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Dilemmas of the inclusive city: Amsterdam as a case study

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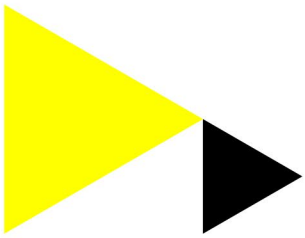

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Dilemmas of the inclusive city: Amsterdam as a case study

Ivan Nio

Inclusion has been the new magic concept in Dutch policy for about ten years now. The term appears in policy memorandums of many municipalities. At the same time, there is a discussion among scholars about interpretations of inclusion. What is an inclusive city? Is it a city that is accessible to everyone? A city without inequality? A city where everyone feels at home? There are no unequivocal answers. Everyone interprets the inclusive city differently. But it does touch on essential issues. This article elaborates on policies for an inclusive city of the municipality of Amsterdam. I will critically assess the effects of three policy areas aimed at inclusion in deprived neighbourhoods. I will show that the results are not so unequivocal because of obstacles in the system world and the realities of everyday life. Finally, I will indicate what this means for the approach of various practitioners who deal with the principle of inclusion.

1. The rise of the concept of inclusion

Before I show how the municipality of Amsterdam strives towards more inclusion, I will first sketch the rise of the Dutch debate on inclusion. The accessibility of cities is one of the United Nation's sustainable development goals, to which the Netherlands has committed itself. Based on the principles of an accessible city and equality of opportunity, cities should provide opportunities for all its inhabitants to develop, emancipate, progress in terms of income, find a job, receive an education or move to a better place. Since the 1990s, policy for Dutch cities has focused strongly on economic growth and attracting higher incomes. The attractiveness and popularity of Dutch cities has increased significantly over the past thirty years. But due to the retracting government, increased market forces and more emphasis on self-reliance, negative effects like inequality, growing polarisation and segregation have become more apparent (Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving 2016; Raad voor de Leefomgeving en Infrastructuur 2020).

The discussion about inclusion has gained momentum due to exclusion processes in cities. In the past ten years, inequality of access to housing, em-

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ployment, education, transport and public facilities has increased, especially in the large Dutch cities. The emancipatory lift function of the city is faltering, because of rising housing prices and the diminishing range of public facilities. Victims of exclusion processes are no longer only the most vulnerable groups (such as people with a low income or social assistance benefits, with a physical or mental disability, with debts and/or a small social network), but also people with middle incomes (teachers, healthcare staff), flex workers and self-employed persons (Raad voor de Leefomgeving en Infrastructuur 2020; Boterman/Van Gent 2022). Access to the city as a whole has become more restricted for broad groups. For entire sections of the population, exclusion from the city is a threat, and with it, the prospect of social advancement disappears.

Reflecting a shift in thinking about the condition and future of the city, municipalities apply a broadly defined concept of inclusion (of a city which is accessible to everyone) to emphasise more strongly the social aims of urban policy. This concept of inclusion also concerns housing associations which were partly deregulated in the 1990s. For example, a number of large Amsterdam housing associations are now committed to inclusive cities. This means cities where everyone feels at home, can participate and develop their talents. "Where everyone has access to everything the city has to offer; from a place to live to facilities and from public space to education. Inclusive cities offer a healthy and safe living environment with sufficient greenery and public space in all neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods invite everyday encounters; a first step towards recognition of the other. Ultimately, it's about creating valuable places, neighbourhoods that people love" (De Vernieuwde Stad 2011: no page).

Private developers now also embrace inclusion. This proves the capacity of this concept to mobilise and enhance the formation of coalitions for new spatial and social assignments, although it will also be part of their marketing strategies. One of the largest developers in the Netherlands, AM, launched a competition in 2018 entitled: 'Towards a more inclusive city'. In their definition, it is also a city with a diversity of population groups, backgrounds and incomes. The city must remain accessible to everyone and be a place where everyone has equal opportunities, with access to education and the labour market. The inclusive city offers amenities and activities that residents feel they are part of. Mixed neighbourhoods are seen as a key to achieving this inclusion (Smit 2018).

