

**THE STRUGGLE TO BELONG.**

**DEALING WITH DIVERSITY IN 21ST CENTURY URBAN SETTINGS.**

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**CITY CHILDREN AND GENDERFIED NEIGHBOURHOODS;**

**The new generation as urban regeneration strategy**

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## CITY CHILDREN AND GENDERFIED NEIGHBOURHOODS

### The new generation as urban regeneration strategy

#### Abstract

Former industrial cities in the West are employing gentrification as urban policy. In these policies, women and families play an important role as gentrification pioneers. Analysing the case of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), I propose the term *genderfication* to understand the gender dimensions of this process. Genderfication refers to the production of space for different gender relations. I analyse Rotterdam's urban planning program for the "Child Friendly City", in which current urban dwellings are replaced by new, larger and more expensive "family-friendly homes" as a strategy for *urban re-generation*. Urban re-generation supplements regeneration in the form of material and economic restructuring, and refers to the replacement of part of the current population by a new and better suited generation. The "Child Friendly City Program" is considered in tandem punitive "youth policies".

*Keywords: Gentrification, gender, family, genderfication, Rotterdam, urban regeneration*

## 1. The post-industrial city and genderfication

In the western borough of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), the city administration is pushing gentrification. Vintage clothing shops, hip restaurants and bars receive subsidies to establish themselves in this formerly rundown quarter. The small housing that characterized this part of the city for over a century is in part being replaced by larger and more expensive dwellings. In Gaffelstraat, one of the narrow streets, an innovative project is to attract new inhabitants. A large banner adorns an empty slot where new inhabitants can design their new homes themselves. The banner shows a large picture of a thirty-something white woman with a smart leather jacket at her front door, a baby carrier with her small child in front of her and the slogan “Build your own dream house”<sup>1</sup>. Why do the project developer, the housing association and the administration of the former industrial city Rotterdam use the imagery of an affluent, young *mother* to push the gentrification it is aiming for in this part of the city? How has the family become the new desired group of inhabitants? This article will answer these questions by focusing on recent strategies of the municipality to establish a “child friendly city”.

Many former industrial cities in the West are employing gentrification as “positive urban policy” (Lees et al., 2008: 198). For instance in the United Kingdom, New Labour developed policies to bring the middle classes back to – among other cities – Newcastle and London. And in Canada, similar strategies were used in Vancouver (Lees et al., 2008). Gentrification is one of the strategies to move away from the industrial city of the past, and into a new economy. Other much used strategies to do this are city marketing (Van den Berg, 2011) and the stimulation of a creative economy (cf. Florida, 2002). These instruments are often part of a combined strategy of regeneration. In gentrification policies, women and their families now play an important role as gentrification pioneers. Urban administrators introduce middle class families as desired new inhabitants of urban neighbourhoods and sometimes even as the silver bullet to a variety of urban problems. Many scholars wrote about the relationship between gentrification and gender

since the 1990s (Bondi, 1991; 1999; McDowell, 1999; Lees, 2000; Lees et al., 2008). In this article, I build on that literature and offer a perspective on the intersections of class, age and gender by focusing on the gendered nature of these policy practices that are to enhance gentrification and social mixing.

Children, youngsters and parents are thus a focal point in gentrification policies: they are desired new urban inhabitants. However, children and youngsters are also most often looked upon as urban problems and *undesirable* subjects (Lees et al., 2008). The focus on children and youngsters in the contemporary city is thus two-sided: middle class children and highly educated parents are imagined as the solution to urban problems, whereas poorer young categories of urban inhabitants are mainly seen as the cause of much “liveability” problems or generally as “illegitimate subjects” (Watt, 2006: 777).

## **2. Rotterdam’s plan for a “child-friendly city”**

Public administrators and politicians in Rotterdam agree that gentrification is one of the most important routes to becoming a prosperous city of the future. Recently, Rotterdam supplemented targeting highly educated people without children with deliberately targeting families in gentrification efforts to change the demographic make up of the city (Rotterdam, 2009). The 2010 plan “Building Blocks for a Child Friendly City” (Rotterdam, 2010a) gives a detailed strategy for the future planning of especially older inner city poor neighbourhoods. I interpret this plan as an ‘instant gentrification’ (Rose, 2004: 280) strategy and an exemplary case of the shift in focus of cities that aim for gentrification from single young men and women to *middle class nuclear families* as gentrification pioneers.

