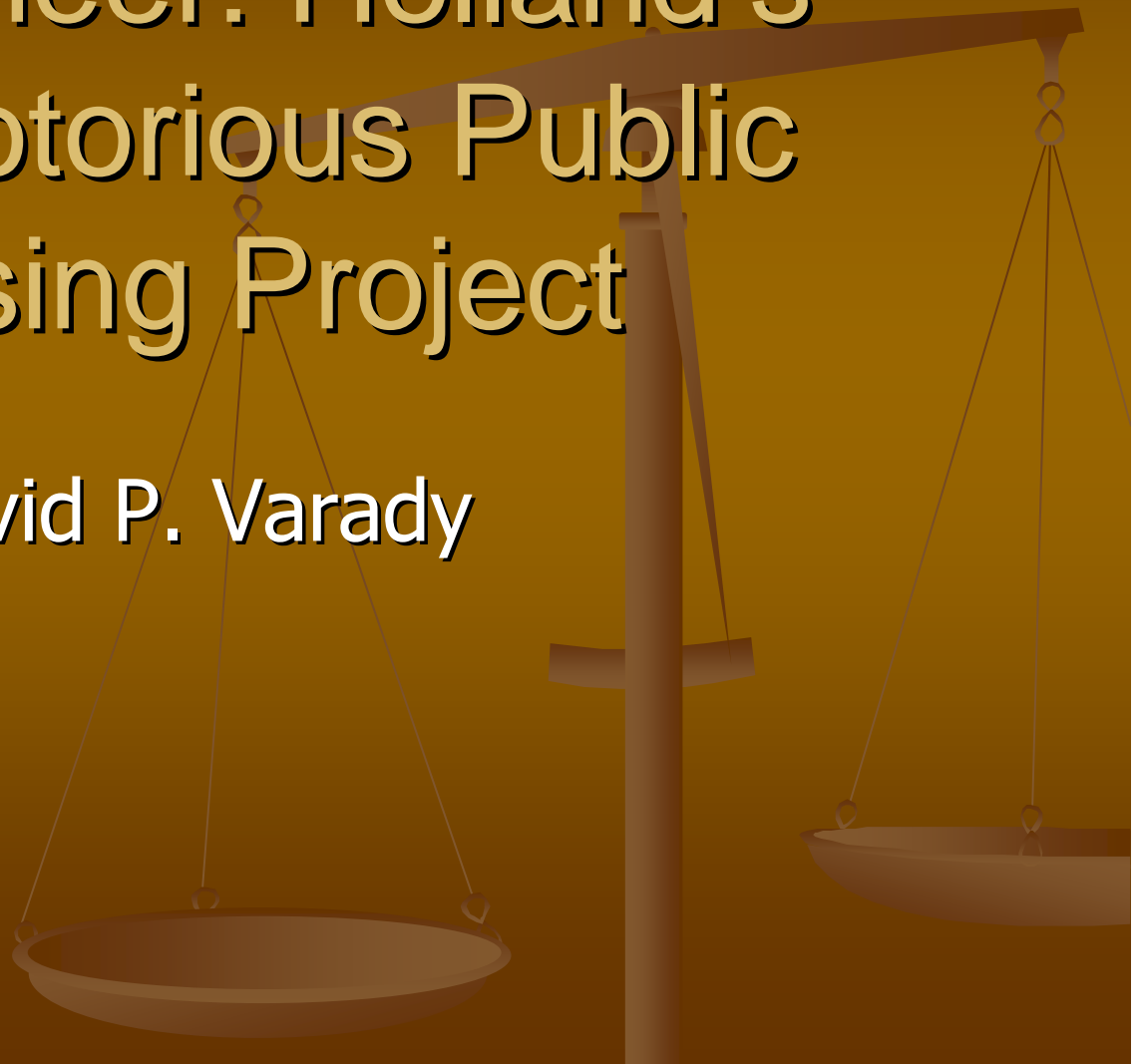


Bijlmermeer: Holland's Most Notorious Public Housing Project

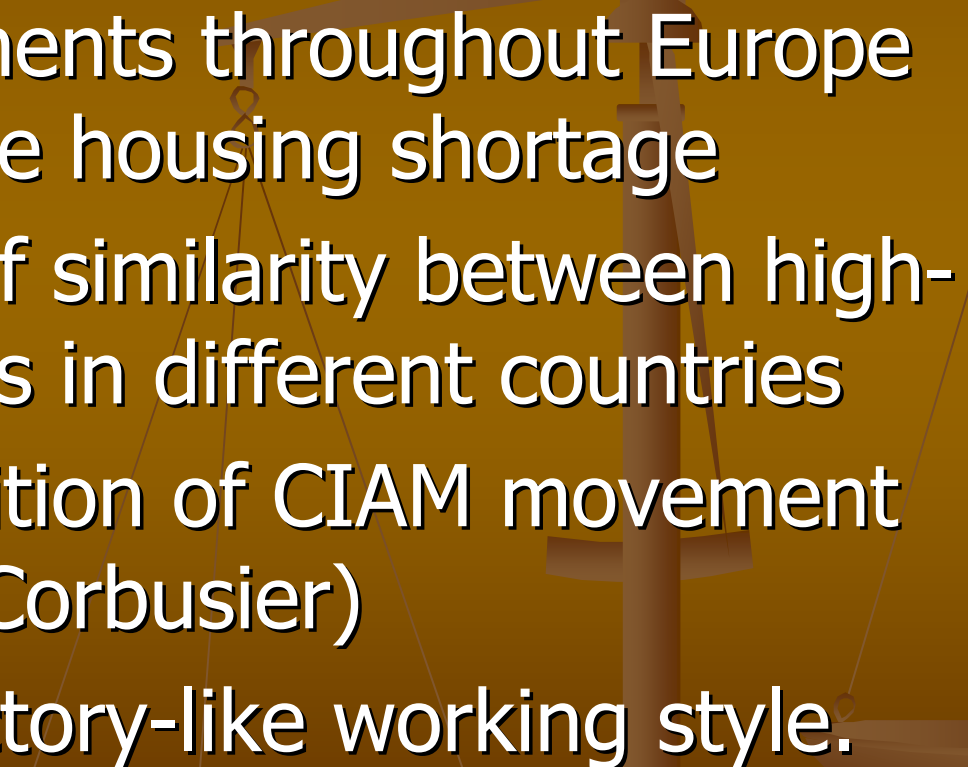
David P. Varady



Bijlmermeer

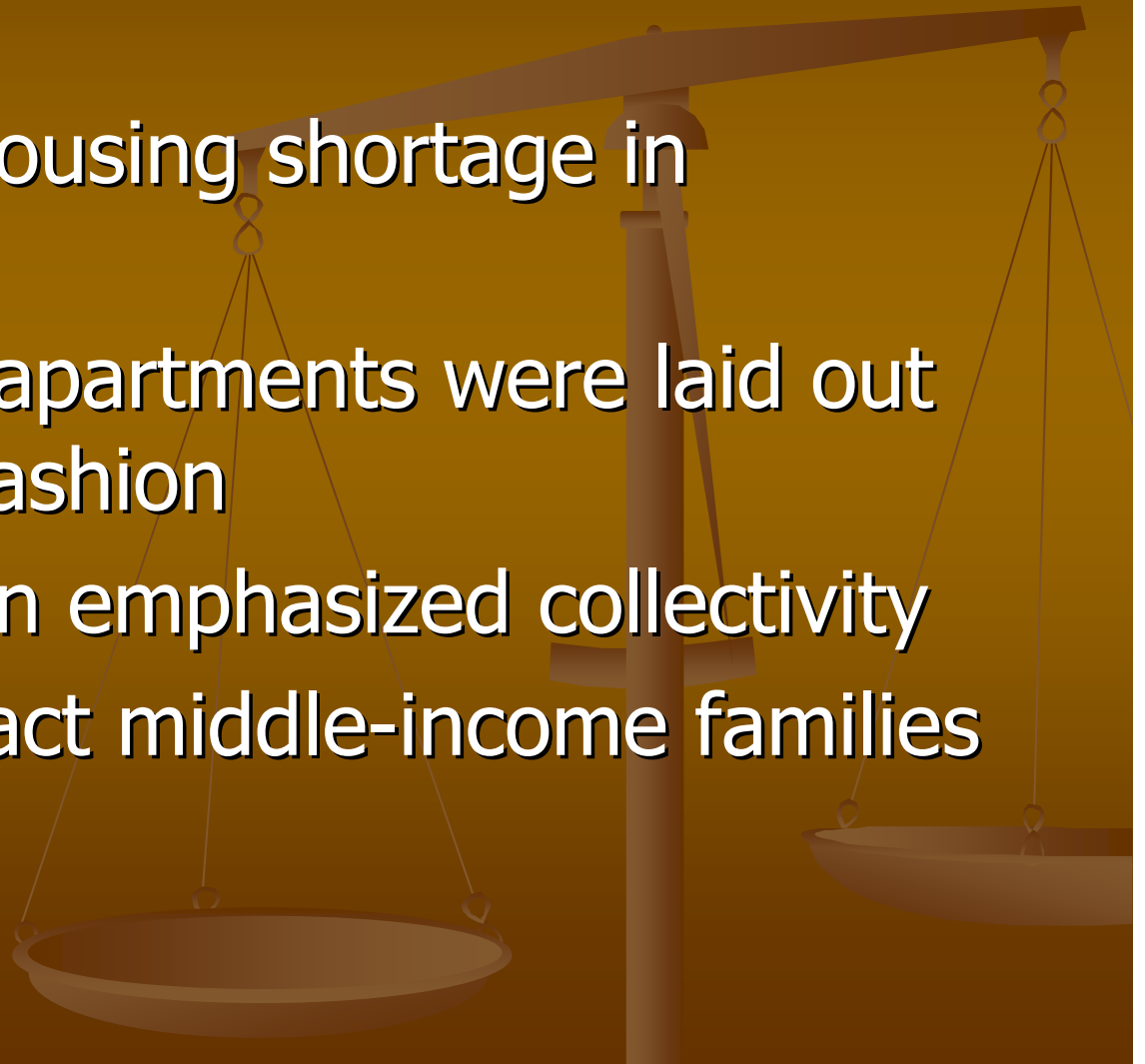
- Located in the southeast extension of Amsterdam it is an example