Because of its broad scope, normative attractiveness and near-universal application, the inclusive city can be seen as a magic concept (Pollitt/Hupe 2011). The concept of inclusion seeks to support efforts to do something about the increased inaccessibility of cities and the inequality of opportunity. It is striking how quickly the concept of inclusion has become common in the system world of municipalities, housing associations and private developers. However, the above quotes suggest that everyone can find a place in an inclu-

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sive city and that this can occur in a harmonious and rational-planned manner. That is why the concept has been criticised. Pollitt and Hupe (2011) warn that magic concepts can dilute, obscure or even deny traditional social science concerns with conflicting interests and logic. Franke and Veldhuis (2019: 69) argue, for example, that the concept of an inclusive city has an overly idealistic and moralistic edge. 'It sometimes suggests the elimination of differences, while the city thrives on difference, contrast, conflict and complexity.' They prefer to speak of the just city. Buitelaar (2020) considers both concepts – just city and inclusive city – to be interchangeable. However, he believes that the concept of justice can draw on a long philosophical tradition, while inclusion is mainly a recent, policy-related invention.

The assumption that inclusion must include conflicts is also reflected in criticism based on the theories of political scientist Chantal Mouffe. According to Mouffe (2005), instead of pinning our hopes for an inclusive city on the rational capacity of humans, we should learn to live together again in a world of division, conflict and complexity. Scholars argue that contradiction and conflict should be part of urban development (Visser 2020). It is not a problem if places are not one hundred per cent inclusive. Then there will also be openness to intergenerational inclusion, for citizens who want to alter a place at a later time (Verloo in: Karnenbeek/Willems 2022).

Some Dutch sociologists argue for a more relaxed view of inclusion, with a focus on initiatives where residents connect because of things they have in common and less on inclusive activities that should be accessible to all residents. The aim should be more focused on inclusive neighbourhoods and less on inclusive activities (Engbersen/Jansen 2022).

2. Amsterdam as an inclusive city?

Inclusion is identified as a value in recent policy documents of the municipality of Amsterdam. In the Environmental Vision 2050, the long-term vision for the spatial development of the city, it is described as follows: 'Amsterdam wants to be an inclusive city. A city where inhabitants of Amsterdam and newcomers can feel at home, and which offers opportunities to develop. An inclusive city is also an undivided city. This means that opportunities to emancipate are the same everywhere in the city. It also means that we combat large differences in perceived quality of life and concentrations of disadvantages and social problems' (Gemeente Amsterdam 2021b: 158).

An important reason the concept is embraced is that Amsterdam as an undivided city is under pressure. The city has experienced strong economic growth since 2000 which has made Amsterdam a more expensive place to live in. The city is struggling with rising land and rent prices, crowds of tourists

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and the arrival of expats (Milikowski 2018). Housing prices of owner-occupied dwellings and rents in the private sector have risen enormously and there has been a decrease in affordable housing (Christof/Majoor 2021). Not only vulnerable and lower-income households, but also the middle class is finding it increasingly difficult in Amsterdam (Boterman/Van Gent 2022). This is a new situation for this city which has a rich tradition of affordable (social) housing. In the past, Amsterdam was even hailed by Fainstein (2010) as a just city and praised for its social democratic principles of city development. Others claim that Amsterdam no longer deserves this 'just city' status (Uitermark 2009).

Secondly, there is increasing inequality and segregation. The social geography of Amsterdam shows a growing core-periphery divide (Savini et al. 2015). Pockets of poverty and high unemployment have arisen in vulnerable post-war neighbourhoods in the urban periphery outside the A10 ring road. These neighbourhoods have high percentages of non-Western migrants. In these superdiverse neighbourhoods, various kinds of policies are trying to reverse the threat of exclusion and displacement processes.

In Amsterdam, inclusion has been translated into various policy areas. This article focuses on urban renewal in so-called deprived neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods are characterised by socio-economic problems such as high unemployment, low incomes and feelings of unsafeness. In addition, the maintenance of homes and public space is often delayed or minimal. In the past 20 years, some of these neighbourhoods have been renovated in terms of housing, social facilities and public space. In 2018, 32 neighbourhoods were again designated for large-scale renovation and socio-economic improvement. In the last few years, the aim has been to better align physical investments with the needs of current and future residents. In addition to extra social investments, restructuring and densification are a means of improving quality of life. Inclusion relates to both the process and the outcome of urban renewal. In order to increase the number of affordable homes in the city and therefore inclusion, the municipality of Amsterdam introduced the '40-40-20 scheme' since 2018. For new construction, the requirement is 40 per cent social rent, 40 per cent medium-priced rent and purchase and 20 per cent high-end rent and purchase (Gemeente Amsterdam 2017).

