

Five Theses on the Neoliberal City

Design for the Post-Neoliberal City
Civic City Conference Zürich

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Starting point

- All systems are opportunistic
 - Daily reproduction
 - Overcome its all too apparent shortcomings
- Neoliberal city is always almost beyond itself
- The design for a post-neoliberal city is an art that needs a lot of diplomacy
 - Always in danger running late



References

- The Dutch city
 - Long history of capitalism
 - ... and social democracy
 - Rhineland model
- Metropolitan area of Rotterdam
- Historically capitalism is most successful in social democratic countries
 - Immanuel Wallerstein



Stakes

- Beyond the common understanding of the neoliberal city
- Leftist myth of disaster capitalism
 - Beautiful souls
 - Utopian daydreams
 - Interpassivity
- Möbius ring of neoliberalism



First thesis

**The neoliberal
city is not made
by neoliberal
hands**



1.1 Framework

- Unrestrained neoliberalism does not work
 - Cf. Economic crisis in USA (housing market)
 - Shortcomings come to the fore
 - Popular unrest
- Social-democratic mediation is necessary



1.2 Urban Development in Rotterdam

- From the gentrification of Nieuw Crooswijk
 - Tabula rasa, PPP, the higher interest (ICP of Rotterdam)
 - Mass protest, court cases, delays
- ... to the gentripuncture of Spangen
 - Scale of one house or block, initiative of creative entrepreneurs, local needs, target-group-oriented discourse (self-interest)
 - General enthusiasm, frustration about the supply shortage (over-demand)



Second thesis

**The neoliberal
city is a
socioeconomic
win-win**



1.1 Framework

- From the economic vs. the social/ecological/human/cultural
 - Bipolar discourse (earning and spending ministries)
 - Activism
 - Small concessions
- to social/ecological/human/cultural capital
 - Everything generates surplus value
 - Asset management
 - Sustainable couples



1.2 Spatial planning in the Green Heart

- From self-destructive protection...
 - Red lines around the Green Heart
 - The high costs of nature preservation
 - Shrinking popular interest in green areas
- ... to sustainable development
 - Luxury estates in protected green areas ('Red for Green')
 - Building support for green through housing and recreation
 - Market is responsible for safeguarding green and its attraction
 - Integral financial management of red, blue and green



1.3 Tweede Maasvlakte

- Sustainable development of the Port of Rotterdam in green areas
 - Synergy between the extension of harbour activities with green preservation, blue reinforcement and public recreation
 - Dune formation, water management, wind energy, beach attractions
- Enabling artists to produce critical work
 - Portscapes
 - New perspectives



Third thesis

**In the neoliberal
city everybody
participates**



1.1 Framework

- From the almighty business elites
 - Restoration of class power
 - Disarming social movements
 - David Harvey
- to sharing responsibilities
 - IOU (Noreena Hertz)
 - Reciprocity of rights and duties
 - Government facilitates the division of labour



1.2 Cooperation along the Rotterdam take

- After the free play of the market ...
 - Withdrawal of the government
 - Bypassing popular demands
 - Profitability as the guiding principle
- ... comes the proactive government
 - Dividing core functions among partners
 - Monitoring individual accountability (sector based performance agreements)
 - Organising the local people ('Urban Protocol for Inhabitants Participation')



Fourth thesis

**In the neoliberal
city everything is
possible**



1.1 Framework

- From the self-regulation of the market...
 - The blind hand of the market
 - The market solves everything
 - The free market needs no help
- ... to CEO's with a human face
 - Conscious about the shortcomings of the market (It needs artists for gentrification, inhabitants to create a positive climate, etc.)
 - Concentrating on people
 - Makes people enthusiast to come up with new ideas
 - Reaches a hand to develop alternative approaches



1.2 The Poetic Freedom in Rotterdam

- From the housing corporation does it all...
 - Lay back, everything is taken care off
 - The corporation vs. the people
 - Spontaneous stratification of the housing market
- ... to responsible housing management
 - Saving a housing block by giving it away to young creative people
 - A spontaneous proposal by an architect firm
 - Buy out the lower segment of housing market (local government)
 - Start capital and bail out in case of failure (housing corporation)
 - Tapping into positive media exposure and rising house prices



Fifth thesis

**The neoliberal
city develops
democratic
conflict**



1.1 Framework

- From merging the corporate and common interest...
 - The corporate state
 - Suppressing popular demands
 - Democracy as a façade for economic power
- ... to the empty place of common interest
 - Open for everyone to fill in (Claude Lefort)
 - Constant struggle to link up private interest with the common interest of the city
 - Enforcing citizens, artists and the vulnerable to do the same



1.2 Pact at the South Bank, Rotterdam

- From postfactum participation to...
 - Important decisions are always already taken
 - Critique is always too little and too late
- Neighbourhood development as an open process
 - Everybody is invited to bring in private ideas, projects and activities
 - Artists are invited to come up with alternative visions (Afrikaanderplein)
 - Workshops with the local youth
 - Squatters as anti-squatting-guard



- The neoliberal city is not made by neoliberal hands
- The neoliberal city is a socioeconomic win-win
 - Economic base
- In the neoliberal city everybody participates
- In the neoliberal city everything is possible
 - Characteristics
- The neoliberal city develops democratic conflict
 - Political program