Rotterdam takes its cue for these policies from Vancouver’s history of recovery. This Canadian city is often considered an international emblem for urban “liveability” (Punter, 2003). The city was successful in attracting desired inhabitants to its urban core by focusing on dual earner families. Vancouver developed a gendered strategy to attract these groups: it built family

friendly housing in inner city neighbourhoods and provided spatial solutions for the combination of care and work (Hutton, 2004; Punter, 2003).

### *Data and research questions*

I critically analyse the urban planning texts 1) “Building Blocks for a Child Friendly City” (Rotterdam, 2010a), 2) the “Child-friendly Boroughs Monitor” (that is designed to monitor the effects of the plan, Rotterdam, 2010b) and 3) the “Urban Vision Rotterdam 2030” (Rotterdam, 2008). I interpret the content of and discourse produced in these texts in the Rotterdam economic, demographic and social context. I focus on the paradoxes and contradictions in the plans and the obfuscating effects of the discourse that is produced and speaks in neutral terms of “families with children” as the desired new group of inhabitants, tracing how middle class families are constructed in the texts as the solution to many urban problems and what “child friendly” means.

The subtext of the neutral discourse is thus highly classed, gendered and age-specific. The in-depth analysis of the planning texts in this specific case will allow for an innovative approach to gender and age/ lifecycle aspects of gentrification as urban policy. Moreover it shows how space is produced for certain specific gender ideals. This way, the analysis supplements existing class-based approaches to gentrification in the urban research literature. In this fashion, this article fits the epistemological and methodological perspective of intersectionality because it looks at how gender, age and class work together and at how these constructions interact (see Wekker, 2002; Davis, 2008; Brah & Phoenix, 2004).

It is critical to show gendered and age-specific strategies of the city to change its population in addition to already much discussed class and *ethnicity* based strategies (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). Especially in Rotterdam, ethnic conflict and cultural contestations, for example about Islam and Muslim inhabitants, are very much central stage in public discourse, academic analyses and urban policies. What should be noted here is that the fact that this article

sheds light on gendered and age specific dynamics in no way means that ethnicity, culture, class or race are taken to be less important per se. Rather, this article seeks to *supplement* existing analyses of cultural, ethnic and class based conflict and policies (Tops, 2007; Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008) by offering a perspective on the gendered and aged aspects of urban dynamics. This article unravels what gentrification policies are about besides class upgrading or attempts to enhance the acculturation or assimilation of immigrants.

Four research questions guide my analysis of the Rotterdam plans for the “child friendly city”: 1) How does the city of Rotterdam intend to produce a “child friendly city”? 2) What does “child friendly” mean in the plans of the Rotterdam administration? 3) What reasons does the Rotterdam administration have for planning a “child friendly city”? 4) What role do gender and age play in this production of space?

*The other side: A discourse of “opportunities”*

The other side of the “upgrading” of the city as a whole that is the ultimate goal of the efforts towards a “child friendly” city, is formed by policy efforts to manage “youth”. The unequal character of these project comes to the fore in the construction of one category of children as “opportunity rich” or “potential” and a second category of “opportunity poor”, “risk youth” and “nuisance” (see Schinkel, 2009) . “Opportunities” and “potential” are important concepts in the legitimating discourse of gentrification. It delegitimizes “opportunity poor” as inhabitants of the city and legitimizes strategies to exclude whoever qualifies as such. Calculations of *future potentialities* are thus crucial in the social and spatial policies of today (Schinkel, 2009).

“Opportunity rich” on the one hand, and “opportunity poor” on the other hand are signifiers for a variety of factors. In Rotterdam youth policies, “opportunities” are a signifier of educational levels, for instance when a 2004-2007 youth policy plan states: “Too many Rotterdam youths have a low education and, thus, too few opportunities”<sup>2</sup>. And in other instances, “opportunities” signify employment, ethnicity, knowledge of the Dutch language, or even health<sup>3</sup>.

Generally, though, “opportunity rich” and “opportunity poor” are categories that are used in the exceptional spatial policy measures to prohibit the renting of houses to people with a low income (less than 110% of the social minimum<sup>4</sup>) in specific areas under the “Umbrella and Exception Law”, also known as the “Rotterdam Law” (see Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011 for further elaboration on this law and its consequences). In these cases, “opportunity poor” is a euphemism for “poor”, because it is defined as people with a very low income (Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011).

