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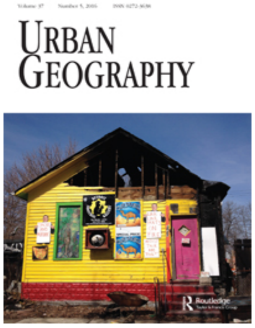

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INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood decline and the economic crisis: an introduction

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ABSTRACT
Urban neighborhoods are still important in the lives of its residents. Therefore, it is important to find out how the recent global financial and economic crisis affects these neighborhoods. Which types of neighborhoods and which residents suffer more than others? This introduction provides an overview of the papers in this special feature that focus on this question. It concludes with the statement that governments should specifically pay attention to the poor neighborhoods and the people living there, because here the effects of the crisis are very prominent and in many cases probably long-lasting.

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Background

Since the Chicago School in the 1920s (e.g., Hoyt, 1939; Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925/1974), neighborhoods have never been off the agenda of urban researchers. This is evidenced by the numerous articles and books that focus on life in urban neighborhoods (e.g., Gans, 1962; Suttles, 1974), on urban spatial segregation (e.g., Bolt, Van Kempen, & Van Ham, 2008; Kazepov, 2005; Lieberson, 1981; Logan, Stults, & Farley, 2004; Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998; Musterd & Van Kempen, 2009; South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005; Taeuber & Taeuber, 1965), and the somewhat more recent research on neighborhood effects (Friedrichs, Galster, & Musterd, 2003; Musterd, Andersson, Galster, & Kauppinen, 2008; Van Ham & Manley, 2010). Many studies show that the neighborhood is certainly of importance, in particular for poorer households (see, e.g., Ellen & Turner, 1997; Guest & Wierzbicki, 1999) and for specific ethnic groups in the expectation that they will be more likely to receive social, economic, and emotional support from their fellow residents (Enchautegui, 1997; Fong & Gulia, 1999).

However, since the 1960s, researchers have also suggested that the neighborhood is becoming less important in people's lives (Stein, 1972; Webber, 1964). At that time, this idea was based on the rapidly increasing (auto)mobility of urban society. Later, under the influence of the globalization literature, the further internationalization of the economy

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(Castells, 2000; Marcuse & Van Kempen, 2000), and the rapid development of the Internet and social media, the idea that the local becomes less important than the global became the dominant discourse (Graham & Marvin, 1996; Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014; Wellman, 1999, 2001). In times of globalization, better transport and the Internet, many urban residents can "go" almost anywhere, so why bother about the neighborhood?

At the same time, there is strong evidence that neighborhood remains important in the lives of people: we are willing to pay considerably more for a house in a good neighborhood (Cheshire, 2012); children go to local schools, play in the street, and have a lot of their friends and social contacts in the neighborhood; local contacts and networks are still important in people's lives; and local residents organize themselves when there are threats to their neighborhood. In many neighborhoods, social activities are organized by neighbors, often aimed at enhancing social contacts within the neighborhood. On the other side of the spectrum, we also know that problems in the local environment can negatively affect peoples' lives and lead to tensions between residents. In such cases, life is far less agreeable, even if people have their leisure and work activities in other parts of the city. Such problems may even be a reason to move to another neighborhood as quickly as possible (e.g., Clark & Ledwith, 2006). So, neighborhoods still matter for many.

A neighborhood can be defined as a relatively small spatial subdivision of a city or town for which a number of physical and socioeconomic characteristics can be measured (for a more elaborate discussion of this definition, see Zwiers, Bolt, Van Ham, & Van Kempen, 2016, this issue). Cities always comprise a mosaic of neighborhoods: poor neighborhoods, slums, ghettos (not everywhere), mixed neighborhoods, "white" neighborhoods, immigrant neighborhoods, posh neighborhoods, working-class neighborhoods, deprived neighborhoods, gentrified areas, gated communities (also not everywhere), calm suburbs, and bustling inner cities. Some neighborhoods show great stability over time. Others gradually, or sometimes quite quickly, change for better or for worse, e.g., as the consequence of neighborhood-directed policies or because of the availability of new and attractive housing opportunities elsewhere in the city or region (causing people who can afford it to move away). Processes such as gentrification can also rapidly alter the population and the character of neighborhoods.

