

Towards a new definition of citizenship in the 21st century

Some time ago, I read a magazine article entitled "The dirt, the city and death"¹. In that article, the journalist Floris van Straaten reports on the current situation in the city of Basra, the second city of Iraq. The suffering of the city is described in its various forms. As a result of all the traumatic events of recent decades and the war last March, Basra is a city filled with uncertain people. In the article, the surgeon Amer Al Khozai says "the worst legacy of Saddam Hussein is perhaps that people no longer trust each other". Nahi Shahi Ali Alta'i, a retired history teacher, elaborates on this idea. Referring to the terror, the repression and the secret services of Saddam Hussein, he states that "they managed to eradicate the entire idea of citizenship. There came a time when people lost the feeling that they belonged to this city"². A little bit later, the article says that the continuing uncertainty of the Basrawi is closely linked to the absence of security.

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Van Straaten's piece impressed me for various reasons, but particularly because he sets out, in the passages I have referred to, a concise description of the conditions required to establish citizenship. If people are uncertain or feel unsafe, do not trust each other and no longer feel that they belong, then citizenship is apparently – as we can conclude from the article – a lost cause. However, if there is stability, safety, confidence and community, it is more likely that citizenship will fare better. Citizenship is one of the core concepts for living together in a city – not only in Basra, but also in Amsterdam and other large cities across the world. This brings me to Richard Sennett, who will be giving the 7th Megacities Lecture in Amsterdam on 27 November 2003.

A recurring theme in Sennett's work is the question of how people who differ widely from each other can live together in an urban environment.

That is also the question that preoccupies me as the mayor of Amsterdam when I say that I am looking for ways of keeping things together.

In my Cleveringa speech³, I followed the sociologist Gabriel van den Brink, and listed five major developments of the last forty years that have dramatically changed the appearance of the Netherlands. These developments are: democratisation, individualisation, privatisation, globalisation and secularisation. Each of them has resulted in many benefits and many freedoms. Together, they have darker sides that have resulted in a society of "strangers". Amsterdam is the city where the drastic social changes of the last forty years in the Netherlands have been felt most acutely. No other city in the Netherlands is so varied and multicultural as Amsterdam. Nowhere else is the population as secular and nowhere else has the individualisation of society been as widespread as in Amsterdam. If we wanted to describe the Amsterdam of the 21st century in a single word, that word would be "diversity". Some statistics to demonstrate my point.

The population of Amsterdam on 1 January 2002 consisted of 735,000 people with 173 different nationalities; there were more than 87,000 people without Dutch nationality. We had 332,000 single people and 142,000 families. If we look at the population of Amsterdam from the point of view of ethnic origin, 387,000 people (52.6%) are classified as native Dutch and 348,000 people (47.4%) are thought to be members of ethnic groups⁴. In 2020, 60% of the Amsterdam population will be made up of people with a non-Dutch background. Looking at the city from a socio-economic perspective, we see that, of the 529,000 Amsterdammers aged between 15 and 65, 386,000 were members of the working population, with 46,000 unemployed or looking for work. We had a total of 108,000 people who depended on benefits (including social security and disability pensions); that is 19.4% of the population between 15 and 65.

Given this diversity, the challenge is to keep together all these strangers, all these different individuals, who together make up the Amsterdam of today. A community that includes everyone. That is what matters. In the Cleveringa speech, I explained that we have to look for renewed forms of citizenship. A citizenship based on trust and responsibility. Responsibility: for yourself *and* for the whole, whether it is the society or the company where you work, the school you send your children to, or the street where you live. That sounds straightforward, but it is not. How does one go about creating that trust and that responsibility? How is "bonding" established? Richard Sennett's work can provide us with a number of elements that are important for establishing "bonding". For example: routine, unpredictability, time to develop yourself as an individual, time for a community to establish mutual solidarity, continuity, social links resulting from mutual dependency and, following Lewis Coser, something that is very important: the capacity to articulate differences and the time to negotiate them through. Community is something that develops over time.⁵

In an age when flexibility and mobility are used as magic words, the chances of success in the search for bonding, community and citizenship are low. But we must never lose courage. The search for "the glue that keeps things together", the search for community must go on. In America, the triad of individualism, local democracy and religion are the glue⁶. In the Netherlands, individualism also plays a major role,

but the relationships in the area of local democracy and the position of religion are completely different. This means that, here, we will have to gamble on a reformulation of the concept of citizenship, strengthening local democracy and firmer law enforcement. It is a question of restoring trust and responsibility: in and for one another.