The idea that poor parents and children are “opportunity poor” leads to two lines of policy action: 1) the spatial replacement of “opportunity poor” with middle class “high potentials” and 2) policies to enhance the “opportunities” of the urban poor, to set a middle class norm for social behaviour and cut off deviant potentialities feared on the basis of statistical calculations of risk.

### **3. Gender, lifecycle, family and gentrification**

#### *Gender and gentrification*

Gentrification is approached in theory and research mostly as an economic and class-based issue (see Smith, 1996; Lees et al., 2008; Slater, 2006). Notwithstanding more cultural or consumption focused approaches to the process (see for example Zukin, 1989; Warde, 1991), gentrification is generally refers to the process where affluent people or businesses buy property in formerly poor neighbourhoods and occupants are displaced. In practice, the displacement of working class residents is most often the result (or even the goal) of the attraction of middle class residents to certain urban areas (Smith, 1996; McDowell, 1999; Slater, 2006). That gender and gentrification are correlated, comes to the fore most clearly in the abundant amount of studies on male gay gentrifiers (for an overview see: McDowell, 1999; see also Florida, 2002). However, many studies also suggest a relationship between gender and gentrification in dynamics where *women* are at the

forefront (Bondi, 1991; 1999; Patch, 2008; Lees et al., 2008). In such arguments, single women professionals, lone mothers and dual-earner couples play an important role. Gentrification coincided with the increase of women in professional jobs and therefore women gaining access to the financial resources to buy properties in the inner city (Smith, 1996; Bondi, 1999). In addition to economic and political restructuring, social changes that led more women into high earning professions do seem to have had an impact on the *form* of gentrification processes (Smith, 1996). Gentrification is thus a process at the intersection of gender and class.

Currently, *families* are becoming new catalysts to gentrification. Karsten showed how YUPP's ("Young Urban Professional Parent"; 2003: 2573) have increasingly come to make a "positive choice for the urban way of life" (2003: 2573). Especially certain groups of dual earner families seem to find the city an attractive place to live, because of the proximity of amenities, a liberal climate for those that want to depart from patriarchal ideals and the proximity to work, which makes the combination of work and family life much easier (Karsten, 2003; Warde, 1991; Lees et al., 2008). In line with intersectionality studies, gender should be understood here first and foremost as a social relation. What changes is the way in which people think about differences between men and women and proper roles for each sex. In other words: men taking on care work in the home changes the form of gentrification as much as women entering the labour market. Altered behaviour of women and new gender roles spur new forms of gentrification (Bondi, 1991; 1999) and this has not gone unnoticed by city administrators. The city of Rotterdam is after YUPP's and aims at attracting them through a spatial strategy of urban design.

The phenomenon of the YUPP shows a hiatus in theories of lifecycles and gentrification. Many theorists emphasized that gentrifiers are mainly young adults that live in gentrifying areas *prior* to having children (see for example Bondi, 1999; McDowell, 1999). When planning a family, and thus entering a different phase of the lifecycle, many former gentrifiers seem to buy property outside of the city. The city of Rotterdam tries to invert this process by deliberately associating



family with gentrification. The gentrification efforts of Rotterdam are thus exactly targeted at young people *with* children.

#### 4. Youthful Rotterdam: On urban re-generation

##### *Context: Rotterdam*

In addition to economic hardship that was the result of the rationalization of production in the harbour and the outsourcing of labour to low income countries, Rotterdam experienced a vast out-migration since the 1960s of middle class families and an in-migration of large groups of post-colonial migrants from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles and of groups of labour migrants, most notably from Turkey and Morocco (Becker et al., 2004). Rotterdam is the poorest, most industrial and at the same time the most ethnically diverse city in the Netherlands.

<b>Table 1. Statistics</b>	<b>Rotterdam<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>The Netherlands<sup>6</sup></b>
People living in Rotterdam in 2010	592.939	16.609.145
Percentage Non-western allochtons	36%	11%
Percentage of housing stock that is social housing (government or corporation owned)	49%	30%
Percentage inhabitants with incomes below “poverty line”	16%	8%

Rotterdam considers these characteristics of the population (ethnic composition, income levels and age) and its housing stock as major problems and the city explicitly aims to change the demographic profile of the city. This distribution is taking place on the basis of income, but the administration acknowledges that this is also a proxy for ethnic dispersion (Rotterdam, 2004; Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011). The youth of Rotterdam’s population and the fact that the city’s

population is getting younger (as opposed to all other cities in the Netherlands) is perceived as a problem *and* an opportunity by city administrators: a problem of poor youths as “nuisance” and an opportunity of middle class youths as “future of Rotterdam”. The basis of Rotterdam’s anxiety and the legitimization of gentrification policies is formed by the demographic phenomenon of “selective out-migration” (COS, 2010). That is to say that higher earning inhabitants in the age of 30-45 leave Rotterdam as a place to live more often than other categories of inhabitants and the city wishes to invert this trend.

