Article

Being Accommodated, Well Then? 'Scalar Narratives' on Urban Transformation and Asylum Seekers' Integration in Mid-Sized Cities

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Abstract

This article deals with the interplay between the rescaling processes of cities and pathways of asylum seekers' integration. Building on scale theory and employing a downscaled mid-sized city in the Netherlands as a unit of analysis, two research questions are answered. Firstly, what kind of urban planning strategies do urban authorities of downscaled, mid-sized cities develop to rescale their cities? Secondly, how are these strategies related to the imagined pathways of asylum seeker integration? Here, the term 'scale' does not refer to an absolute 'spatial object' that is able to affect social reality. Rather, scales are socially produced through negotiation processes which are contested and heterogeneous. It is argued that Dutch urban authorities and housing corporations take a normative view of 'pathways of integration' and standardise these in terms of space, time and financing. By these socially produced scale processes, asylum seekers' accommodation is well-managed, keeping the residents regulated and 'in place'. Urban authorities utilise 'scalar narratives' to legitimate their interactions with asylum seekers and the way in which disadvantaged neighbourhoods in mid-sized cities are transformed. Using the Dutch mid-sized city Kerkrade as the case study, it is illustrated that local opportunity structures for integration are confined by (1) urban planning strategies mainly based on residential and tourism economies, (2) the perception of successful integration via a small-scale social mix within neighbourhoods, and (3) the neglect of public representation of cultural diversity.

1. Introduction

Mid-sized cities of up to 50,000 inhabitants have not been the main destination of asylum seekers arriving in the Netherlands in recent years. Instead, the four big cities—Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht—have been favoured. This settlement pattern has not been changed by the recently arrived asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and other non-Western countries. However, given the Dutch national distribution policy, a large number of the asylum seekers who received legal status, whereby they are allowed to stay for at least for five years, were initially distributed across the Netherlands. The national governments decide how many asylum seekers are to be accommodated in each municipality according to its population size. Therefore, a significant proportion of asylum seekers were allotted beyond the metropolitan areas, in small and mid-sized cities (Rijksoverheid, 2018).

The allocation is motivated by the idea that integration should be manageable on site. The Dutch distribution policy has recently been broadened by the strategy of 'matching' asylum seekers with regions. With the so-called 'duty traceable system', asylum seekers

are assigned to places with job opportunities expected to suit to their individual capacities and education profiles. Personal information is saved in digital records by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (2018) and made accessible to governments in charge of integration. Once settled in these places, the chance to move elsewhere is limited. A large number of asylum seekers depend on social benefits, at least in the first phase of their settlement, and affordable flats in the big cities are rare. Owing to these conditions, the local opportunity structures become particularly relevant for the chance to get access to (further) education, employment or healthcare.

Mid-sized cities have probably fewer local opportunity structures at their disposal than do the metropoles, but it is clear that these places are not isolated islands. In the Netherlands, mid-sized and small cities are properly connected to big cities by public transport, even if they are situated in rural areas, in comparison with most other European countries. In addition, thanks to the range of social media platforms, asylum seekers are able to maintain social networks with others who live elsewhere. However, due to the power relations in the field of capital flow, big cities are more likely to attract investment and human capital than are mid-sized cities (Habit, 2010; Harvey, 2006; Smith, 1984). To better understand the processes of hierarchical positioning of cities in relation to migrant pathways of integration, a number of scholars propose a multiscalar approach (Belina, 2008; Brenner, 2011; Swyngedouw, 1997). For Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011a, p. 7), the differential positioning of a city reflects:

(1) flows of political, cultural, and economic capital within regions and state-based and globe-spanning institutions, and (2) the shaping of these flows and institutional forces by local histories and capacities.

They argue that the 'relative positioning of a city within hierarchical fields of power may well lay the ground for the life chances and incorporation opportunities of migrants locally and transnationally' (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2011b, p. 73).

This article explores these dynamics, while suggesting that the generation of suitable local opportunity structure for asylum seekers is intertwined with the contested repositioning of cities. It is argued that the chance for participation as a social and everyday practice is affected by urban authorities who socially produce scales by which, in turn, asylum seekers are 'kept in place'. Once institutionalized, these scale processes become the means to legitimate certain interactions with asylum seekers as well as the way in which urban transformation has been executed. Here, the term scale is not perceived as an object that 'operates on' people's life but as socially produced processes that aim first and foremost to assure a hierarchic social order (Belina, 2008).