of unpopular high rise apartments built after WWII
- Is now the most expensive, impressive and largest renewal area in the Netherlands.
- Stands out because of its integral approach to renewal (social & physical).

The Rise of High-rise Estates

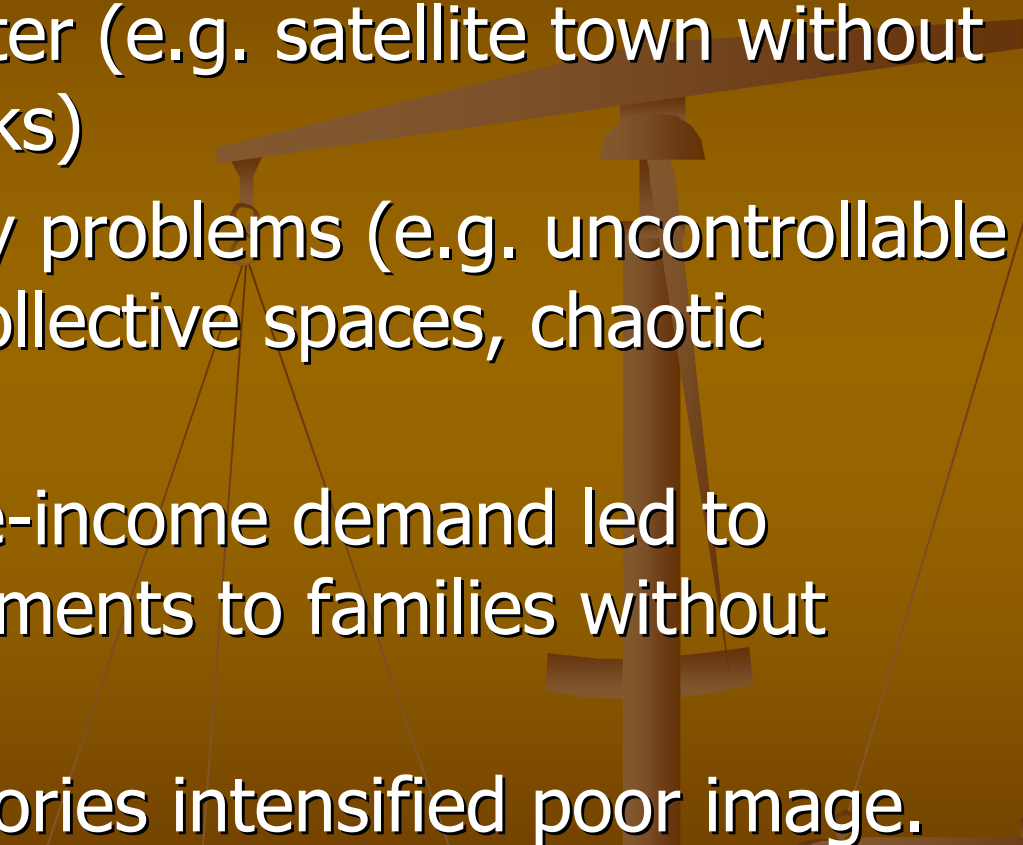
- These developments throughout Europe responded to the housing shortage
 - A high degree of similarity between high-rise communities in different countries
 - Built in the tradition of CIAM movement philosophy (Le Corbusier)
 - Built using a factory-like working style.
- 