### *“Social mix” in Rotterdam*

The administration of Rotterdam has pushed gentrification as a strategy to aid social ills since the late 1990s. Uitermark, Duyvendak and Kleinhans (2007) documented how each year 3000 new owner-occupied houses are added to the total of 250.000 houses while 4000 social houses for people with relatively low incomes are demolished. Many of the latter group are displaced in the process (Kleinhans, 2005). Rotterdam is thus a good example of a city where gentrification is employed as urban policy of which the goal is a “social mix”. Uitermark, Duyvendak and Kleinhans state: “In language that hardly requires textual deconstruction, the government of Rotterdam declares that it aims to attract ‘desired households’ to ‘problem areas’” (2007: 129). In other words, the city aims to “relocate” lower income groups to the suburban municipalities around Rotterdam, so that the city boroughs become more “mixed” and “differentiated” (Van der Graaf & Veldboer, 2009; Uitermark et al., 2007).

According to the proponents, to stimulate a “social mix” is to strengthen cohesion, further the integration of different groups and enhance “liveability”. By “diversifying” neighbourhoods, - as policy makers like to call it - poor inhabitants are dispersed, become less visible (Wacquant, 2008) and social order is easier maintained (Uitermark et al., 2007; Lees et al., 2008). The language of “social mixing” is mostly egalitarian. The practice is accompanied by talk of cohesion and integration. Yet, “social mix” is only proposed as a solution to urban problems

in poor neighbourhoods, not the middle class ones, and in areas with potential for “bourgeois chic” (Zukin, 1989). This is what Blomley meant when he stated that: “the problem with ‘social mix’ is that it promises equality in the face of hierarchy” (2004: 99).

Most research shows no integration, social cohesion and emancipation of lower class residents as a result of “social mixing” (Blokland, 2003; Lees et al., 2008). However, for cities like Rotterdam that want to attract the middle classes, “social mix” is not only a successful strategy to gentrify, but also a city marketing tool, because the tolerant, inclusive message of the city that is sent by talking about mixing, can in itself attract certain middle class residents (Lees 2008). The Other (the poor, the ethnically different) then serves as a signifier for “authenticity” (Zukin, 2010) for those that think of themselves as tolerant and open-minded (Slater, 2006).

#### *The city as a reproductive milieu*

With Rotterdam’s efforts to attract dual-earner families, the city is once again imagined as a place of *reproduction* (in the sense of having and raising children). From the 1960s onwards, urban planning texts spoke far less of residential areas for children and families (Karsten, 2003). Suburbanization coincided with the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s. These had the joint effect that politically progressive families, people without children, elderly and young people remained in the city and many nuclear families left.

Supplementing urban regeneration in the form of material and economic restructuring, Rotterdam is now focusing on the city as *reproductive milieu*. Rotterdam sets out to discipline the urban youngsters of the lower classes into the middle class of the future. These two focus points show that Rotterdam is trying to renew the city by bringing in a new generation, to *replace* the current population by a new and better suited generation. In short: to establish what I term *urban re-generation*.

### **5. Genderfication in the making: “Building blocks for a child friendly city”**

*Stopping “selective out-migration” by “family friendly planning”*

Rotterdam considers “selective migration” of the “opportunity rich” to be the root of all urban problems. This comes to the fore most clearly in this quote from the City Council:

“The capacity to absorb in certain areas is challenged and exceeded by a continued in-flow of people without and the continuing out-flow of people with opportunities. This is the core of all problems of Rotterdam” (Rotterdam, 2004).<sup>7</sup>

The image is invoked here that without an immediate stop to this process, further deterioration of the city will be inescapable. Note how the “opportunities” discourse is put to work here.