By doing so, the following research questions take the centre stage: what kind of urban planning strate-

gies do urban authorities of downscaled, mid-sized cities develop to rescale their cities? How are these strategies related to the imagined 'pathways of integration' of asylum seekers? In addition to scale theory, the empirical basis for this article is ethnographic research on the Dutch downscaled mid-sized city Kerkrade, where I lived for seven months in the period of 2016 to 2018. There, I conducted expert interviews with nine agents of urban authorities (of the local government and housing corporations), two group discussions with 8–10 volunteers supporting asylum seekers, and in-depths interviews with 24 asylum seekers. In addition, I had several informal encounters with volunteers and asylum seekers. All of the interviews were recorded, and the transcripts coded, firstly, using the open coding method (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and secondly, axial coding by rereading, comparing and validating coded text fragments to determine the main categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Moreover, participant observation of public spaces and an analysis of policy documents were carried out (Krippendorff, 2004). This article does not deal with all of these different perspectives, but first and foremost with the agency of urban planners and housing corporations, whilst suggesting that their 'scalar narratives' are neither new nor unique to this place, but rather illustrate patterns of rescaling processes that probably characterise other European downscaled mid-sized cities.

2. Multiscalar Perspective on Mid-Sized Cities

In European urban studies, the prevailing definition of mid-sized cities refers to the number of inhabitants in combination with the population density. For the scholars of the EPSON-project (EPSON, 2006, 2013), who studied a large number of European regions in detail, the boundary between small and mid-sized towns is fluid. These have between 5,000 and 50,000 inhabitants and a population density of 300 to 1,500 inhabitants per square kilometre. The scholars of the EPSON-project point out that despite their diversity, small and mid-sized towns have some characteristics in common that mean they generally differ from big cities (100,000 inhabitants or more). These are connected to their demographic composition, their labour markets, and their economic profiles. As regards the first aspect, in small and mid-sized cities, a higher proportion of pensionable adults and school age children are found alongside a lower proportion of working age adults with (higher) degrees. Regarding the labour markets, these cities seem to have a greater proportion of jobs in the industrial sector than in the service sector (which serves for a higher economic activity rate on average than in larger European cities, but also makes them vulnerable).

In terms of economic profile, three categories were identified in small and mid-sized towns. First, the 're-structuring industry' is characterized by a delicate balance between retaining the local production of trading goods, on the one hand, and industrial branches losing

their importance as a result of increasing global competition, on the other. The second one, named the 'residential economy', is mainly based on local activities such as housing demand, tourist activities, and social services. The last category, the 'knowledge-based economy', could be related to either the first or second type, and additionally relies on technical and social innovations, educational institutions, and creative industries.

The EPSON-project provides valuable insights into the specific characteristics of European small and mid-sized cities and it highlights the differential opportunities for further development according to the cities' historical pathways. For example, mid-sized cities with 'a higher proportion of employment in industrial activities tend to have negative trends in terms of growth, employment and population' (EPSON, 2013). Additional peculiarities affect mid-sized cities' development, such as their proximity to metropolitan areas, their infrastructural configurations, and their political position (EPSON, 2006). However, this study describes hierarchies of cities rather than analyses causes of uneven development. This deficiency also characterises studies wherein the scalar position of mid-sized cities is taken for granted (Esser, 2002; Greiving, Flex, & Terfrüchte, 2015; Kühn & Milstrey, 2015; Leimbrock, 2010; Lekkerkerker, 2016). By this deficiency, the process of strengthening the economic power of some cities while disempowering other (mid-sized) cities has rarely been explained. In contrast, the conceptualisation of cities' hierarchies as condition *and* outcome of the neoliberal global process of restructuring circuits of capital offers a possible means of interpretation (Harvey, 2006; Sassen, 2000, 2001).

More than two decades ago, Sassen (2001) has shown that a few so-called global cities were able to assume a strategic role in controlling and managing the financial markets and the global network of production sites, above other (major) cities. She argues that capital accumulation needs—and brings about—processes of deterritorialisation (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996), but simultaneously depends upon investment in specific place-based key service industries. Global cities can be viewed as the territorial embodiment of globally managed and controlled capital flows, while mid-sized cities have to work harder to recruit (highly educated) labourforces, state subsidies, and private investments (Brenner, 1999; Smith, 1984).

For Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011a, 2011b), the struggle for positioning underlies the processes of rescaling cities, as well as other sociospatial reorganisations, such as new urban and housing forms (Keil, 1991) and new transnational network formations; for example, by the agency of migrants. Since the early 1990s, a number of scholars have elaborated the conceptual framework of rescaling in relation to globalization process, whereby the term does not refer to geographical scales as such. Scale is not an absolute 'spatial thing' (Bird, 1993; Keil, 1991, 1994; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999; Smith, 1984; Swyngedouw, 1997). Instead, scales are socially produced through negotiation processes which are deeply contested and heterogeneous (Belina, 2008; Swyngedouw, 1997). Moreover, the bipolar local-global perspective has been abandoned in favour of recognizing processes constituting other relevant scale levels to understand the complexity of the territorial embodiment of power relations (Brenner, 1999; Swyngedouw, 1997).