That implies:

- a. An elaboration of the concept of citizenship in at least four domains: employment, law enforcement, political participation and cultural transfer;
- b. Stricter government action against transgressions of the law;
- c. Citizens who observe the rules;
- d. The explicit formulation of standards and values (including standards of decency);
- e. The joint formulation of rules so that their authority is safeguarded.

- 1 *Floris van Straaten "Het vuil, de stad en de dood", M het maandblad van het NRC Handelsblad, October 2003, pages 13-28.*
- 2 *Idem, page 15.*
- 3 *Job Cohen "Vreemden", Cleveringa-rede 2002, given on 26 November 2002 in the Aula of Leiden University.*
- 4 *Stadsdelen en buurtcombinaties in cijfers 2002 Gemeente Amsterdam, O&S het Amsterdamse Bureau voor Onderzoek en Statistiek, November 2002.*
- 5 *After Richard Sennett, "The corrosion of character" (1998), chapter 8 "The dangerous pronoun".*
- 6 *See Ben Knappen op. cit.*
- 7 *With thanks to Paul Scheffer, who has been appointed by the city of Amsterdam to the Wibaut chair at the University of Amsterdam.*



Self-respect and compassion

"Look after yourself; nobody else will", is something my father taught me very early in life. Currently, when it is not only Dutch politics that are dominated by calls to the public to "assume responsibility for their own lives", this strikes me as an idea that was ahead of its time. An idea that had taken firm root at the back of my mind when I was politically active in the struggle against the dismantling of the idea of solidarity. Or when I worked in youth assistance programmes, fighting against the work ethic individually in concrete ways by sending young clients straight to Social Services instead of to the job centre or employment agencies.

It comes to mind when I read Sennett's latest work, *Respect*. He describes his mother, a social worker, as being "precise and calm in her work, firmly marking out human distances". A professional whose engagement was not characterised by a "passionate embrace of the oppressed". For the young Sennett, the difficulties and doubts suffered by his mother at work were invisible. Only much later, when she wrote a short story in which the young protagonist worries about a visit to a welfare mother, and expresses her hate for her role as an investigator, as an enforcement officer, did her ambivalent attitude towards her work become clear to him.

For Sennett, this was one of the reasons for examining the paternalism associated with assistance for the lower classes. He therefore sees the provision of autonomy in a situation of dependency as one of the major bureaucratic dilemmas for the social democratic founders of the welfare state. How can, for example, the homeless experience support and autonomy at the same time? Sennett calls this "a riddle that I can barely solve". The fight against the evil of inequality is, in any case, not enough to generate mutual respect, he concludes, because what matters is precisely the question of how the strong can respect those destined to remain weak. My own father had no answer to that question either, nor do the current-day advocates of individual responsibility.

Unlike Sennett, I would not wish to exile compassion completely to the realm of the paternalists. We need it. My position would be that: "everybody is entitled to self-respect and compassion". In the public spaces of the large cities, everybody can see why this is the only way out. Putting this in extreme terms, you see two types of people walking around: people who walk with bent heads looking at the ground. Shame means they want to avoid contact with others. Or there are people who actually walk upright with their gaze fixed on the horizon. Fear is their reason for avoiding contact. The ultimate public expression of the division in society. Mingling between them, we see the homeless, some with psychiatric problems, and groups of young people (often males) who break with this pattern in the form of highly individualistic vulnerable behaviour, or precisely macho group behaviour. This is the new social issue of decreasing tolerance in the public arena, now more and more people see that arena as a necessary expansion of private space. Social inequality here is perceived as a nuisance and as insecurity. People working with homeless addicts who do remain reserved as they do their job, supporting their clients and respecting their autonomy, can count on the derision and the aggression of the honest citizens. A hard approach is the loudest of the calls we hear these days. Those who lag behind have only themselves to blame.

My father's 'look after yourself' principle was, in other words, not all that bad a lesson for his daughter. But as soon as it is adopted as a principle for society or politics, you're in trouble. Respect will then be reserved for the people who earn it. The undisputed status of the concept of support is pushed out by the demand for measurable results. This only makes Sennett's dilemma for the social workers more acute. And all of us who struggle on in the large city on a daily basis, trying to preserve our humanity, must not lose our ability to feel compassion and to experience through others. We are in sore need of it.

Instead of helping the poor, mobilise for social justice

Richard Sennett convincingly analyses the uneasy relationship between respecting and helping the poor. However, social justice should not be about helping the poor, it should be seen as a public good. Efforts to achieve this good should focus on the large cities.