Turning around this process by attracting more families is the logical answer because:

“(Families with children) strengthen the social cohesion and the economic activity of the city. They provide the ideas and the energy for the future Rotterdam. They are the future in which the city invests.” (Rotterdam, 2010a: 9)

New families of which the parents are dual earners and have a higher education (as is made explicit in the plan) *are* the future of Rotterdam, it turns out in this quote, and they are also the ones in which the city invests. This quote is telling because the plan indeed focuses on spending public budgets to provide housing and attractive milieu for the “opportunity rich”.

*When “child-density” is and is not a problem*

The plan insists that a “family friendly city” is accomplished by working on four “building blocks”: housing, public space, amenities and routes. Public space and routes speak more or less for themselves: the efforts under these headings focus on sporting areas, parks, playgrounds and

traffic safety. The efforts to strengthen family amenities are interesting because the plan speaks of the necessity of families in order to keep amenities affordable. It says: “If families leave, the quality and quantity of amenities withers” (Rotterdam 2010a: 13). What is interesting here is that in most of the boroughs in which this plan proposes to invest, there *are* already many families with young children. In fact, some of these boroughs are the most “child dense” (the amount of children per hectare) of all the boroughs in the city, such as Afrikaanderwijk or Rotterdam Noord. The neutral language of “families” and “amenities” disguises the way in which very specific families are targeted: the municipality will invest in amenities such as schools, sporting clubs and child care if it will attract the higher middle classes.

The municipalities’ efforts for gentrification by families find their concrete distillation in the definition of “family friendly housing”. In the guideline, a “family friendly house” is 85 square meters in size or larger, has a private outdoor space, an elevator if it is not on the ground floor and has a separate bedroom for each child. In fact, if the latter is not the case, the municipality now considers a house “overcrowded”<sup>8</sup>. When applied on the current housing stock of Rotterdam, the city states that certain neighbourhoods have less than 10% “family friendly houses” (Rotterdam 2010a; 2010b). The plan proposes to change this not only by building new homes, but also by converting two smaller apartments into one. This leads to less dwellings and the displacement of current inhabitants. This is, however, exactly what is the more or less latent goal here, as is made explicit:

*“An accidental advantage* of this is the dilution of these highly populated boroughs” (italics author).

Interestingly, the middle class boroughs and the city centre are areas for planned residential “condensation”. Under the neutral guise of remaking the city into a “child-friendly” one, the dispersion of the lower classes and a “heightened density” of middle class families is an important

goal. The plan speaks of attracting more families and the need for children in order to have “life” in the city. But when it comes to the poorer neighbourhoods, exactly the density of children becomes a problem. In the urban planning texts, “*child friendly*” is a proxy for *middle class friendly*. The city does not apply the guidelines for “family friendly housing” so that all families in Rotterdam can have such a house. Instead, prices will go up, creating affordability problems for large groups and new, more affluent families will move into these neighbourhoods, leaving many of the poorer families displaced.

Before moving on to an analysis of the gender notions underlying the plan, what should be noted here is that the program is accompanied by an annual monitor that is highly publicized. 6 months after releasing the “Building blocks” plan (Rotterdam, 2010a), the first “Child-friendly borough monitor” (Rotterdam, 2010b) was published. It is hardly surprising that so soon after the presentation of the plan, already 7 of 11 “pilot boroughs” turned out to have become “significantly more child-friendly”, even though the text of the monitor report explains that an entire investigation was not yet possible due to insufficient data (Rotterdam, 2010b). This is a very good example of the performative nature of “managing through measurement” (Noordegraaf, 2008). The measurement of “child-friendliness” is meant to make the existing qualities of Rotterdam visible. “Child friendliness” is in part accomplished by claiming it. The “child-friendly city program” works as a city marketing tool.

#### *The gender subtext: genderfication*

Rotterdam wants to attract more dual-earning, middle class, nuclear families. In the “child-friendly city program”, space is not only produced for families that subscribe to specific gender ideals, for instance when the combination of work and care is made easier by the provision of childcare facilities close to “family friendly houses”.