Bijlmermeer: The idea

- A response to housing shortage in Amsterdam
- Balcony access apartments were laid out in honeycomb fashion
- Bijlmermeer plan emphasized collectivity
- Aim was to attract middle-income families with children



The Bijlmermeer: Four Groups of Problems

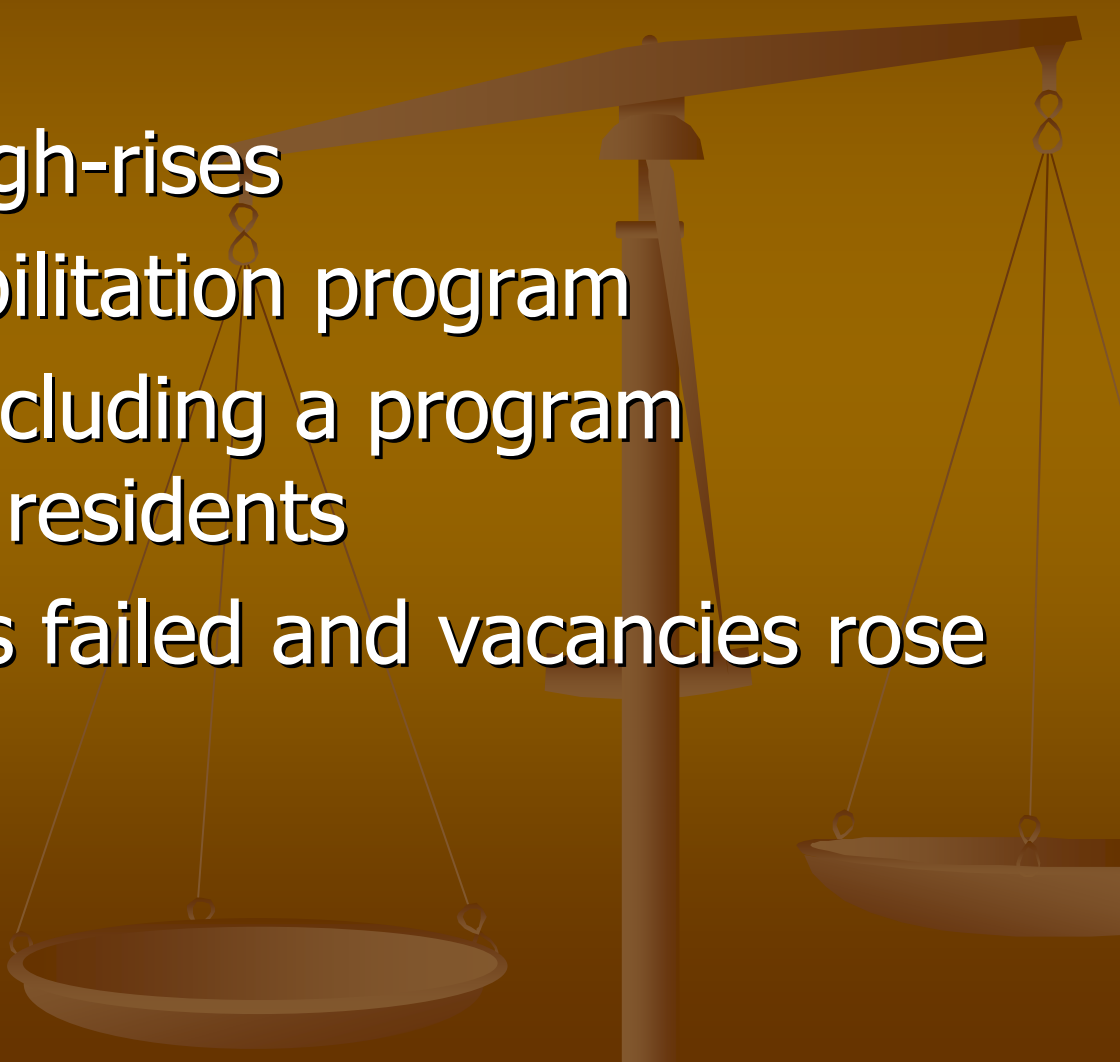
- Unfinished character (e.g. satellite town without good transport links)