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Globalisation is accompanied by a growing social divide, especially in the metropolises.¹ Until recently, the Netherlands has remained relatively unaffected by this phenomenon, due to a decent system of social security and a strong tradition of public housing. Things have started to change, however, most visibly at the margins of the labour market. At the top end, some managers feel entitled to rewards as high as a hundred times the wages of a normal employee. At the other extreme, a class of working poor is emerging slowly but steadily. A combination of stricter social security and inadequate job training puts increasing pressure on the unemployed to accept bad jobs. The number of poor workers' households has increased from 105,000 in 1995 to 160,000 in 2000, while the number of employees who are paid below the appropriate minimum wage has increased from 36,000 in 1997 to 68,000 in 2001. Especially in the lower socio-economic areas of the large cities, many are forced to alternate between inferior temporary jobs and income support.²

Meanwhile, there is growing hostility towards those who fall by the wayside. Welfare recipients are depicted as frauds; the homeless and drug dependents are chased from one place to another across the cities. Illegal workers are portrayed as criminals and are rounded up and deported in large-scale raids, staged in part for media coverage. This growing hostility has a particularly strong impact on relations between ethnic groups. There is extensive media reporting of incidents involving ethnic youths.

Students who have worked hard to become successful members of society now find that they are once again seen as Moroccans and that they are being held accountable for the deeds of other Moroccans. Some turn to the Arab European League, an organisation which defies both right-wing populism and integration policies considered to be patronising. However, some believe that it also encourages anti-Semitic sentiments among its followers.

Of course, these phenomena are not specifically Dutch. In fact, they have been seen in other countries before, and in a more acute form. According to Sennett, the core problem here is not inequality, but our inability to deal with dependency. The ideology of autonomy turns those who need help into failures or parasites and turns compassion into condescending charity. While Sennett is of course right when he says that the poor will sometimes be offended when they are offered money, there is another aspect to income policies: the fact that they affect the quality of society as a whole. For example, social security not only benefits the unemployed, but also affects the relation between employees and employers: without the safety net of social security, workers are forced to "sell labor at whatever terms the market offers".³ On a more general level, comparative studies have found that communities with high income inequality tend to have higher crime rates, more health problems and weaker social cohesion.⁴ The important point here is that decent income distribution is not about helping the poor, it is a public good.

Striving for social justice requires efforts to be made in the large cities, not least because inequalities are most pronounced here. While many national governments are increasingly indifferent about the social impact of their policies, local governments are sometimes more responsive to such issues. Importantly, they may also have the power to do something about them. Using a strategy reminiscent of how American governments have dismantled their social security, the Dutch government is shifting responsibility for income support and labour market policies to the municipalities, while simultaneously cutting the budgets by over half a billion euros. In theory at least, municipalities will now have the power to provide decent income support and to create more jobs. However, in practice, financial constraints make it uncertain that they will do so – unless pressure is exerted. It is important that local groups mobilise to demand decent social policies from the municipality.

Mobilisation is not just important as a means to obtain decent policies: it may also strengthen solidarity in the process. In this year's February 15 anti-war demonstrations, a considerable number of ethnic minorities participated – for once not as targets for social welfare projects, or for police crackdown, but fully-fledged allies striving for a common cause. Such common causes can be found at the local level too. When we interviewed people on the streets of the Rotterdam Delfshaven and Amsterdam Bos en Lommer neighbourhoods, we found considerable agreement among respondents about what the local government should do: give financial support to those with low incomes, prevent kids dropping out of school without a proper qualification, create jobs and provide Dutch-language courses. Of course, there are individual differences in the priorities people hold, but these differences are not organised along ethnic lines. Despite all the indications of a growing gap between ethnic groups, they basically agree on the social issues that should be addressed.⁵

Perhaps the network of organisations opposing neo-liberal globalisation can play a role here. At first considered by many as a disorganised group of troublemakers, they

have proven quite effective at mobilising people and at influencing the agenda of institutions such as the World Trade Organisation. It has been argued that international activists should turn their movement into “thousands of local movements”; for if “they don’t represent the local realities of globalization, they are too easily dismissed as misguided university students or professional activists”.⁶ Perhaps this is already changing: Dutch groups preparing for the European Social Forum are simultaneously addressing the social policies of the City of Amsterdam.

Then there is the role of the trade unions. In some countries, trade unions defend the interests of those with secure, full-time jobs, at the expense of those with marginal jobs and new entrants to the labour market. As a result of growing inequality and low levels of union membership among those with non-standard jobs, Dutch trade unions may move into a similar exclusionist direction. On the other hand, they could also choose to strive for social inclusion. This is not as easy as it may seem, since the usual organising concepts tend not to be very effective outside the traditional sectors of the labour market. In a sense, trade unions will have to reinvent themselves. Some of their efforts should be directed at mobilising people in the large cities, forging flexible alliances with local grass-roots organisations.