Brenner (2011) recapitulates the academic discussion on the multiscalar approach by advocating investigations of rescaling processes, rather than elaborations of scale levels themselves. In addition, he proposes the 'strong claim that the *differentia specifica* of scalar organization lies in the vertical differentiation and rediffer-entiation of social relations' (Brenner, 2011, p. 32). As a result, reorganisation of 'scalar hierarchies create geographies and choreographies of inclusion/exclusion and domination/subdomination that empower some actors, alliances, and organizations at the expense of others, according to criteria such as class, gender, race/ethnicity, and nationality' (Brenner, 2011, p. 34).

The emphasis on the vertical differentiation of social relations has been contested by others who state that a multiscalar perspective is limited by top-down structural constraints (Marston & Smith, 2001; Sheppard & McMaster, 2004; Strüver, 2008; Taylor, 2004). First of all, a researcher runs the risk of thinking over-hierarchically and thus other forms of sociospatial structuration are easily overlooked. Furthermore:

A conceptualization of interactions across a diversity of 'sites', unfolding non-linearly, horizontally, and vertically, offers the explanatory power to account for the ways that the layout of the built environment—a relatively slow-moving collection of objects—can come to function as an ordering force in relation to the practices of humans arranged in conjunction with it. (Marston, Jones, & Woodward, 2005, p. 425)

Most recently, scale theory has been challenged because only a few scholars have explored the relationship between the scalar position of cities and migration processes. While acknowledging that a multiscalar approach does facilitate a better understanding of the relative positioning of a city within the context of neoliberal globalization processes, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009, 2011a, 2011b) appeal for elaborating of theories on migrants' pathways of incorporation in different cities. A comparative explanatory framework is needed, under which the varied and unequal opportunities for participation (of migrants and old-established inhabitants) in relation to the relative positioning of cities can be explored. They assume that 'all cities, including those that are failing, engage in global competition, and localities that experience marginalization are part of the same processes that shape the cities acknowledged to be global' (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2011b, p. 73).

Exploring different cities as localities means, firstly, theorising city scale not (only) in terms of size or den-

sity of population but as a relative measure situated in a changing field of power relations. Secondly, migrants' agency should not be reduced to serving economic goals by the provision of their labour force (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). Rather, migrants are scale makers who contribute to the repositioning struggles of cities in multiple ways (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016). As regards the relation of local opportunity structure and the size of cities, Aumüller (2009) suggests that the bigger the town, the more chances migrants have to get a job in the informal labour market, to find their way without support by formalized institutions, and to encounter migrants from the same country of origin. On the one hand, in mid-sized cities, migrants seem to be more dependent on formal arrangements of the local government. On the other, there, companies seem to offer special qualification measures due to mediation by acquaintances and, because of that, the chances for incorporation in the labour market seem to be good (Boos-Krüger, 2005; Georg, 2011).

3. Urban Transformation and Asylum Seekers' 'Pathways of Integration'

In the current system of many European countries, asylum seekers are distributed to cities by the national government, and the local urban authorities are in charge of providing suitable accommodation (Darling, 2011; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018). In the Netherlands, local authorities closely work together with housing associations to manage this task. By doing so, few private home owners are involved, as the majority of the social housing stock is owned by housing corporations or associations throughout the country.

An asylum seeker dependent on social benefits is officially denoted an 'urgent target group' for social housing. Here, Dutch integration policy and urban transformation processes come together and constitute conflicting scales processes: the Dutch state rates the number of asylum seekers to be 'integrated' into certain places, while housing associations and local authorities make plans to transform these places in line with regionally negotiated urban planning strategies. The objects of this urban transformation are, above all, disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Here, a higher proportion of private property has to be realised as the Dutch neoliberal urban policy prescribed (Musterd, 2014; Priemus, 2004, 2006). At the same time, these neighbourhoods are the first homes of many asylum seekers. In their given role as an 'urgent target group' for social housing, asylum seekers must compete for affordable housing with others who also depend on welfare provisions. Thus, the actions of urban authorities and housing associations are guided by the distribution of an insufficient amount of social housing to low-income groups and the requirement to balance diverse needs. Their actions are accompanied by 'scalar narratives' from which two narratives stand out in particular.