A large number of papers and books have been dedicated to neighborhood change, and especially neighborhood decline, with contributions from various countries, including some more theoretical accounts of neighborhood decline (e.g. Grigsby, Baratz, Galster, & Maclennan, 1987; Prak & Priemus, 1986; Temkin & Rohe, 1996). The discussion of neighborhood decline combines population change, physical decline, economic development, and the role of governance and policy. We define neighborhood decline as *any negative development in the physical, social or economic conditions of a neighborhood as experienced by its residents or other stakeholders* (see Zwiers et al., 2016, this issue). Neighborhood decline often combines a number of negative developments, such as a declining physical quality of the housing stock, the outflow of more affluent households, the inflow of less affluent households, an unfriendly or even dangerous atmosphere in the streets, rising criminality, etc. The combination of all such developments can easily lead to a spiral of decline. Most models that aim to shed light on the causes of neighborhood decline also pay attention to external factors, especially (global) macro-developments.

The global financial and economic crisis that hit the world since 2008 is an example of a macro-development that affects neighborhoods. The beginning of the crisis was signaled by the fall of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, and widened to encompass banks and other financial institutions, multinationals and local firms, the employment structure, the housing market, property values, and public expenditure. But maybe most importantly, it affected the lives of many people all over the world in the form of declining incomes, unemployment, foreclosures, forced moves, and reduced services as national and local government expenditures were cut back.

The extent to which the crisis also affected urban neighborhoods has not yet received much attention. This is unfortunate, because although it is true that the crisis has affected all countries, regions, and neighborhoods, there are large geographical differences with respect to the impact of the crisis. Some countries have a much larger social rented sector than others, which may cushion the effects of the crisis. Some governments have decided to implement more rigid austerity programs and budget cuts than others. Those budget cuts are likely to hit some regions and neighborhoods more than others. The poorest neighborhoods are likely to be hit most by the crisis, as their population runs the biggest risk of declining incomes and job loss. The effects of the crisis also partially depend on the definition (especially the size) of the neighborhood: in large heterogeneous neighborhoods, effects may be more differentiated than in small homogeneous (e.g., very rich or very poor) ones. For this special feature of *Urban Geography*, we asked a number of international authors to reflect on the development of urban neighborhoods in times of crisis.

Content of the special issue

The first paper in this special issue (Zwiers et al., 2016) attempts to unravel the complex and multidimensional process of neighborhood decline. Although many models of decline have been proposed, and many factors have been identified as a cause of neighborhood decline, until now, researchers have paid only limited attention to the effects of economic developments and of the economic crisis on neighborhoods. The authors of this introductory paper formulate a number of hypotheses that can be seen as starting points for further research into the relationship between general economic developments and developments in and of neighborhoods.

Kathe Newman and Edward Goetz (2015, this issue) argue that the question of whether neighborhoods are still important in a globalizing world is not a crucial one. They point to the increasing interrelatedness of neighborhoods and globalization: what happens in one place may affect what happens on the other side of the world. They, e.g., state that changing financial regulations in the United Kingdom could affect the cost and availability of capital in the United States (and elsewhere), which can profoundly affect investments in urban places. The global economic crisis thus influences local developments (although it is not always clear exactly how this works). Neighborhoods remain at the heart of community development policy and practice, but part of the community development agenda is to understand and engage with external processes that shape the development of neighborhoods.

In their paper, Newman and Goetz also point to a second issue: the growing body of literature and policy action that privileges the region as the place from which to understand urban decline and which addresses issues that have historically been the concern of community development. Newman and Goetz define regionalism as a political and policy approach that locates the problems of central city neighborhoods, as well as the solutions to those problems, in the relationship of those neighborhoods to larger, metropolitan-level economic, social, and political dynamics. This idea is very much related to the fact that research has indicated that place-based revitalization policies have not effectively reversed the decline of central city neighborhoods in (American) cities. Indeed, too much neighborhood-focused work does not engage with the broader economic and political processes that help to produce local conditions. At the same time, Newman and Goetz identify potential danger in the work of the (primitive) regionalists: they often pathologize deprived neighborhoods, and propose solutions that involve moving people away from those areas. This is related to policies in Western Europe that focus on the restructuring of urban neighborhoods (i.e. large-scale demolition in order to break down spatial concentrations of the poor), leading to forced moves of low-income households to other places within urban regions. Such policies often fail to improve the socioeconomic situation of households living in deprived communities.