- 1 E.g., Saskia Sassen (2000), *Cities in a World Economy* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.
- 2 *Poor workers’ households: data provided by Statistics Netherlands (CBS); underpayment: Arbeidsinspectie (2003), Werknemers met een bruto-loon op en onder het wettelijk minimumloon in 2001; alternating between temporary jobs and income support: Richard Staring, Godfried Engbersen and Annelou Ypeij (2002), Armoede, migranten en informaliteit in Rotterdam-Delfshaven, p.57, Rotterdam: Risbo.*
- 3 Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (1997), *The Breaking of the American Social Compact*, p. 180. New York: The New Press.
- 4 Richard G. Wilkinson (1999), *Income Inequality, Social Cohesion and Health: Clarifying the Theory*. *International Journal of Health Services* 29(3): 525-43.
- 5 FNV Randstad (2003), *Welke problemen moet de overheid aanpakken: Een bliksemenquête onder de bewoners van Rotterdam-Delfshaven; ibid, Welke problemen moet de overheid aanpakken: Een bliksemenquête onder de bewoners van Amsterdam Bos en Lommer.*
- 6 Naomi Klein (2002), *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate*, p.244. New York: Picador.



Comments on Richard Sennett

The space of global flows indeed has to touch ground somewhere. Castell's flows of capital that start somewhere and end up elsewhere have to be conceptualised, initiated, co-ordinated in concrete places as Saskia Sassen has aptly observed. Richard Sennett in his recent work traces the socio-cultural articulation of the emerging space of flows. He looks at the impact of the increasing intensity and extensity of links between far-flung places on both concrete places and the impact on concrete social classes. The darker sides of globalisation are increasingly unhinging places and people. The benefits of cheap toys from China, cheap travel, the availability of good cappuccino and Indian food almost anywhere in the Western world are overshadowed by fear. Fears of global terrorism, plagues such as AIDS or SARS, and economic uncertainty are translated in the perception and the experience of places, of other people, and, inevitably, also of people's own identities.

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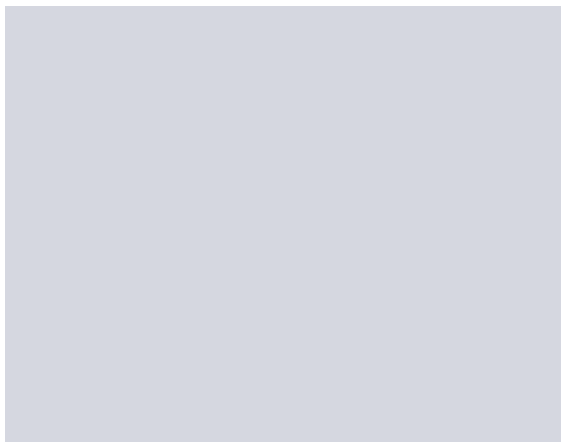
This deep crisis occurs at a time when neo-liberal viewpoints dominate the discourse in those societies under pressure. Market solutions are seen as the panacea for co-ordinating the myriad web of actions in advanced societies. States are, consequently, making a retreat in socio-economic affairs; the welfare states are being trimmed back even in nations with a very strong tradition in this field as Germany, France and the Netherlands. States are, however, not retreating in a different domain, namely that of public order. Instead, states are rapidly enlarging their eyes and hands to control and police societies. Overall fear is being translated in fear of public spaces, fear of crime, fear of immigrants, fear of others more generally. Places are being reshaped and persons change their perceptions and, hence, their behaviour.

Against this haunting backdrop, Richard Sennett tries to voice his concerns for the fall of, this time not just Public Man, but of public places and personal integrity as

well. To get things in perspective, he uses a deeply historical and historicised view. His long-term perspective spans from Classical Athens to contemporary New York. I have to say I am not totally convinced of the usefulness of the body metaphor as a kind of master prism to grasp cities – cities are much more like geological layers, each with its own different logic. Still, his analysis of the palpable impact of the changes mentioned above on the once neat and transparent Washington Square in New York makes it all worthwhile.