The first narrative refers to the term scale as a 'spatial object' (Belina, 2008) which is perceived as being able to

affect 'pathways of integration': the larger the so-called ethnic community living closely together within a neighbourhood, the lower the chance of successful 'integration' into the 'receiving society' (Ronneberger & Tsianos, 2009). Although this 'scalar narrative' is recounted slightly differently depending on national contexts and histories, the essential message remains unchanged in many European public and political discourses (Hess, Binder, & Moser, 2009; Loch, 2014; Wieviorka, 2014). In Germany, for instance, the large-scale clustering of certain social groups is perceived as a sociospatial manifestation of 'parallel societies', which are, in turn, perceived as closed off from the German mainstream culture (the German Leitkultur; Ronneberger, & Tsianos, 2009). Here, Muslim migrants in particular have been depicted as backward and oriented towards traditional religious norms and values which are not compatible with 'modern' European values (Miera, 2012). This trend has also been observed in the Netherlands (Entzinger, 2014; Uitermark, 2010; Van Heerden, De Lange, Van der Brug, & Fennema, 2014). As a consequence, the processes of urban transformation of social housing stocks often aim to mix different social groups to boost 'integration' (Uitermark, 2003). The issue what social mix is effective for whom is contested (Galster, 2007; Ostendorf, Musterd, & De Vos, 2001) and positive neighbourhood effects for migrants in socially mixed neighbourhoods are very difficult to prove (Pinkster, 2014). Nevertheless, this direction of urban transformation is still practised (Watt & Smets, 2017).

The second narrative refers to the struggle of urban authorities to balance the diverse needs of asylum seekers and other low-income groups. They have to treat everyone equally by law, but Dutch urban authorities and agents of housing associations appear to be adopting increasingly neoliberal integration policies, with the mainstream parties representing 'a monoculturalist discourse in which ideas about the compulsory integration of immigrants are paired with plans to limit the influx of asylum seekers' (Van Heerden et al., 2014, p. 133). Thereby the pressure for behavioural change is laid on the asylum seekers and not on the agents of local governments (Entzinger, 2014). Besides, urban authorities attempt to manage migration flows to maintain 'social peace' whilst drawing upon benefits of the asylum seekers' human capital. Darling (2011) has analysed this contradictionary mode of governance by suggesting that the accommodation of asylum seekers is an internal border practice (of the UK). Drawing on the concept of domopolitics, he argues that accommodation is not a limitation of their mobility at all costs, but rather symbolizes a 'desire to categorise and filter flows of people and goods so that threatening might be dealt with while the advantageous is permitted' (Darling, 2011, p. 265). As long as local governments are responsible for accommodating asylum seekers, urban authorities are able to regulate 'pathways of integration', on the one hand and to response to the desire for a safe nation and society, on the other (Darling, 2011, p. 269).

These two 'scalar narratives' are related to a normative view of how pathways of asylum seekers should be and will succeed. Regarding the latter narrative in particular, the notion of a 'one-way road' integration 'seems to have won increasing acceptance among politicians and in the media in European countries and become an unquestioned legitimate objective', while integration policy programmes are far from neutral (Miera, 2012, p. 193). During the last three decades, attention has shifted from multicultural policies towards an integration policy centred on forced learning processes of the language, history and sociocultural norms and beliefs of the host societies (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakul, 2008; Entzinger, 2014; Uitermark, 2010; Wieviorka, 2014).

In this way, from a sociological perspective, the process of integration and participation has been narrowed down to the imagination that asylum seekers must fit into a majority that, in itself, is well-integrated and positively bound to each other (Miera, 2012). This perception has been criticised by many social scholars, who argue that, firstly, the so-called host society is constituted itself by super-diverse communities (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2018), and secondly, the idea of clear-cut and unambiguous affiliation of individuals or social groups fits neither urban everyday life and routines nor the multi-local and transnational orientation of many social groups (Yildiz, 2013).

In this article, it is proposed that this normative and simplified imagination of 'pathways of integration' is inappropriate for understanding everyday struggles, practices and needs of asylum seekers. Moreover, this perception paves the way for scale processes which are not developed to do away with barriers for participation but rather to regulate and order migration flows within nation states and 'receiving' (mid-sized) cities (Gebhardt, 2016; Ronneberger & Tsianos, 2009). To underpin this argument, the dictated pathway of sociocultural integration as one among other scale processes concerning 'integration' is illustrated. Besides, the urban transformation process of Kerkrade and its relation to 'scalar narratives' of urban authorities are discussed in the following.

