies' (Van Eyck, 1970). His pupils advanced such observations in the opinion pages of planning journals, or as architects Paul de Ley and Jouke van den Bout stated about the merits of citizen participation: 'Demands should be coming from residents and their living environment. [...] The processing of these demands is difficult, but extremely rewarding, as we can then work from a complex situation instead of one-dimensional statistical needs' (De Ley and Van den Bout, 1971: 35). Here, again, norm entrepreneurs, in this case the structuralists in the milieu of Van Eyck, dismissed the unidirectional planning imperatives of the post-war years by rejecting its socio-spatial essentialism.

The hard work of urban social movements reverberated in the proposals Van Eyck and his associate Theo Bosch made for the Nieuwmarkt area, where from 1967 onwards a well-organised and vocal movement of both squatters and preservationists came to protest the demolition works. Grassroots knowledge about the neighbourhood's social and physical fabric was operationalised through the

establishment in 1971 of a consultation group consisting of municipal planners and city officials, housing corporation representatives, residents and architects (Albers, 2019: 44). The counterproposals originating in the neighbourhood meetings swiftly found favour in the press and a majority of city councillors. In the preceding years, Amsterdam and other Western cities had experienced an influx of younger residents arriving on the heels of middle- and working-class families leaving for the suburbs or commuter towns in the hinterlands. In line with criticism uttered by Van Eyck, the newcomers called for the abolition of redevelopment agendas in favour of renovating the older urban fabric and the provision of affordable housing and local amenities. Their archenemy was the local planning department, which according to sociologist André Hoekema was neither willing nor able to change its working methods: 'A lively, but then also often surprising exchange of thoughts with society is at odds with the need for a clear and feasible planning practice, which in turn is needed for a future-proof, rational administration of the city' (1978, 77).



*Figure 4.4* Visual montage of how office developments threatened the urban fabric, produced by a community action group.

Source: Stadsarchief Amsterdam.

Amsterdam's social movements and community action groups quickly became a political force to reckon with, which was mirrored in the municipal elections of 1966 and in particular those of 1970. This was the moment when the door opened for the establishment of a new knowledge regime. With the instalment of Han Lammers as alderman for urban planning, who as a member of the New Left – a reformist group of young politicians within the Dutch Labour Party large – had spoken out against urban redevelopment himself, it was widely expected that Amsterdam would put an end to the technocratic reign of its planning department. However, he was soon converted to large-scale thinking by his civil servants, about which a fellow councillor had already warned him upon his inauguration: 'They will take you in with their arguments; they have more information than you do; they have power and experience; and they can thrive on a great past' (Brinkgreve, cited in De Liagre Böhl, 2010: 68). The head of Amsterdam's planning department, Ton de Gier, was only willing to discuss his plans with urban action groups after they had deepened their knowledge of how his planning apparatus worked (Vroemen and Hijna, 1968: 10). According to Lammers himself, the mounting discontent in the city was understandable, but the solution for the problems lay with city hall. He had particular aversion towards students claiming to represent disaffected residents: 'Little ideologies derived from the bird guide for sociology will not help housing construction' (Van den Berg, 1971).

Under the authority of Lammers, in 1971 the Amsterdam planning department published its Second Memorandum on Urban Renewal. The plan was a recognition of the changing tides in the field of urban planning and was much more geared towards residents' concerns than its predecessor, a position which was reflected in the formulation of planning objectives, phases, and expected outcomes and consequences. Equally important was the reconciliatory and self-conscious tone its authors had adopted after observing the social unrest in the city's redevelopment areas (Gemeente Amsterdam, 1971: 5). However, as one high-placed planner observed in his memoirs, his department had difficulties in adopting the new planning strategies and scenarios:

It was difficult to get used to the horizontal consultation structures and working methods, which were meant to put urban renewal back on track. Heads of department demanded frequent feedback and held on to the normal course of business. Lots of talking without much result.  
(Van den Berg, 2016: 106–107)

After his re-election in 1974 and several concessions to neighbourhood action groups, Lammers increasingly sided with those planners who still believed in the merits of comprehensive redevelopment. With the rise of new norm entrepreneurs within his own party who pleaded for

small-scale solutions instead of large-scale interventions, Lammers was ultimately forced to resign in 1975. Consequently, the counterproposals to modernist redevelopment would go on to be implemented on a large scale.