Three aspects of inclusive urban and social renewal in deprived neighbourhoods will be discussed here: resident participation, socio-spatial infrastructure and mixed neighbourhoods. The ambition of the left-wing city council is to involve everyone in participation processes and to make the results in the field of housing, social facilities and public space as inclusive as possible. For inclusive goals at the intersection of spatial and social policy domains – participation, collective facilities and neighbourhoods – I will address two issues on the basis of some examples. First, living together in a city is always accompanied by processes of self-selection, division, conflict and inclusion and exclusion in relation to places. Second, I will contrast the system world of the pro-

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fessionals with the everyday living environment of residents in neighbourhoods. Based on research of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) and research into the socio-spatial practices of residents in the superdiverse post-war neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, I will show what inclusion as a policy goal means and how it actually works in daily life and what dilemmas it poses.

3. Participation as a process

Amsterdam has a tradition of strong government and outspoken civil society. In this constant confrontation, all kinds of – often pragmatic – attempts are made to establish a connection with bottom-up movements (Christof/Majoor 2021). With the change of city government in 2018, a greater focus on democratisation emerged. The municipality of Amsterdam has the ambition to involve citizens as much as possible in decision-making about spatial interventions and urban renewal. New ways of cooperation are being explored for an inclusive city. There is room to experiment with new forms of participation. The policy document on participation states: 'Our participation is inclusive. This means that we match the wishes and possibilities of the target group as closely as possible with the use of language, working methods and means of communication. We also make sure that the buildings where we organise meetings are easily accessible to everyone' (Gemeente Amsterdam 2019).

The city council attaches great importance to the fact that the residents of deprived neighbourhoods are included in the renewal. This implies involving residents in urban renewal, i.e. renovating existing homes and public space, adding new homes and making the neighbourhood low-traffic or natural gas-free. The objective of inclusion implies a high degree of accessibility to participation for the citizens who have an interest in the outcome. In addition, another goal is the broad representation of local residents. However, no specific participation methods are prescribed, thus enabling participation to be customised. Citizens are involved in the planning processes in very different ways.

An important issue for inclusion is how to achieve broad representation. Participation often promotes unintentional selection of participants. Active residents have the time and energy to participate, while it is precisely in deprived neighbourhoods that people do not have (mental) space to participate in this planning because of the many problems with which they themselves are confronted (Van Aanholt et al. 2019). Ethnic minorities, young people, the less educated and women are often underrepresented in participation (Bronsvoort et al. 2020). If it is not a good representation of the local population, a project runs the risk of becoming exclusive rather than inclusive (Jansen 2019). The dilemma is: Will the municipality engage in targeted dialogue with a limited

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group of residents who are already active and have a network in the neighbourhood, or is it trying to involve as many people as possible?

In the post-war neighbourhood of Banne Noord, an intensive participation process was chosen in the course of urban renewal and densification in order to arrive at a plan (Van Aanholt et al. 2021). 16 meetings were organised – mainly in the neutral context of a primary school – in which about 600 residents participated in one way or another. The municipality's project team approached groups of residents who were largely absent at the first meetings, such as Muslim women, young people and residents of social housing. Because the project team attached great importance to the inclusivity of the process, they went door-to-door at nearby social housing flats to invite residents to the next meeting. In terms of numbers of residents and the inclusion of those residents, the participation process in Banne Noord has been successful. Migrant groups also took an active part here. Shaping inclusive participation gatherings is an art that determines whether it is meaningful to residents (Bronsvoort et al. 2020). Despite the efforts, the older, long-term residents who were involved from the start left a greater mark on the process. The residents had a strong preference for a minimal variant of densification. The municipal ambitions for densification were much greater due to the housing shortage. The municipal team eventually found a balance between city-wide interests and the neighbourhood. The starting point will be the small-scale densification that was preferred by the participating residents. Banne Noord shows that a large-scale inclusive participation process requires a lot of commitment from the municipality and that it also leads to imbalances in the process and new uncertainties and complexities in the outcome.

There are also neighbourhoods in which participation experiments take place where participants form a selection of activist residents. In the K-neighbourhood in Amsterdam Zuidoost, a majority of residents are of an immigrant background. After residents in this neighbourhood went on a 'participation strike' because plans had already developed so far that they no longer had any real influence on them, an organisation from the neighbourhood was made responsible for the implementation and supervision of a participation process. According to some residents and officials, this central role comes at the expense of the inclusivity of the process. Others believe that it is increasing because this organisation has a broad network in the local area (Van Aanholt et al. 2021).