Once settled down in their new home, asylum seekers are expected to attend the integration course. Within a prescribed period of time they have to learn Dutch, facts about Dutch history, figures, law and several norms and values of the Dutch society. The course should be

Legend:

national governments:

COA: Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers
   Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers

DUO: Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs
   Agency of Executing Education

IND: Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst
   Immigration and Naturalisation Service
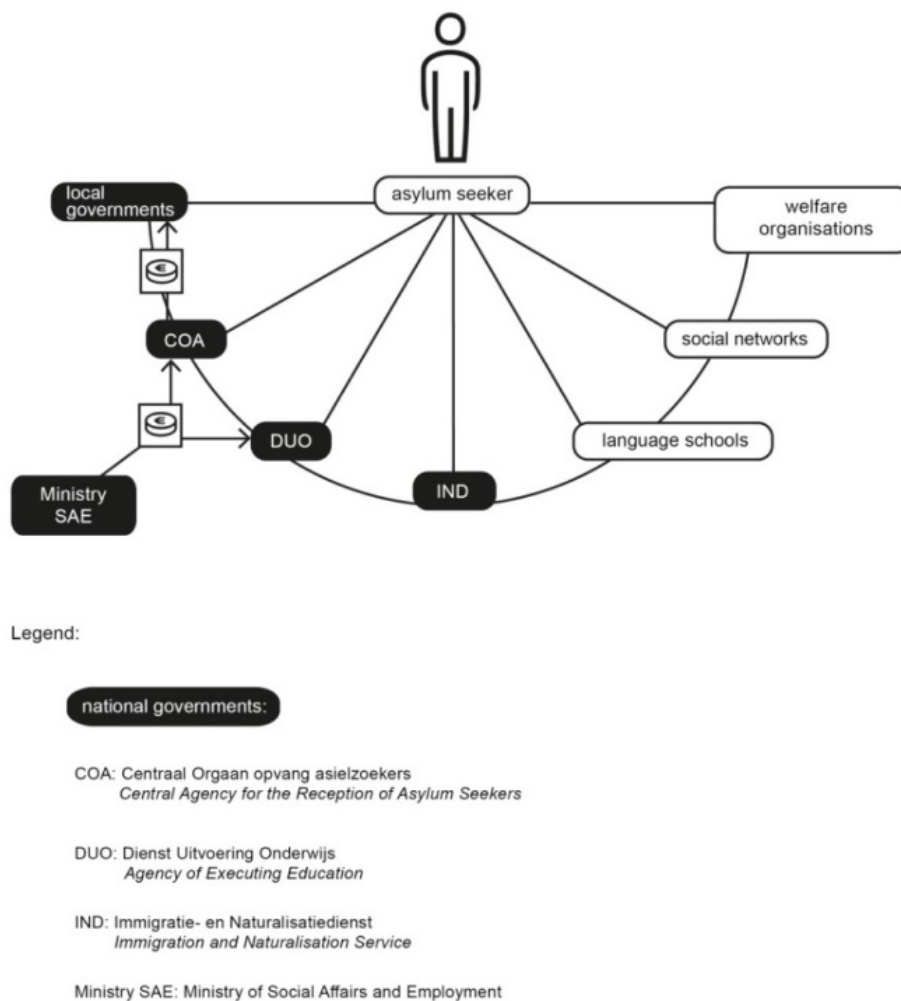
Ministry SAE: Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment

Figure 1. Actors in charge of asylum seekers' integration (figure drawn by the author based on Rekenkamer, 2017, p. 7).

finished with an exam taken within three years. Without passing the exam, the chance of receiving a permanent residence permit or Dutch citizenship is low (though exceptions can be made). Throughout the Netherlands, a large number of private and public language schools offer integration and language courses controlled and licensed by the Agency of Executing Education (DUO), which is part of the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

Overall, this means that the asylum seekers' 'pathway of sociocultural integration' reproduces and is prestructured by (1) a spatial path (moving out of the accommodation centre into a flat in a certain city), (2) a time path (learning the Dutch language and culture within three years), and (3) a financial path (borrowing money to pay for the integration course). Interrelated key actors working for national and local authorities, language schools, housing corporations, and banks manage and control these pathways by generating scale processes along which tasks and responsibilities are arranged. For instance, as regards the financial path, DUO informs the asylum seeker on its website that s/he is able to borrow up to €10,000 to pay for the integration course and the obligatory exams (DUO, 2018). Language schools are aware of this and regularly charge exactly this price (see Figure 2).