 - Enormous livability problems (e.g. uncontrollable semi-public and collective spaces, chaotic management)
 - Insufficient middle-income demand led to allocation of apartments to families without choice
 - Negative media stories intensified poor image.
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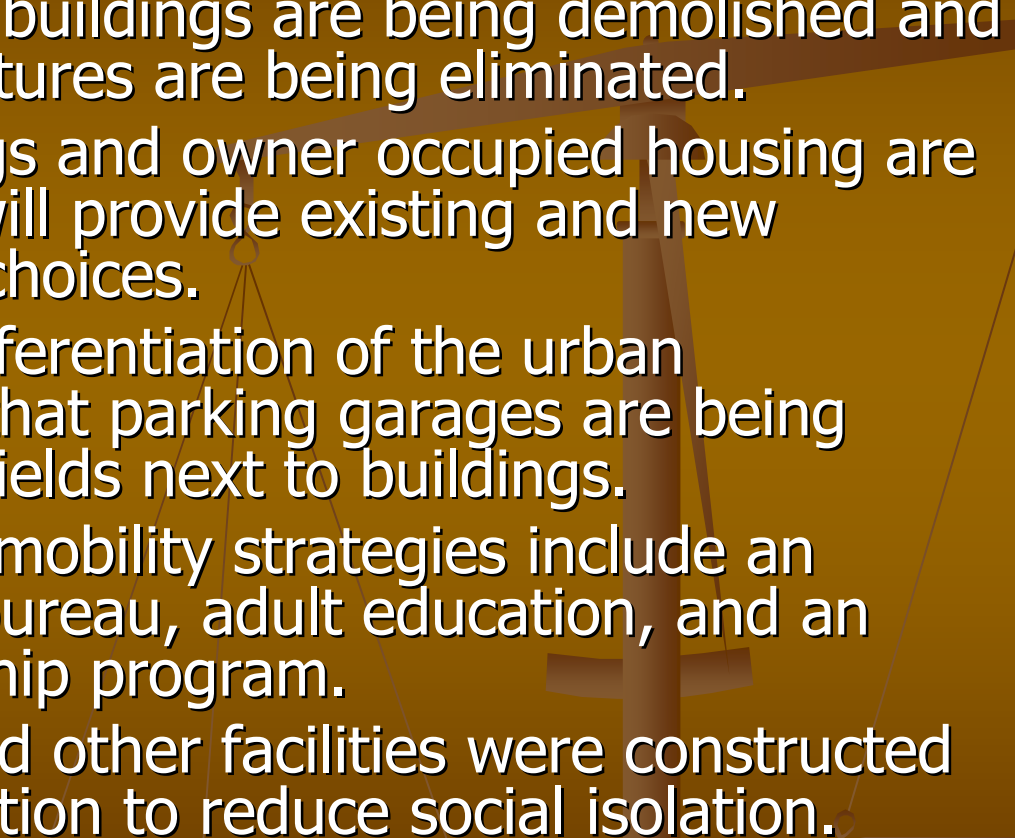
The modernist vision—honeycomb structures, long balconies—proved unappealing to the native Dutch for whom the development was targeted.