At the intersection of class and gender, this means that class upgrading of neighbourhoods is given a distinctly gendered form and is done using gendered strategies. The

term *genderfication* helps us understand the gender dynamics in the strategies of the city to change its gender composition. I define genderfication as the production of space for different gender relations. For this definition, I build on Hackworth's definition of gentrification as "the production of space for progressively more affluent users" (Hackworth, 2002: 815). The advantage of this broad definition of gentrification is that it can be applied to the production of space beyond residential properties in working class neighbourhoods. Moreover, it focuses on the social production of space, and is thus well suited to look at meaning making and at the production of space "through human intentions" (Molotch, 1993: 887). Building on LeFebvrian theories of space, genderfication points to shifts in the do's and don'ts that space signifies (LeFebvre, 1991:121). Space is produced for a specific gendered order. In the Rotterdam case, the modernist space that was produced after the Second World War, ordered the patriarchal separation of the sexes, the clear separation of private and public space and clearly distinguished gender roles. Genderfication changes this order into one in which the public and private sphere are much more intertwined, where men care and women work in the (home) office and where children are brought up in dual earning families and in day care facilities.

What Rotterdam aims for is not *just* more families and children, but in fact women, children *and* men that subscribe to certain specific norms about raising children and dividing labour. In other words: Rotterdam is seeking middle class groups with specific gender roles and norms. And these specific gender notions are dominant in the YUPP- higher middle class that Rotterdam desires. The production of space for these gender norms is a means to produce space for progressively more affluent users (and thus gentrification), but can be distinguished from gentrification because it does order space in a clearly gendered way. Thus, genderfication is to establish gentrification in the end, but has specifically gendered features, uses gendered strategies and thus works differently and produces specifically gendered outcomes. Informed by intersectionality perspectives, we can thus see how Rotterdam's efforts are not just about class upgrading and gentrification, but instead consist of gendered strategies to attract "desired" new

inhabitants. Those have sufficient income to buy a family home in the city, they live in nuclear families, share work and care tasks, aim for gender equality and earn dual incomes.

*Producing space for gender-equal task sharing*

From the analysis of the plans for the child-friendly city, it becomes apparent that the gender ideal that guides genderfication in Rotterdam consists of norms of 1) gender-equality, 2) dual-earning and 3) the nuclear family. Genderfication assumes a specific shape in the case of Rotterdam: it leads to building larger, more expensive (as compared to the current housing stock) owner-occupied homes for middle class nuclear families, with ground level front doors, 3 to 5 bedrooms, parks in front of the houses and day care facilities in direct proximity. As Bondi (1991) argued, the restructuring of urban space and definitions of gender are closely linked. “Changing patterns of production and reproduction have caused women and men to adjust their uses of space and time such that ‘the process of gender constitution and the process of constituting urban environments are inextricably linked’” (Bondi, 1991: 194, quoting Mackenzie, 1988: 27). The spatial organization of the city is a reflection of dominant gender ideals. Spatial organizations reaffirm and co-construct dominant gender norms, precisely because they make certain gendered practices possible and obstruct other organizations of production and reproduction. The combination of paid work and caring for a family, for example, is obstructed if childcare facilities are not located close to home or work and parents have to commute in a modernist city.

The first element of the genderfication in the case of Rotterdam, i.e. gender-equality, is expressed in the farewell to modernist planning that consisted of the zoning of spaces for work and family that is declared in the “Building Blocks” plan (Rotterdam, 2010a). Rotterdam is a very good example of such a modernist city: before the war and after, residential areas were separated from production areas and the city was one of the first in the Netherlands with highly modern roads for cars (Van Ulzen, 2007). This kind of zoning is a spatial expression of a patriarchal social



structure (Bondi, 1991) and itself produced patriarchal gender relations. It shows how urban planners in Rotterdam worked on the basis of the separation of production and reproduction in gendered spheres. Now, Rotterdam attracts middle class families precisely on the basis of their moving away from modernist zoning with a new spatial mix of urban functions. The most telling example of this is the goal of the city to become an attractive residential city. The Rotterdam Urban Vision 2030 (Rotterdam, 2008) states:

“To be able to live in the city there must be good housing and suitable employment. Employment, in turn, thrives only when the city can offer favourable conditions for business development with high quality housing” (pp. 10).

These goals are presented as neutral in the plan, as it says that both goals are “inextricably linked” (pp. 10). However, after the Second World War and in the 1970s, Rotterdam primarily focused on building residential areas outside of the city centre and did not consider residential and economic functions to be linked spatially at all. The ideal in the beginning of this century is that women and men share their responsibilities of work and family and that in order for the new, more gender-equal family to live in the city, work, play, home and care facilities should be mixed and provided on a neighbourhood-level in order to make the combination of work and care both more equal and accessible. The modernist ideal of the separation of production and reproduction in gendered spheres is thus departed in favour of a production of a gender equal space of mixed urban functions.