As the cases of Utrecht and Amsterdam demonstrate, norm entrepreneurs had challenged predominant norms of the 'scientised city', which had manifested themselves in hegemonic public-private partnerships in the case of Utrecht and a techno-administrative bulwark in the case of Amsterdam. By means of forging alliances with grassroots organisations and urban social movements, alternative norms were actively promoted and gained momentum. Juxtaposed to the paternalism, socio-spatial essentialism and technocratic beliefs of the immediate post-war period, these new social norms entailed a more pluralist, decentred, reciprocal and horizontal understanding of the role of knowledge in urban planning. Faludi and Van der Valk (1994, 11) have referred to this as the 'sociocratic planning' doctrine. The norms underpinning this sociocratic knowledge regime were gradually confronted with the germination of yet another set of norms that would ultimately usher in the age of urban entrepreneurialism by the late 1980s.

## **Conclusion**

Through the late 1960s and 1970s, the coming together of new planning ideals, neighbourhood protests, an economic slump and changing tides in local politics led to the establishment of a new knowledge regime in Dutch cities. This chapter offers tentative proof of how the notion of norm entrepreneurship helps to explain, empirically, why and how normative change is brought about by historical actors. We have done so by adopting a contextualised and decentred approach to normative change brought about by norm entrepreneurs. The all-pervasive norm of the 'scientised' city in the immediate post-war years culminated in a knowledge regime that was established by a coalition of planners, architects, administrators and builders. Modernist spatial designs, socio-spatial planning templates, technocratic governance routines and standardisation of building procedures mutually reinforced each other. Uncritically accepting spatial determinism and the political idleness of citizens, throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s this knowledge regime became consolidated and legitimised within the vicious circle of planning and governing elites. Obviously, this was not how representatives of the regime saw themselves, having claimed to be working in a unified public interest and merely seeing themselves as the trailblazers of modernity.

Already from the late 1950s onwards, hence much sooner than current historiography assumes, a number of norm entrepreneurs began to actively challenge or even attack the 'scientised' perspective on the functioning of cities. A younger generation of planners, architects and social

scientists contested the existing knowledge regime of urban planning from distinct but mutually reinforcing perspectives. All agreed that the prevailing norm of essentialist socio-spatial knowledge and unresponsive technocratic governance was overdue – politically, ideologically, theoretically and socially. These norm entrepreneurs, amongst others Van den Berg, Hertzberger, Van Eyck and Van Doorn, consciously or unconsciously created a political opportunity structure for social movements and engaged critical residents to jump on the norm bandwagon and become essential parts of the new ‘sociocratic’ knowledge regime. This regime articulated new norms of urban planning that were at odds with the ‘scientised city’: small-scale, pluralist knowledge-based, contextually-determined and coalition-driven. The ‘sociocratic’ knowledge regime was swiftly accepted, consolidated and legitimised by new political elites, who were mainly affiliated with the Dutch New Left, which had aligned itself with calls for the democratisation of society and the emerging peace and civil rights movements. To understand the transition from one dominant knowledge regime into another, Fred Feddes’ formulation of the two opposing visions on urban modernity is more productive than castigating the modernists as coldblooded technocrats. While the scientised regime saw the city as a technically advanced, socially refined, and rationally ordered growth machine, the sociocratic regime understood the city as a breeding ground for social interaction and cultural diversity (Feddes 2012, 294–297). Hence, the shift from the ‘scientised’ to the ‘sociocratic’ knowledge regime should be understood as the product of norm change, initiated by norm entrepreneurs who promoted a radical and different version of urban modernity.

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