Ultimately, the total costs cover the attended hours only, though the loan interest is determined in advance. This business model applies a penalty that the asylum seeker must pay if s/he fails to finish the integration course within three years (Dutch Integration Law, 2006, chapter 6 §28). This illustrates how the 'pathways of sociocultural integration' as educational and financial practices are intertwined with a concentration of power by

| Betreft: | Offerte | Dln.nr.: | BSN: | Bijlage: | n.v.t. | Datum: | 23-11-2017 |

Geachte mevrouw

Wij bieden u het volgende traject aan:

Onderdeel	Prijs
Leerbaarheid Alfa	€ 50
Voortraject Inburgering Alfabetisering A	€ 3028
Voortraject Inburgering Alfabetisering B	€ 1730
Voortraject Inburgering Alfabetisering C	€ 1730
Inburgering A1-A2 25 weken	€ 2163
Inburgering oriëntatie op de Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt begeleiding	€ 63
Inburgering lezen examen	€ 50
Inburgering luisteren examen	€ 50
Inburgering schrijven examen	€ 50
Inburgering spreken examen	€ 60
Kennis Nederlandse Maatschappij examen	€ 40
Leermiddelen Alfa en TPR	€ 415
Leermiddelen Inburgering A1-A2 25 weken	€ 84
Leermiddelen ONA	€ 23
Leermiddelen KNM	€ 35
Leermiddelen voorbereiding examen	€ 26
Totaalprijs	€ 9597

Indien u akkoord kunt gaan met deze offerte verzoeken wij u deze ondertekend aan ons te retourneren.

Voor akkoord,

Namens de opdrachtnemer,   Namens de opdrachtgever,

Opleidingsmanager

Figure 2. Copy of an original offer for a licensed language school, sent to an asylum seeker who lives in Kerkrade.

scale processes, which are, in turn, placed beyond asylum seekers' choices (for example, to learn the Dutch language and culture in another way.)

4. Kerkrade: A Downscaled Mid-Sized City

Around 45,800 inhabitants live in the mid-sized city of Kerkrade, which is situated near the German and Belgium border in the southern part of the Netherlands. Kerkrade is part of an association of eight small and mid-sized municipalities, called Parkstad ('Park City') Limburg, of which five have seen declining population since the 1990s (Hoekveld & Bontje, 2016; Latten & Musterd, 2009). The downscaling process began with the closure of several coal mines in Parkstad Limburg during the 1960s. Despite considerable public support for creating new jobs, the rate of unemployment has stayed relatively high at around 15% in recent years, though it decreased significantly to 8% in 2017 (Elzerman & Bontje, 2015; Gemeente Kerkrade, 2017; Reijnders, Krishnamurthy, & Van Tetering, 2017).

The downscaling process of Kerkrade caused by deindustrialization constitutes a devaluation of the built environment which is closely related to capital flows moving by trend towards high(er) profit rates (Reijnders et al., 2017). Following Smith (1984, p. 148): 'the mobility of capital brings about the development of areas with a high rate of profit'. Concerning the attractiveness of downscaled cities for migrants, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011b) note that these provide limited opportunities for economic and social mobility and the development of local ethnic politics and representation. The latter characteristics are applicable to Kerkrade, although the city has experience with immigration from non-European labour forces who worked in its coal mines in the past. Of the 31.4% of inhabitants with a migration background, 5.8% are of non-European origin (CBS, 2018). As a result, the 340 asylum seekers allotted to the city between 2014 and 2018 do not come across large ethnic or religious organizations (except Christian parish communities) or businesses. These are also underdeveloped in the larger neighbouring city of Heerlen, although there is a mosque and some small businesses established by former migrants.

In contrast to many other municipalities in the Netherlands, in Kerkrade the asylum seekers are not supported by the national Dutch Council for Refugees but the much smaller welfare organization Impuls. This is run by volunteers and two part-time employees paid from the local government. The great majority of these have migration backgrounds and therefore have intercultural competences, a transnational network and speak the language of many asylum seekers (such as Arabic or Kurdish). Despite this valuable local agency for asylum seekers and the local history of immigration by non-European labour forces, the cities' repositioning does not consider the multilingualism or cultural diversity of their inhabitants an asset. Instead, tourism, local traditions,

cultural events (such as carnival) and a cross-border ('EU-regional') residential economy are promoted. Regarding tourism, Kerkrade officials aim to reinvent the cities' image with slogans such as 'European and hospitable' (Gemeente Kerkrade, 2018). It is stated that 'tourism, recreation and culture can show us the way towards a new future. Embedded in the local history, in the tradition and in the landscape of Kerkrade they can grow into the new motor of our society' (Gemeente Kerkrade, 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, urban renewal projects are an additional part of the reinvention strategy characterized by conflicting scales processes. On the one hand, Kerkrade pursues its own interest of attracting tourists and new residents by transforming the city centre (while Heerlen does the same). By doing so, cultural and economic capital flows were territorially embodied, which disempower the other cities of Parkstad. On the other hand, the city depends on collaboration with Parkstad Limburg for being attractive to tourists and new residents. After all, many diverse attractions are needed to be able to keep the pace of competition with the nearby German urbanised area of Aachen.