The second element of the Rotterdam gender ideal, “dual earning”, is expressed in the form of larger, more expensive family houses. Dual earners have more to spend than the traditional breadwinner family and can therefore afford such a house. Moreover, dual earners are working increasingly from their homes in order to, again, be able to combine work and care duties. This is expressed spatially in the plans in the form of home offices. The merging of smaller and cheaper apartments into larger dwellings is one of the main instruments of the plan “Building blocks for a child friendly Rotterdam”. Moreover, the first two elements, “gender

equal” and “dual earner” also find their concrete distillation in the investment of the city in community schools (brede scholen) in which after school programs and childcare facilities are most often included. This enables parents to combine care and work duties.

The third element of the gender ideal is expressed in the form of the provisions of homes for nuclear families. A family, in the urban plan for the “Child-friendly city” consists of parents and children under the age of 18 living together in one unit<sup>9</sup>. This is an expression of the general practice of families in the Netherlands. But the above mentioned guidelines for a “family friendly house” show how families with approximately 3 to 5 members are the norm (see the “child friendly monitor, pp. 8 and 9). Interestingly, the gender subtext of the plan for the “Child-friendly city” here expresses precisely the bourgeois, heteronormative, modern, ideal of the nuclear family with 1 to 3 children and both parents present. In the *form* that genderfication assumes here, we see on the one hand a departure from the modern ideal of the breadwinner household and on the other hand an affirmation of the ideal of the nuclear family.

### **The other side: “youth” as a spatial problem**

In the eyes of the Rotterdam policy makers, “youth” is a spatial problem. An analysis of the genderfication project can not do without a recognition of the other side of youth policies. Therefore, without doing justice to the complexity of this dynamic (see Schinkel, 2009; Van Swaaningen, 2005; Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011), I will highlight some elements of punitive measures that are taken to deal with “undesirable youths”, and “opportunity poor” children, because, as became clear in the analysis of the “Building blocks” plan, not all children are considered necessary ingredients of a lively city. In fact, some are said to be precisely the cause of “liveability problems” and thus delegitimized as urban citizens.

Exceptional policy measures such as Mosquito’s (little boxes that put out a very high sound that only young people can hear, find very irritating and urges them to leave) are used to prevent youngsters from gathering on the streets in designated areas (Boonstra & Hermens,

2009). The idea that legitimizes these measures is that “nuisance” can quickly deteriorate into “criminal behaviour” (Schinkel, 2009). Social and safety policies see the very idea of groups of in itself as a spatial and criminal problem. Moreover, in policy problematizations of children’s safety, child abuse and neglect, parents in the same “risk areas” are held responsible. The policy measures that are designed to combat these issues are forms of what Schinkel terms “prepression” (Schinkel, 2009): they not only aim to prevent and repress criminality, but also to prevent children’s other deviant future potentialities. Prepression is a combination of repression and prevention. The logic of prepression is based on statistics and group characteristics. Thus: living in a certain neighbourhood is a statistical “risk factor” (as is a migration background, or poverty), therefore an individual child from this neighbourhood is subjected to specific policies to prevent him or her from developing certain future potentialities, such as unemployment, alcoholism, or becoming a victim of spousal abuse (Schinkel, 2009).

In Rotterdam, paternalist and punitive “youth” policies are connected to the genderfication project. They are designed to produce an orderly, middle class future city. The categories of “youth at risk” and “normal youths” sort groups of youngsters and parents that are the subject of punitive approaches and are disciplining mechanisms: they define the norm and alert professionals in social work and police departments to deviation. Following, “nuisance” is increasingly “penalized” (Van Swaaningen, 2005: 295).

## **6. “Rotterdam hates women and children” Does it?**

In Rotterdam, “child friendly” essentially means “middle class family friendly”, because the norms that are formulated in the plans for the “child friendly city” are a direct translation of middle class housing desires: separate rooms for all children, more than 85 square meters and a single family home on street level with a park or playground in front of it. The city intends to produce a “child friendly city” by rearranging space according to these norms: there are to be more green spaces, more biking paths, more and better child care facilities and more “child

friendly homes” and also more “owner occupied housing”. The “child friendly city” is primarily targeted at holding onto current inhabitants that plan to have children and at attracting affluent families from the surrounding suburbs. Rotterdam is producing space for affluent families that adhere to *specific gender ideals*. Gender and age play an important role in the production of space in the program for the “child friendly city”.