His Washington Square story proves that Richard Sennett does not wallow in a historical world. On the contrary, he uses his sensitive gaze to link the contemporary with the past. That's how he is able to depict a crucial paradox of the hypermobility around us, namely that in some respects the meaning of place becomes, at least potentially, more significant. It is in places that we are, in principle, able to meet others and to empathise with them. Proximity, even if it is only very temporary, still remains an important stimulus for community. Proximity might form a necessary condition, but certainly not a sufficient one. His moving tale of the Werdegang of Cabrini Green in Chicago says it all. A community ripped apart by institutional racism and inequality in conjunction with structural socio-economic changes.

Richard Sennett probes the consequences of the deep crisis in contemporary capitalism in a highly original, perhaps even idiosyncratic, inspiring and erudite way. He has no concrete program of action on offer, but he does have a lot to say about the confusing developments around us. After reading Sennett, places and persons including oneself have changed, albeit only in your own mental map. To create and preserve humane places, this is a first and necessary step.



Respect between equality and difference

The welfare state is under pressure and cuts are threatening in numerous places. This erodes the conditions needed for respect.

Respect, the recognition that you are a fully-fledged person, is organised by the welfare state, where a bureaucracy operates and treats everybody consistently and equally. Assistance for weaker people must be a right, not a gift. As soon as assistance is based on pity, humiliation rears its ugly head and respect vanishes.

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These are a few thoughts from Richard Sennett. The central role of the concept of "respect" is unusual, because it is not found at all in many discussions about the future of the welfare state. Those discussions concentrate on government, the market, the centre ground, Europe, globalisation and so many other topics.

I believe that the concept of "respect" should be positioned between the drive for equality and the drive for differentiation. People want to be equal (no discrimination) and to be different from each other (own identity).

Everybody knows the situation in which official policy runs up against the fragmentation of the group targeted by that policy. The standard of living of the imaginary 'man in the street', representation for the neighbourhood, etc. etc. It immediately becomes clear that the unity suggested by the policy conceals a colourful set of individual wishes and subgroups. The tension between creating equality and differentiation has increased greatly. And this is awkward in a country that has an extensive history of "distributive justice". In the personal arena, we have experienced this since our childhood: during the washing-up, in the playground, at school, at the sports club. Imposed equality is not always felt to be right by those directly involved. In the

world of policy, the policy of urban development and restructuring work for example, there are also numerous examples of distributive justice. Seasoned spatial planners will still remember – speaking of making choices and differentiation – the list and the approach to establishing urban nodes in the early nineties. The distribution of the funds from the Investment Budget for Urban Renewal programme is inconceivable without the element of the equal treatment of municipalities. We are now blessed with a list of fifty-six priority areas for urban restructuring.

They are all units that betray the urge towards a policy focus, but that are highly impregnated with the idea that there should be a place in policy for every case. And that, above all, there should not be too much differentiation.

In a transition from equality to differentiation, from equal results to equal opportunities, freedom of choice becomes a central concept. This is not without problems. The call for "individual responsibility" – a mantra of government policy – sounds good and, indeed, many people want to be more in life than just objects of policy. But what should we do if people are unable, in practice, to cope with freedom of choice and if they long for certainty and clarity?

Despite this, the drive towards freedom of choice includes risks. If policy sets out what is good for people, those affected become recalcitrant and highly creative in nullifying the impact of the policy. Whether the policy relates to a "balanced population profile" or to the fight against "cheap accommodation being tied up by those who can afford better", assertive citizens know how to cope. Because a strict top-down approach is destined to fail, policymakers who focus too much on equality can do little else than allow freedom of choice.

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The dilemma under those circumstances is that freedom of choice is extremely selective. It exacerbates differences and the resulting opportunities will be exploited most at the top end of the market (larger houses, private options for more luxurious care). Basic facilities will decline (in absolute or relative terms) and the collective values (for example economic use of space) will come under increased pressure. This is demonstrated by the attempts to introduce more private initiatives to the area of housing construction.

The task is to ensure that freedom of choice is non-selective. But is this not a contradiction in itself? It is possible to create ways of moving forward in the housing market, on the labour market, or in education. If the quality of housing in the Netherlands increases in the next few decades, low-income groups should have the opportunity to benefit in line with the general trend.

Creating room for differentiation also means creating opportunities in the area of perception for the formation and expression of identity. Coordinating urban-planning and architectural measures can encourage "pride in the neighbourhood". This in turn encourages bonds with a neighbourhood and can result in areas acquiring a clearer identity profile. Striking projects that link up with the cultural orientation of local residents can also help here. In this respect, multicultural building opens up interesting perspectives. Multicultural building is certainly not the factor that will allow for the integration of ethnic groups in Dutch society (many other things are required

to achieve this), but it is a line that creates more space for culture and identity. This is very desirable. It generates pride in a complex, a neighbourhood. In Sennett's words, it organises respect.