Another issue is the effect of inclusive participation. How interactive is the communication between citizens and government and how influential is the participation? The 'right to the city' (Harvey 2003) – having control and being able to influence your environment – appears to have been realised to a limited extent. Not all residents – e.g., those with limited Dutch language skills or a low education – feel free to think along with the government. Even within an inclusive participatory process, divisions can exist, and certain groups of resi-

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dents are dominant. And professionals are not always eager to participate, because NIMBY (Not In My Backyard)-like protests can lead to delays. The ideas that are generated through participation often also do not fit with the internal municipal procedures and responsibilities. There is still little willingness among civil servants to work on such participatory projects. Translating civic needs into urban plans requires extensive negotiation, flexibility, and above all, patience among administration as well as civil society (Christof/Majoor 2021). Opinions are therefore divided about the effectiveness of participation in Amsterdam. On the one hand, it has increased involvement in the living environment. On the other hand, the participation mainly concerns adjustments to large-scale plans and has little effect on the affordability of housing and accessibility of the city.

4. Socio-spatial infrastructure

A second policy area of inclusion is the social infrastructure. The municipality of Amsterdam strives for a broad and accessible range of activities and support in each neighbourhood or district (Gemeente Amsterdam 2019). Mayor Femke Halsema of Amsterdam argued that every neighbourhood should have at least three core facilities: a library, a community centre and a basketball court (in Dutch the three B's: bibliotheek, buurthuis, basketbalveld). Here, fairness is the aim of inclusion. The inclusive city is translated into offering personal development opportunities to residents who have had fewer chances than others. The social infrastructure focuses on connectedness and promoting involvement between residents. Everyone is welcome in community centres and they should be accessible to everyone. Initiatives that have their own objectives and target their own group – such as migrant organisations – therefore receive no support from the municipality. The objectives of community centres as places where people can meet are strict. The policy of the municipality is aimed at universal accessibility of these facilities for everyone. Based on this policy, there is a clear hope that community centres will provide universalistic, low-threshold facilities for all residents in highly diverse neighbourhoods. Against the background of increasing diversity and the accumulation of social problems, the community centre should be a place, especially in deprived neighbourhoods, where different groups of residents 'learn to live together'. Bridging contacts should be formed, which should lead to the reduction of prejudice, greater mutual sympathy and possibly mutual support.

That this turns out differently in reality is shown by research (Welschen et al. 2020) which gained insight into what the social basis means in practice for residents and professionals. Vulnerable groups (migrant elderly, refugees with a residence permit, people with a mental health care background or intellectual

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disability and people from social care) were examined in two community centres in the Amsterdam Nieuw-West district. It has become apparent that there is a great need among vulnerable groups for particularistic facilities and activities: aimed at their 'own groups'. Coming together with one's own group lowers the barriers: for elderly migrants who do not have sufficient command of the Dutch language, for people with a care background who feel unsafe in mixed groups, for refugees who still do not know the way to formal facilities and who seek support from compatriots. Activities in your own circle are important to feel at home somewhere. Vulnerable groups in society have a strong need to continue to come together in their own circle and to reach out to new residents from there. All these different groups of residents first of all want a place for their own group. In Robert Putnam's (2000) terms of social relations: before bridging is possible, the focus is primarily on bonding.

These findings form a nuance of the municipality's policy aimed at universal accessibility of facilities for everyone. Social professionals are often ambivalent about the ideal of inclusion. The ideal image is supported, but on the other hand, practice points to a different reality. Professionals in the community centres are aware of the need for a certain degree of particularism. Otherwise, some groups, such as women with a migrant background, will not be able to leave their houses. Research also shows that elderly people prefer the intimacy and living room-like atmosphere of small-scale neighbourhood rooms instead of a larger community centre (Nio et al. 2020). The location and physical characteristics of a building and the layout and atmosphere also determine its accessibility and for whom it is and is not intended. In ethnically mixed neighbourhoods, native elderly people also have a clear preference for places where they can be among others of their own kind. In community centres of different sizes, it is about the balance between the need for safety of activities in one's own circle, and the possibility of openness for other groups. Social professionals always have to navigate between these conflicting objectives and look for the right balance. As Zacka (2017) states, social work in everyday practice always requires a 'balancing act' between all kinds of conflicting expectations. It turns out that the community centres are mainly used for certain groups of residents, partly as a result of the composition of the neighbourhood. Street-level professionals do, however, play with time and space to create circumstances in which encounters become more likely. An example is the simultaneous planning of activities of two groups who then 'spontaneously' encounter each other during the coffee break.