The finding that scales processes either 'solve' competition between cities or reinforce it is not new (Smith, 1984). Hence, particularly for downscaled cities, this leads to long-lasting vacancies (Hoekveld & Bontje, 2016; Hospers, 2013), partly because downscaled cities—such as Kerkrade—have difficulty attracting new residents interested in buying houses. In a number of policy and urban planning documents of Kerkrade and the region, this difficulty has been acknowledged: 'despite the great cross-border potentials, at the moment [an EU-regional labour and housing market] is not yet an everyday reality. At the moment only 2.0% of the working population who resides in South-Limburg work abroad' (Parkstad Limburg Stadsregio, 2016, p. 18). Due to demographic change, a large number of existing houses are for sale, while the more rural small cities within the same region (Parkstad) or more urbanized cities (Heerlen) are often more attractive to home buyers. For Kerkrade, this means that it can hardly reposition itself neither through 'residential economy' nor 'restructuring industry' (EPSON, 2013).

5. 'Scalar Narratives'

For the interviewed urban authorities and planners of this city, urban transformation and asylum seekers' integration means reconciling both with local interests. These interests are essentially (1) the achievement of the 'right' and small-scale social mix and (2) the maintenance of 'social peace' by acting on the basis of equality. The follow citations illustrate how two urban planners perceive the relation between the imagined pathways of integration and disadvantaged neighbourhoods:

> R 1: You have to watch out, also with accommodating asylum seekers, that you do not settle them all down

in those [disadvantaged] neighbourhoods...you know? Rather, that you distribute them across the city.

R 2: But this becomes more difficult. Since the introduction of the new Dutch Housing Law, we have to negotiate agreements with the housing corporations once a year. In general, they want to support us but say, 'Soon, we have whole streets or apartment complexes where only asylum seekers are living...you should try to accommodate at least some of them in privately rental housing'. But they live on social security...so this does not *work*. Sure, you want to prevent there being whole streets of Syrian or whole streets of Eritrean. Then it clusters around altogether. This is probably fine for them, but for overall integration it is not a good idea...that you do not integrate into society. Thus, it is difficult because there is a shortage of social housing at the moment.

The idea that a small-scale social mix is an instrument for solving the 'problem' of the asylum seekers' integration is shared by two agents of a housing corporation.

R 3: You have some streets within neighbourhoods where you should not accommodate anybody. Two foreign families already live there, so no more. Otherwise, they will form a group when you just want them to integrate and to join in with the society. Having their own traditions, that's okay.

R 4: Yes, that they get something out of the Netherlands.

R 3: This is the idea we follow. In the past, you had whole neighbourhoods with just foreigners: Turkish neighbourhoods, Moroccan neighbourhoods. We try to prevent this. We also do this with disadvantaged Dutch families: settle them down next to a stronger one.

These quotations show that neither the asylum seekers nor the 'strong Dutch' neighbours are perceived as social agents with diverse skills or characteristics. Instead, a fixed sociospatial pattern of a homogenous majority group around which a minority group should be orientated is assumed. By utilizing this often heard 'scalar narrative' in Dutch planning practice (Galster, 2007; Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009), spatial scale is reified as an object with an autonomous effectiveness on people.

Nevertheless, 'scalar narratives' are flexibly deployed, depending on the interest at hand. All of the interviewed urban authorities know that a shortage of social housing will complicate the realization of a small-scale social mix within Kerkrade. This shortage is a result of the rescaling process initiated by all municipalities of Parkstad. They came to an agreement as to where and when urban renewal should occur. Therewith, they exercise the neoliberal Dutch housing policy (Priemus,

2004, 2006) and hope to reduce vacancies caused by demographic change. Ahead of other cities, Kerkrade demolished a significant share of its social housing in recent years. As a result, many households moved away and the city lost tax income. Therefore, urban renewal plans have recently slowed down and the strategy has changed to pay more attention to inhabitants' needs. Here, the 'scalar narrative' was utilized to reclaim power to broaden the local scope of action by renegotiating former agreements. As regards the maintenance of 'social peace' by acting on the basis of equality, officials hesitate to prioritise asylum seekers over other urgent target groups.

R 3: We want to help [asylum seekers] but we do not continuously provide extra help. There are other tenants who also earn something extra but they are nevertheless requested to clean their gardens. You should be able to do that. If not, there are particular [welfare] organisations who offer support, just like for Dutch families. Although, then, language is a barrier. You have to provide an interpreter in order to even understand their expectations'.