In this way, living environments with a profile can contribute to pride and respect. It is certainly not possible to encourage the latter if neighbourhoods are classified solely in statistical terms from high to low on the basis of the percentage of rented housing, the proportion of ethnic groups, or average income. These figures are not unimportant, but the claim that a neighbourhood with owner-occupied homes, few ethnic residents and high incomes is "good" and the opposite "weak" is patronising and insulting. Many residents of the 56 priority neighbourhoods are more positive about where they live than one might suspect on the basis of many sketchy media reports set to downbeat music.

Strategy and substance mean it is very important to make the most of the people in these areas, whose commitment to the area leads them to act as unpaid entrepreneurs. Each neighbourhood has local heroes, even if they are not yet always known or have not yet fully developed. The trick is to allow the establishment of vigorous coalitions that support initiatives from the outside and from the residents themselves. Under these circumstances, residents take on roles in which they themselves assume more responsibility.

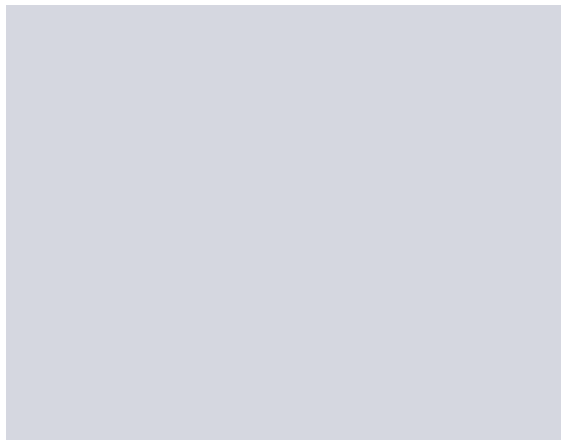
They are in a better position – even if it is only for the short term – than general policy concepts imposed from above to say what has to be done to stop the area going downhill. This always involves a trace of populism. As long this does not involve playing off groups against one another, this need not be a real problem.

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The concept of "respect" in Sennett's work is very useful in providing room for differences in a much more active and aggressive way compared to the stiff approach usual in the Netherlands. However, as soon as "difference" is put into practice, tension is created with the principle of equality and the classic arrangements of the welfare state. Sennett sometimes has a great deal of respect for bureaucracy, an instrument that does treat people equally but also sees them as numbers. Not everybody is always happy with this, something that can quite easily be seen as emancipation.

Respect also proceeds, more than Sennett would appear to believe, from opportunities outside existing frameworks.

However, the organisation of solidarity is indispensable. A clear framework indicating what is allowed and what is not continues to be desirable. It is necessary to find again and again the balance between care and emancipation, between patronisation and abandonment, involvement and respect.



Where society is makeable

In the Netherlands, serious consideration is being given to the geographical dispersal of under-privileged groups, usually of ethnic origin. That is a striking development in a country where the belief in the makeable society has been abandoned. The dismantling of the public housing policy in the nineties fits in with the tendency to move the collective responsibility of central government down as far as possible to market parties, local authorities and individual citizens. The Dutch Ministry of Housing continues to draw up housing construction programmes annually, but they are still a long way from completion. The ministry is pulling back, limiting itself to refining or dismantling regulations. In practice, the building decree and environmental regulations determine to a considerable extent the nature of our living environment. The effect of the living conditions on the proper functioning of areas and cities is no longer an issue for central government.

At the same time, the integration of minorities is high on the political agenda. This objective has to be based on a belief that society is makeable. Responsibility for this integration process has been shifted onto individual citizens. People who are not considered to have fitted in are expected to follow Dutch language and culture courses so that they can 'join in', this being one of the avowed political objectives of the present Dutch government. Mainly, this means that 'they' can participate in economic terms. Everybody must contribute to the central objective of cabinet policy, the reduction of the budget deficit. Cultural differences are thought to interfere with optimal working performance. Seen from this point of view, integration is not a social, but an economic problem. That is why integration policy can be allied with an unmistakable cynicism about the makeable society and the achievements of the welfare state. The reduction of the budget deficit requires what Richard Sennett calls flexible people. People who can subordinate their own values and standards, their ideas, wishes and longings, their imperfections and emotions to the optimisation of corporate profit