There is even an important role for a certain degree of particularism in the inclusive city. The inclusive city cannot do without parochial places for specific groups. Parochial places are spaces which (sometimes temporarily) are appropriated by and for a certain group (Lofland 1998). These are spaces that evidently constitute the space of a certain group. Various groups that have something in common have their own places where they feel at home and or-

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ganisations where they meet and organise activities. This happens in the working-class neighbourhoods in Amsterdam Noord where older native residents come together during evening events to play cards and bingo. In Amsterdam Zuidoost, Ghanaians and Surinamese help each other. In Amsterdam Nieuw-West, migrants are active in self-organisations and have their mosques and community centres. And new city dwellers meet each other in trendy cafés. Facilities can be (semi)public or have a more parochial character and they work in- and exclusively. Due to high real estate rents, small affordable spaces in renewal neighbourhoods for specific groups and activities are becoming increasingly scarce.

When we talk about inclusive facilities, we think of neighbourhood-oriented meeting places where everyone is welcome. They come in all kinds of forms, from social facilities such as community centres and libraries to commercial facilities such as local shops. These collective facilities – the sociologist Klinenburg (2018) calls them 'Palaces for the People' – are important for mutual contact between local residents. These can be very mixed places. A major concern is the impoverishment of these public facilities. In Amsterdam, the city council now recognises the importance of sufficient public facilities in poor neighbourhoods. Whether these are mixed or closed group facilities or a combination of both is still an open question for researchers. In my research into socio-spatial practices of various groups of city dwellers in post-war districts in Amsterdam Nieuw-West, I have noticed that inclusion as accessibility can also occur in commercial facilities (Nio et al. 2009). For example, various groups with little money visit the department store HEMA which has a popular and affordable built-in restaurant and coffee corner. This chain radiates neutrality and fulfils an important function for residents with a migration background as well as for native elderly people who are familiar with this store. Research even shows that older people prefer commercial spaces like shopping malls to planned and designed activity spaces in care homes or neighbourhood centres (Van Melik/Pijpers 2017). Other examples of inclusive, easily accessible public facilities that attract a mix of visitors are neighbourhood shopping centres, markets, thrift shops, affordable cafés and lunchrooms. Residents can feel at home in their ethnically diverse neighbourhood, thanks to these commercial facilities.

5. Mixed neighbourhoods

In deprived neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, the municipality, housing associations and private parties have been working on inclusive neighbourhoods for more than 20 years. The policy ideal in Amsterdam is mixed neighbourhoods where different groups feel connected and at home, where groups live together

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and meet each other and where they have equal opportunities. The focus is on social connections and strengthening social cohesion. A great deal has been invested in Amsterdam, in the spatial renewal of deprived neighbourhoods, in order to break through the one-sidedness and improve the quality of life through mixing (more owner-occupied homes). The aim is always a mix of social housing, private sector rental housing and owner-occupied housing. Investments have also been made in new schools, social facilities and public spaces in deprived neighbourhoods. The municipality strives for an integrated approach, spatially and socially. What effect has this had? Urban renewal has led to a heated debate in Amsterdam, because the renewal has also increased gentrification and displacement of residents with low incomes. What does a diversity of population groups, backgrounds and incomes mean in practice for an inclusive neighbourhood?

An example is the Staalmanpleinbuurt, which has been renovated and renewed for 15 years. Many owner-occupied and private sector rental homes have been added, as a result of which the percentage of social rental homes has dropped from 100 per cent to 54 per cent. Social housing has been renewed. Residents of social housing were able to move on to a better home in the same neighbourhood. Residents with a higher income have moved in. The public space has also been renovated. Interviews with residents show that the quality of life has improved and that the mixing at neighbourhood level is appreciated, but that it also leads to new social dividing lines (Nio 2022). The differences in income, education and cultural background are large. A new primary school only attracts children from migrant families, but not children from the newly prosperous households. There is a gym and also a small neighbourhood room which can be used for specific groups. But a lack of connection between the different groups of residents is due to the fact that there are hardly any inclusive social and commercial facilities. There are a few retail spaces with independent entrepreneurs on a recently renovated neighbourhood square. A hopeful new private initiative is a neighbourhood facility with a café that meets the needs of various residents as a meeting place. However, the rent of the commercial space is so high that viability is at risk. Inclusive social and commercial facilities that are also open on weekends can encourage public familiarity in a socially diverse neighbourhood. This concerns lighter forms of living together and feeling at home, observing and recognising each other. An inclusive neighbourhood also demands conviviality. In conviviality, which is a friendly variant of public familiarity, a balance is found between activities within one's own circle on the one hand and cross-group contact on the other, to promote mutual familiarity and friendliness (Wessendorf 2014). What is needed to achieve this are places where that can actually happen: a lively and socially diverse public space and, above all, public facilities.