This housing corporation agent indicates the limits of their responsibility. In contrast to the 'scalar narrative' above, the asylum seeker is perceived here as a social agent who has obligations and expectations and is not able to speak Dutch properly. This illustrates the experienced difficulty to balance diverse needs of low-income groups. It is likely that officials are afraid of paving the way for right-wing policies. The strongest party in Kerkrade's local council is a conservative party and 29% of the inhabitants voted for the Dutch right-wing party. Therefore, the representation of a multicultural Kerkrade has so far been avoided. Says a local official:

R 5: We don't communicate on a large-scale. We don't announce, 'We will place in your street many, many asylum seekers'. We don't do this. We keep it low profile and we are lucky that we do not have a large-scale accommodation centre within our municipality....We communicate very little about asylum seekers and this is a strategy....Politicians ask questions...and we inform them on regular basis.

The resistance to public communication of asylum seekers' arrival, in combination with the neglect of the intercultural competences of them and the volunteers, the focus on the residential and tourism economies, and, last but not least, the broadly accepted 'scalar narrative' on integration via a small-scale social mix, constitute a limited local opportunity structure for asylum seekers.

6. Conclusion

The first research question asks which kind of urban planning strategies are developed by the urban authorities of

downscaled, mid-sized cities to rescale their cities. This article shows that a mid-sized city may be repositioned by the restructuring of its city centre, the transformation of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and the reinvention of its image in order to attract tourists and home buyers. In the case of Kerkrade, regional agreements for transformations of each city within Parkstad Limburg have also been made. The findings suggest that the repositioning efforts of mid-sized cities do not self-evidently mean that the local opportunity structures for asylum seekers will be improved. If urban authorities' main concern is to preserve 'social peace' by concentrating power by scale processes whilst avoiding multicultural representation, the chance of developing suitable local opportunity structures for asylum seekers seems to be low. Recently, urban strategies have begun to change in Kerkrade and Parkstad Limburg, with more attention being paid to participation and bottom-up processes (IBA Parkstad, 2018; Lekkerkerker, 2016).

The second research question concerns the interplay between strategies of urban transformation and asylum seekers' integration. It is demonstrated that urban authorities and state institutions socially produce scale processes to standardize 'pathways of integration' in terms of accommodation, time, and financing (see Figure 1). In all, these scale processes suit the neoliberal view that integration and urban transformation are, among other challenges, business models. Scale processes become affective in space (for example, with no multicultural representations or by reducing social housing) thus intensifying the dependence of asylum seekers on the volunteers who support them. Once institutionalised, scale processes are difficult to change by themselves (and the volunteers). Certainly, it is not suggested here that asylum seekers have no agency and are unable to change their lives or the everyday routines of a mid-sized city (an issue that will be explored in a following article on Kerkrade). The language school, for example, as a social and physical place, offers a platform for (cultural) representation and social interaction. However, first of all, conditions produced by scale processes must be accepted before access to an officially recognised integration course is possible. Secondly, from the viewpoint of urban authorities, the local opportunity structure is sufficient: asylum seekers are well-accommodated (by the intentionally hidden practice of the officials in charge), well-financed (with money borrowed at the asylum seekers' own risk), and well-supported by volunteers, first and foremost, with relatively low public costs.

Of course, Kerkrade is not representative of all downscaled, mid-sized European cities, and more empirical research is needed to ascertain whether or not urban authorities are willing (or able) to boost local opportunity structures for integration. Some studies confirm the presence of internal border practices (Darling, 2011; El-Kayed & Hamann, 2018) whilst Gebhardt (2016) argues that Dutch local governments in particular are losing spheres of influence because the state has centralised control over financial resources, integration programmes, and language courses. Other scholars demonstrate that Dutch municipalities have developed a number of practices to counteract national integration policies (Kos, Maussen, & Doomernik, 2015).

In my view, scale theory offers a suitable theoretical framework for (further) exploration of the interplay between the rescaling processes and asylum seekers' integration in mid-sized cities. The findings show that socially produced scale processes in both fields reproduce a social hierarchical order that leaves limited scope to position oneself outside these. However, future research on the life chances of asylum seekers in different mid-sized cities should take into account the issues of time (for learning new things) and financial circumstances. Governments regulate migration by control of accommodation processes, time, and the manner of financing 'integration', whilst attempting to draw upon its benefits. Last but not least, due to the absence of (large) ethnic organisations in many downscaled mid-sized cities, more research is needed to investigate alternative structures that are likely to be supportive; for instance, religious organisations of various denominations, and clubs.

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Conflict of Interests

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