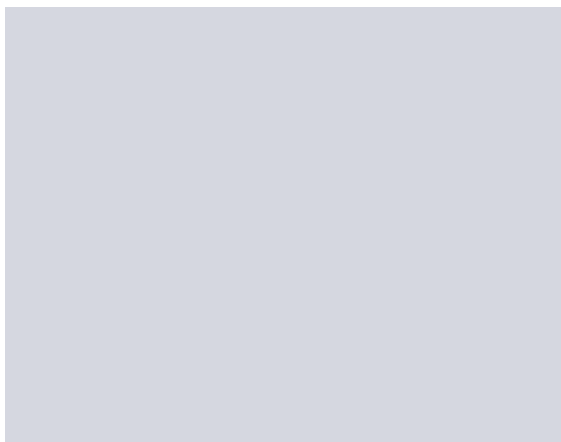
growth. However, although this is an ideal personality in economic terms, it presents a problem for society, as emerges from the meticulous analysis given by Sennett in his latest book *Respect in a World of Inequality*. Flexible people lack respect for their fellow humans, and an understanding of mutual dependency. Sennett unravels the way the urban and social problems are associated with how people behave towards each other. The smallest unit of society is the human relationship and the daily living and working environment is the setting for these relationships.

Sennett starts his analysis of the phenomenon of respect with the description of the living environment in which he spent his childhood. As a result of the housing policies of the city of Chicago, he and his mother found themselves in a new housing project. This had been designed with the best intentions, in the hope of 'emancipating' underprivileged groups. Sennett blames the failure of the whole project on a lack of understanding among policymakers. He denounces the thinking that opposes 'us' to 'them'. This distinction alone prevents mutual respect. Nevertheless, a society can only survive if this respect is at the heart of our approach and if respect also includes people who are different or who, due to illness, old age or other reasons, cannot 'join in' in reducing the budget deficit.

Sennett looks at all sorts of aspects of respect: humiliation, powerlessness, lack of understanding, and the awareness of mutual dependency. In doing so, he uses autobiographical events in order to work as precisely as possible. Respect always presupposes mutuality. Failure is the inevitable result if, when making policy for dispersing ethnic groups, we do not bother to analyse or discuss our own behaviour. Integration presupposes mutual respect. The central government in the Netherlands is distancing itself from problem areas, leaving it to municipal authorities, corporations and local residents to find solutions. With the degradation of its own responsibility, the importance of being Dutch also declines. If public facilities are reduced, society as a whole shrinks, is Sennett's position.

A person who has settled in Dutch society is 'flexible', but we need people who respect each other in order to get towns, neighbourhoods, companies, schools and care institutions working properly. This respect is not generated by language and culture courses, but by giving a good example. That was exactly the answer given by a leading advisory council in response to the question from the Dutch prime minister J.P. Balkenende about how to 'restore' the decline in respect for the standards and values in society. In the opinion of the advisory bodies consulted, the policy at present is often too abstract, too removed from ordinary citizens. In addition, the government is possibly the worst culprit when it comes to shirking responsibility.¹ Sennett's analyses provide us with an understanding of the mechanisms that make the late-capitalist, multicultural society lose its way here and there. He does not provide us with simple, ready-to-use solutions, but he does show the potentially far-reaching implications that policy measures can have on people's everyday lives. The distance between policymakers and the everyday world of people targeted by the policies is too great. Responsibility for bridging this distance does not rest solely with ordinary citizens. Policymakers will also have to take the bit between their teeth. Integration is not a one-sided movement; it presupposes changes in the behaviour of all those involved.

1 *Warna Oosterbaan, Doe Wat! Wetenschappers vinden dat het de overheid zelf ontbreekt aan normen en waarden. NRC Handelsblad, 19 January 2003*



Sensitivity in the age of the Internet and the shopping mall

Urban culture presents a confusing picture. On the one hand, modernisation has allowed it to conquer the world and it has become the dominant culture. On the other hand, the urban life of the historical inner cities seems to be reduced to simple entertainment. Direct access to urban culture has become more awkward, but at the same time there are many more opportunities to acquire experience through different media. In the work of Richard Sennett about the city, the senses are the carriers of urban culture. It is through the senses that the spatial and cultural tissue of the city is experienced. Sennett describes the emotional and sensory impoverishment of the modern city. "It would be difficult to know where in particular to go in modern London or New York to experience, say, remorse. (...) As materials for culture, the stones of the modern city seem badly laid by planners and architects, in that the shopping mall, the parking lot, the apartment house elevator do not suggest in their form the complexities of how people might live. What once were the experiences of places appear now as floating mental operations." (The Conscience of the Eye: xi). The perspective of the complexity of world and life, that has been a feature of the city from classical Athens to the Paris of the nineteenth century, has been increasingly narrowed due to the concentration on intimacy, speed and the comfort of life outside. Even a modern centre of diversity and vivacity such as Greenwich Village in New York falls short in a comparison with the urbanity of Athens. Modern urbanity is based on the passive observation of spectacle, and not on emotional involvement.