A lesson from urban renewal in Amsterdam is that an inclusive neighbourhood requires more than just a mixture of housing categories and a mix of pop-

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ulation groups. For the inhabitants to be able to live together, it is important that there is also an attractively designed and well-managed public space and public facilities. The task for urban renewal is how to create a neighbourhood where diverse groups of people can live together comfortably. The question is therefore: Which spatial structures, places and programs currently function as neighbourhood carriers and how can these be strengthened and enriched so that different groups of residents feel at home in a neighbourhood and feel connected to it? In a study into the renewal neighbourhood Couperusbuurt, we drew attention to a neighbourhood street that links various public spaces and facilities, such as a primary school, a church, a square with a mosque, a park and a shopping strip (Nio et al. 2020). In Sennett's (2018) terminology, this street is a weak boundary or border where the worlds of different groups of inhabitants come together. It is important to create public domains in socially diverse neighbourhoods. In inclusive neighbourhoods, residents can live peacefully side by side and informal contacts are not excluded, so that more mutual trust can develop. However, high land prices and land exploitation are usually decisive in the renewal of neighbourhoods. The financial-economic significance of space has become dominant at the expense of social use, which cannot be expressed in monetary terms.

6. Conclusions

What does Amsterdam's policy deliver in terms of successful interventions and what makes a process (participation), a place (socio-spatial infrastructure) and a neighbourhood inclusive? Urban renewal is a catalyst to simultaneously work on different physical and social ambitions in terms of inclusion. The Amsterdam examples show that the policy revolves around low threshold accessibility, proportionality and simultaneity of groups, interaction, meeting, bridging and building social capital. From the perspective of the lived city, it is important to take socio-spatial issues into account, such as how groups of residents (want to) live together.

The inclusive city is an aspiration, a state of mind and a way of working. It is a guiding principle. Inclusion is also a magic concept that challenges structures and processes that cause social injustice. The concept makes exclusive effects visible and helps to set agendas of (local) governments and other stakeholders. In this way, policy can take vulnerable groups into account, in particular. In the current opinion of the municipality and housing associations, it is necessary to invest unevenly in order to promote equality. However, the issue of the availability of facilities and the affordability of housing in the city cannot be solved solely with the policy aimed at inclusion. The concept of inclusion

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has its limitations because it runs into (bureaucratic and financial-economic) obstacles in the system world and in the realities of everyday life.

What can practitioners in the social and spatial domains do to strengthen inclusion in processes, in places and in neighbourhoods? This presents professionals with dilemmas and challenges for their action repertoire, especially because complexity has increased due to a multitude of stakeholders and a greater diversity of residents who are becoming increasingly empowered. The Amsterdam examples show that there are a variety of situations in which professionals in different policy domains can strengthen inclusion and implement knowledge of the residents' way of life.

First of all, policy makers and other practitioners must have an eye for the lived city, for different groups and their ways of life and needs, for socio-spatial issues. In addition, in socially diverse neighbourhoods there are always frictions and processes of inclusion and exclusion. The Amsterdam case shows that there are opportunities and professional scope for action in bringing various groups of residents together at certain times and places. In the social domain in particular, there is room for anticipatory action. Street-level professionals can acquire a position as an intermediary between groups of citizens. They are part of situations and processes in which they have to act as a bridge between professional knowledge and the knowledge of residents and the interests of the various parties involved.

Practitioners also have to navigate between the lived city of residents and the system world. The system world consists of all kinds of requirements, regulations and frameworks. In the case of participation: how can you adopt inclusion into the city's urban planning system? Particularly in the field of urban renewal, professionals have to take into account complex forces and a multitude of parties and interests. The new action perspective for professionals is that of a mediator between the spatial and social domain and between residents, city government and other stakeholders.

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