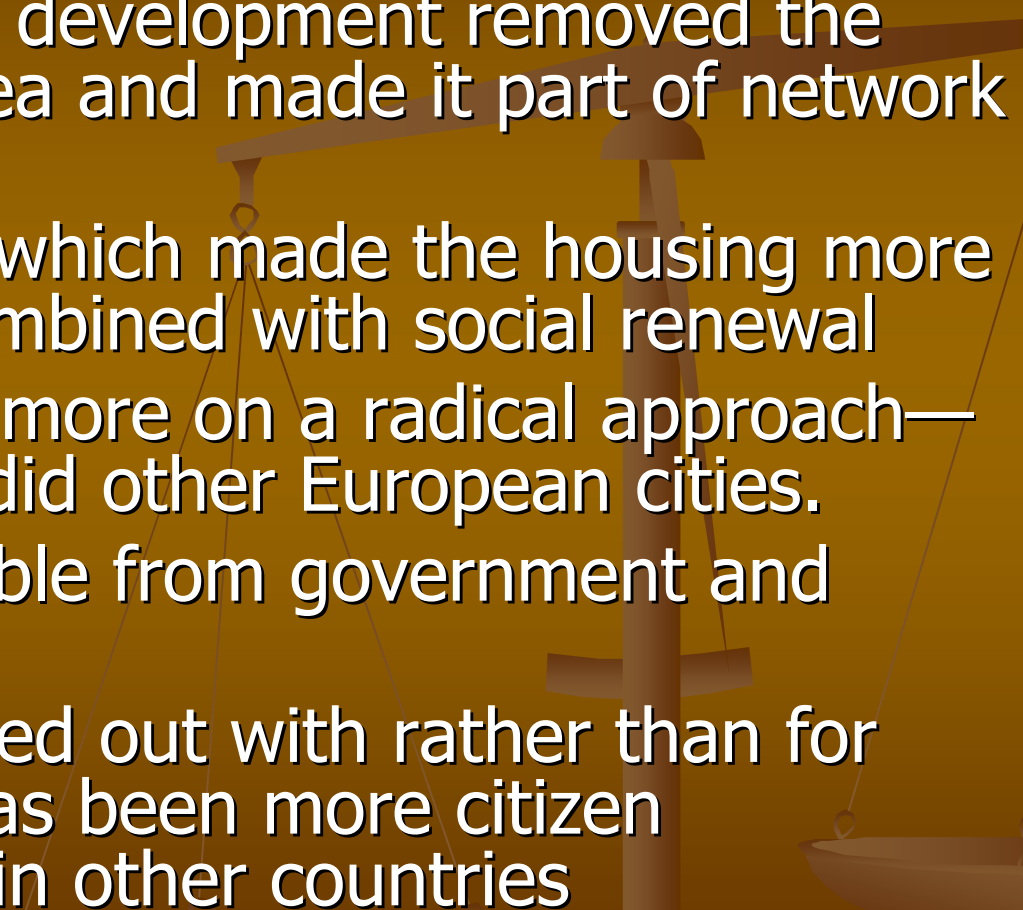
The Bijlmermeer: early solutions (the 1980s)

- Stop building high-rises
 - A housing rehabilitation program
 - Social actions including a program welcoming new residents
 - These strategies failed and vacancies rose
- 