Culture and urban planning

Sennett views the changes in cultural identity and urban planning in conjunction. There have been major changes in the cultural identity and in the physical structure

of the city. In both domains, there has been a transition from 'soft' to 'hard' boundaries. The main cultural change is the increasing separation between the 'inner world', the domain of personal identity and experience, and the urban 'outer world'. The separation between the inner and outer worlds was expressed in a pure form in protestantism: the ethical inner world had to be protected from the chaotic stimuli of urban life. The 'hard boundary' built up in this way between personal identity and the urban environment has its modern equivalent, less the religious origins, in the spectator of the urban spectacle. He watches, but the process of observation has no effect on his identity.

The other category of 'hard boundaries', the physical boundaries in the modern city, are often the result of the redesigning of the urban public area for the purposes of mobility. The gradual transitions between streets and neighbourhoods have been replaced by modern versions of old city walls, but inside the city instead of around it: ring roads or railway lines are the borderlines. The hard mental and urban boundaries cut almost completely through the bonds between human experience and the built environment.

Seen in this way, the urban culture is imprisoned in an iron cage from which escape is impossible. His historical approach means that Sennett appears to be turning his back on the future, leaving only regret about the loss of the classical urban culture. Because the mental and cultural changes have been just as drastic as the physical changes in the city, his analysis also makes clear that the retro-option in urban planning does not work. Rebuilding classical urban patterns does not bring back classical urban experience. Nevertheless, Sennett's work certainly does include possible openings towards new urban experiences. This is actually linked to his basic position that urban culture has to be looked for not only in the physical structure of the city but also in the cultural mentality. However, two developments are important for this search for new urban experience and those developments are given very slight attention by Sennett himself.

Urbanity is no longer linked to the city centres.

First of all, urbanity has moved both to other sites and to other social domains such as the arts. The latter shift is indeed noted by Sennett when he refers to Mark Rothko's Chapel and the ballet of Balanchine to Igor Stravinsky's Apollon Musagète as building stones of a balanced identity in a differentiated reality, an experience that used to be available in the urban public realm (Sennett 1992: 239-252). In essence, his latest book *Respect* continues this theme, since one of the things it explores is the identity of people in the social domain. Sennett pays much less attention to the possibility of the displacement of urbanity. His fondness for the traditional inner city is too great to allow him to do so and this fondness is, incidentally, shared by many urban sociologists, including those in the Netherlands. But there is a strong spatial shift of urban centres to new economic nodes or peripheral shopping malls and night-life areas. New urban locations are created here that differ from the inner cities, but which nevertheless have an urban character. The 'experience density' of these new urban locations taken individually is less than in the old city centre. However, at the same time, people are much more mobile so that urban experiences from various locations can easily be joined up.

The porous post-modern identity

Secondly, the identity of the post-modern urban dweller is more porous than 'hard'. Sennett presumes that the 'hard boundary' between personal identity and the urban outer world has become ever more pronounced since the emergence of protestantism. I do not think that is the case. Personal identities have become 'more porous' in the urban experience economy, and they are continuously being appraised, adjusted and manipulated. People integrate a range of urban experiences in their identity, but this results much less than it used to in consistent biographies or identities. The identity adopted in leisure time no longer fits in precisely with the professional identity and on top of that it may be completely different a year later. The sensory experience of urbanity is more fragmented but it is not necessarily reduced as a result. The 'complexity of life' is no longer experienced in a single glance at the Agora, but composed from different fragments of experience.

Sensitivity in the post-modern city

Even in the post-modern and dispersed city, there is room for the sensory experience of urban culture. Sennett's work rightly draws attention to the danger of the impoverishment of that sensory experience. That results in two challenges for us. The first is an urban planning challenge that we might call the 'agoralisation' of the new urban locations. Those locations must be more than economic concentrations or transit locations for mobility purposes, and provide a wider spectrum of urban lifestyles. The second is a cultural challenge that, if possible, is even more difficult than the urban planning challenge. The excess of fragmented cultural experience rapidly turns into a cacophony in which only the loudest noises get through to us. The urban 'complexity of life' has always consisted of a wide range of experience and emotions: brash and subtle, hectic and calm, alienating and welcoming, distant and involved, regretful and hopeful, wordly and intimate. Maintaining this range is more important for urban culture than any wonderful city square or building whatsoever.

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