The nuclear family is originally a modern bourgeois ideal. It is therefore not surprising that precisely this organisation of the social is now used as a tool for the “embourgeoisement of the central city” (Slater, 2006: 738). Gentrification and genderfication go hand in hand in Rotterdam to produce space for more affluent users that subscribe to the city’s dominant gender ideals. Space is produced by government policy for educated, middle class, dual-earner, nuclear families. Reproduction in the middle classes and their urban residence is presented as a silver bullet for precisely the urban problems that other families are said to cause. Urban re-generation consists of the spatial replacement of “opportunity poor” with “high potentials” and policies to and obstruct “deviant potentialities” and limit “risk”. The dual and highly unequal dealing with children that is at the core of the genderfication and urban re-generation project is reflected in the construction of the children of highly educated dual earners as “opportunity rich” and “desired” and the construction of the children of current lower class inhabitants as “opportunity poor” and “undesired”.

In a public debate on the matter of Rotterdam and the middle classes in 2009, the well-known architect and urban planning expert Geuze argued that “Rotterdam hates women and children”<sup>10</sup>. He referred to the impossibility of cycling with young children from one place to the next in the modernist city that Rotterdam is. Geuze thus connects the modernist form of Rotterdam to misogyny. If indeed the modernist planning of Rotterdam shows tension with new gender ideals (compare Bondi, 1991), and the current city planning is, in fact, hostile to women, the city administration is working hard to change this very fact. The banner to promote the genderfication project in the West of Rotterdam to which I referred in the introduction is a

testament to this fact. However, the patriarchal ideal of the nuclear family is still the starting point for thinking about the creation of space for children and families. One could therefore state that Rotterdam now loves women, as long as they are middle class working mothers and wives.

The logic of the genderfication project one-sidedly attributes responsibility for urban problems to individual poor families. It obscures the structural causes of the deterioration of certain neighbourhoods, of poverty and the quality of life of children. Rotterdam focuses on removing “opportunity poor” children and replacing them with “opportunity rich”, instead of investing in a more equal distribution of these “opportunities”. The critical analysis of the plans for the “child friendly city” in this article showed how some children are constructed as a cause of desired urban liveliness and some children as the cause of “liveability” problems. The plans for genderfication, of the production of space for gender equality, for childcare, play grounds and bicycle paths, could indeed produce a more equal urban space for girls and boys, men and women. However, because “child friendly” means “middle class friendly” in the plans, it is to be expected that the gender equality of the middle classes is facilitated as is further marginalization of the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> see [www.wow-rotterdam.nl](http://www.wow-rotterdam.nl), poster retrieved September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> P. 7 in “Opgroeien in Rotterdam: Steun en grenzen”. Rotterdam 2004-2007.

<sup>3</sup> For instance in the measurement of the “Social Index”: Rotterdam sociaal gemeten 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The “social minimum” is a national policy measure to ensure all citizens a basic income level, which is annually adjusted. Basic income support (*Bijstand, Wet werk en bijstand*: WWB) is based on this calculation.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics of COS: Centre for Statistics Rotterdam. Retrieved from <http://www.cos.nl/stadsgetallen/cijfers.php?bn=rotterdam>, 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2010.

- Non-Western Allochton is a category that COS uses for people that migrated to the Netherlands themselves or people of whom one or both parents migrated to the Netherlands from one of the following countries/ areas: Turkey, Africa, Latin-America and Asia (but not from Indonesia and Japan).
- The poverty line The poverty line is a rather vague instrument of the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research to indicate the amount of people and households receiving/earning an income on or a little bit above the “social minimum”. Social housing means that it is owned by a housing corporation. These are privatized, but have a public function and housing here is often subsidized.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics of CBS: Statistics Netherlands. [www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl) retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2010.

<sup>7</sup> All quotes are translated from Dutch into English by the author of this article

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<sup>8</sup> source: Rotterdam 2010b

<sup>9</sup> The definition of “the family” is deliberately broad in the policies. The Dutch national government uses a similar broad definition, thus including gay couples with children, or single parents.

<sup>10</sup> He gave this statement in the debate “Vechten of Vinex!” that was organized by the Rotterdam Council for Art and Culture on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009 in Rotterdam.