Urban renewal in the 1990s and 2000s

- Most of the high-rise buildings are being demolished and the honeycomb structures are being eliminated.
 - Single family dwellings and owner occupied housing are being built and this will provide existing and new residents with more choices.
 - Improvement and differentiation of the urban environment means that parking garages are being replaced by parking fields next to buildings.
 - Social and economic mobility strategies include an employment advice bureau, adult education, and an ethnic entrepreneurship program.
 - Amsterdam ArenA and other facilities were constructed next to the metro station to reduce social isolation.
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“Bijlmermeer Renewal has been successful” (Helleman and Wassenberg 2003)

- Amsterdam ArenA development removed the isolation of the area and made it part of network city
 - Physical renewal (which made the housing more attractive) was combined with social renewal
 - Amsterdam relied more on a radical approach—demolition—than did other European cities.
 - Funds were available from government and other sources
 - Renewal was carried out with rather than for residents; there has been more citizen involvement than in other countries
- 

But the picture may not be that optimistic...

- Economic growth at national level has had limited impact on resident social mobility at the neighborhood level
- The ongoing concentration of poverty may undercut upgrading.
- - “Waterbed effects” “The results halfway[1999] pointed to a displacement of problems, where the renewal works like a waterbed; sit on one place and it goes down there, but another spot comes up.” (Helleman and Wassenberg, p.14)

A walk through Bjlmer, July 22, 2010





Our route starting from the Bijlmer ArenaA train station



The extension of the metro to Bijlmer (left) has reduced the isolation of the development. Between Bijlmer and the station is a major office development.



Amsterdam Arena (often stylized as Amsterdam ArenA) was built from 1993 to 1996 at a cost of €140 million, and was officially opened on 14 August 1996. It has been used for soccer concerts, and other events. The ArenA is located immediately adjacent to the Bijlmermeer ArenA metro station.



The Heineken Music Hall, The Pathe Cinema, and numerous cafes are in close proximity to the ArenA. At lunch hour the population was diverse but mostly white, in contrast to the mostly black population in Bijlmermeer.



As can be seen in this photo, this section of Amsterdam has experienced a tremendous amount of office building. The close proximity to these offices means that the spatial mismatch model is less applicable here than in American cities. However, office vacancy rates are high reflecting the economic downturn.



The Bijlmer market like other Dutch commercial districts has apartments over stores as well as cafes. It serves an ethnically diverse clientele reflecting its location near the ArenA complex as well as the apartment buildings.



This commercial block contains a variety of ethnic shops right next to the ubiquitous Albert Heijn (AH), a chain with hundreds of stores throughout Holland.



Bijlmer's outdoor market is the largest "exotic" market in the Netherlands. In an exotic market, the "native" Dutch do not know the names of the fruits and vegetables, many of which come from the Caribbean.



A model of Bjlmmer as it is today is located in the office of the housing association that runs the development. The pink area is the ArenA complex and the markets. If you look closely you can see two lights. The lower one is the train station where we started the tour, the upper one is the housing association office.



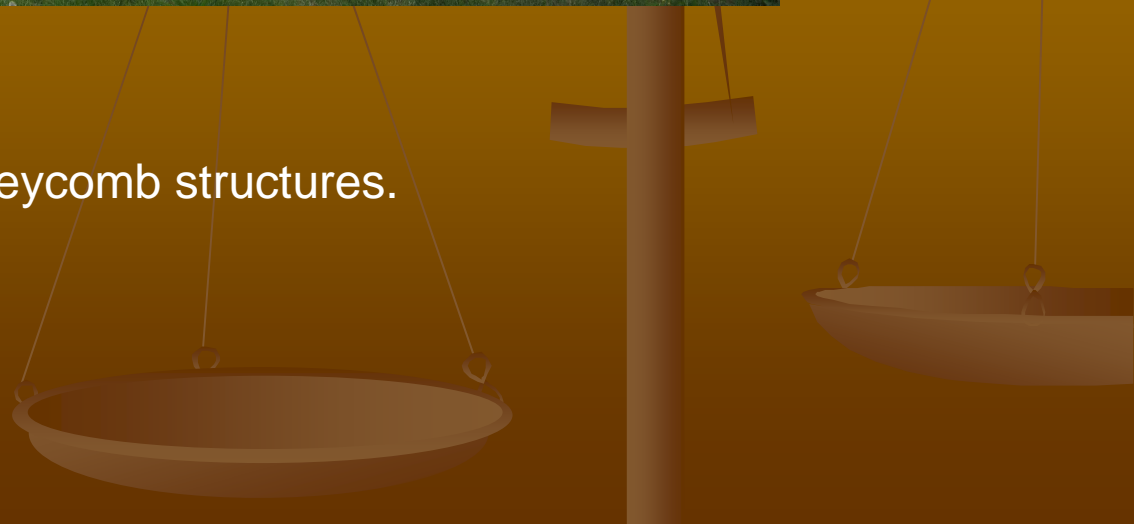
Anton De Komlein was a Surinamese Dutch resistance fighter murdered by the Germans during WWII. Most Surinamese residents hate the sculpture because De Komlein is naked and therefore looks like a slave. Surinamese residents point out that De Komlein usually dressed in a tie and jacket; as a result they often put clothes on the statue. Not so on the day we visited.



Bijlmer renewal seeks to create a high density residential, retail and employment spine; one that brings motor vehicles and pedestrians back to the same level. As you can see on the right, officials hope to “sell” Rembrandt to this mostly immigrant population.



One of the remaining honeycomb structures.





The plan calls for more low-rise townhouses like this and some single-family homes. This feisty woman stopped her scooter to ask what we were doing. Learning that I was American, she informed us that her sister lives in Hoboken, NJ.



Bjlmmer is ethnically diverse. Some of the Surinamese were descendents of workers brought to that colony from India. Here is a Hindu school and a poster advertising a forthcoming South Asian Indian concert.



Commercial strip along traffic spine. Look closely and you can see an Albert Heijn (AH) on the left. Surinamese communities have a great deal of street life. There were quite a few young men hanging out but there was little sense of danger.



The Bijlmermeer Museum. Six of the original 31 blocks will remain as a response to efforts of activist residents who were against demolition. A Surinamese fertility sculpture sits in the foreground while one of the blocks to be preserved is behind it. Whereas other parts of Bjlmer have been “densified,” green space has been preserved here making the area feel somewhat unsafe. No women were to be seen.



In the middle of the area is the monument on the site where the El Al Boeing jet crashed into an apartment block in 1992. Some residents believe that because the tree on the right has eyes (look closely), it witnessed the tragedy. Children created the memorial tiles.





To rehabilitate the original high-rise buildings it is necessary to make better use of the bottom floor. Under the modernist vision, residents entered the second floor directly from the parking garages. These garages are being demolished. At the right we see a reconstructed entrance with mail boxes on the outside.



At the end of the tour we see one of the original shopping centers. Like other European shopping complexes built in the 60s and 70s, it is dark and dreary. It probably will need to be demolished if it is to attract shoppers from complexes planned for the immediate area, see the next slide.



A new development next to the metro stop.



Perhaps the biggest challenge is integrating Muslim immigrants into Dutch society. This is the mosque serving Bjlmer. Christians (mostly immigrants from Surinam and the Antilles) pray in small congregations located in an office building. In the US, these congregations would be located in storefront churches.

Conclusions— building on Helleman & Wassenberg (2003)

- Bijlmermeer illustrates the peak of modernity but “residents avoided this city of tomorrow.” (p.14)
 - The renewal of Bijlmermeer illustrates a radical approach involving extensive demolition
 - Bijlmermeer renewal emphasizes differentiation of the housing stock in terms of building type and tenure but there is less of an explicit emphasis on income mixing than in America’s HOPE VI program.
 - Since multiple factors contributed to Bijlmermeer’s decline, officials need to maintain an integrative approach into the future.
 - Although Dutch politicians speak about the dangers of ethnic concentration, little is being done “on the ground” to reduce ethnic (and racial) concentration at Bijlmermeer.
 - Citizen involvement has been an important part of the process but the existing literature fails to indicate how many citizens have been involved, whether those involved are representative of the area’s population and which citizen involvement techniques have been most effective.
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