In their longitudinal multiple case study, Derek Hyra and Jacob Rugh (2016, this issue) compare three gentrifying African American communities: Bronzeville in Chicago, Harlem in New York City, and Shaw/U Street in Washington, DC. Much of each neighborhood's older housing stock was constructed in the mid to late nineteenth century, when these areas were still predominantly affluent and middle class. In the 1980s and 1990s, these neighborhoods were considered as "no go" zones with high levels of poverty and crime, but in the 1990s they started to revitalize. In the 2000s, during the subprime lending boom, property values began to skyrocket (Hyra & Rugh, 2016, this issue). The Black population steadily declined in number. In their paper, the authors compare the development of neighborhoods across three phases: pre-Recession (2000–2006), Recession (2007–2009), and post-Recession (2010–2012) periods.

Hyra and Rugh emphasize the effects of subprime lending. Their main conclusion is that neighborhoods are differentially influenced by the economic crisis and they make clear that distinct community and city contexts, in particular racial and class neighborhood transitions and citywide unemployment and housing market conditions, mediate the influence of national economic decline and recovery. They conclude that elite upper class, mixed-race gentrification in Harlem and Shaw/U Street, compared to Bronzeville's Black middle-class gentrification, might have protected these communities from excessive subprime lending rates and foreclosure concentrations. This might explain why these areas recovered more quickly during the post-Recession period. Besides these race and class transitions, the authors indicate that the metropolitan context is important. Citywide data suggest that the Great Recession hit Chicago relatively hard compared to New York and Washington, DC, and this might help to explain the continued downward trajectory of the Bronzeville area. The argument resembles the findings of Newman and Goetz: when explaining neighborhood trajectories, attention should be paid not only to local developments, but also to developments at other spatial levels.

The paper by Katrin Großmann and Annegret Haase (2015, this issue) assesses the value of assemblage and complexity thinking for understanding urban neighborhoods. Their basic argument is that our thinking about neighborhoods is too linear in terms of decline or gentrification, and that we pay insufficient attention to differential developments within neighborhoods and through time (Hyra and Rugh also emphasize that this is important).

They argue that assemblage and complexity thinking allows us to better focus on such differential developments. As they state in their paper, assemblage thinking in urban research develops a view that claims to overcome reductionist, linear, causal thinking in favor of apprehending unexpected effects, shifts, and turns. They test whether such a different ontological perspective can enrich neighborhood change research by examining the development of an inner-city district and a large housing estate in Leipzig in the eastern part of Germany. Because it is necessary for their argument to give some elaborate descriptions of Leipzig and the two selected areas, the paper also provides some useful background information about a former Eastern European city and about the development of two areas that might be considered typical for such cities.

Does complexity and assemblage thinking help to better explain neighborhood developments? The authors conclude that it does, but not as a new "one-size-fits-all" approach that replaces all others. Assemblage thinking does, however, keep our eyes open to nuances of neighborhood developments that, at first sight, do not fit the story well. As the authors state: *"we might uncover unexpected dynamics, surprising differences, or counter-trends in that which seems to be stagnant or stable."* Such open thinking might indeed lead to rich results and new perspectives. In the case of developments in times of crisis, an assemblage approach may direct attention to developments that are not immediately related to economic developments, but that can influence the trajectory of (a part of) a neighborhood.

Roger Andersson and Lina Hedman (2016, this issue) begin their paper on Malmö (Sweden) with the hypothesis that the economic crisis is likely to be associated with increasing levels of income segregation and income polarization, and that poor neighborhoods are more severely hit by negative economic developments than more affluent ones. They investigated neighborhood developments in two different time periods – one which was characterized by a severe economic crisis and one in which the economy was relatively stable. Their findings indeed suggest that income segregation and income polarization increased during the economic crisis and that in this period poor neighborhoods fared worse than the region in general. The economic crisis of the early 1990s led to an overall increase in both income inequality and income segregation, but the already poor neighborhoods experienced more dramatic increases in unemployment rates and in relative share of low-income people than better-off neighborhoods. During the more economically stable period, these patterns and measures were also more stable. The authors state clearly that they cannot say that the economic recession *causes* these outcomes, but there is at least a clear correlation between these two. Negative developments can be a consequence of in situ changes (people in poor neighborhoods are more likely to lose jobs than those in other parts of the region) and of residential sorting, where the differences in income and employment status between in-movers, out-movers, and stayers are greater during the period of recession compared to the more stable period. This serves to underline the fact that, to understand neighborhood change, one should simultaneously examine the dynamics of in situ populations and those associated with residential mobility.

The final paper in this special issue, by Rebecca Tunstall (2016, this issue), shows us that neighborhood developments in the United Kingdom are generally slow: neighborhoods are more "slothful" than dynamic. Neighborhoods do change, e.g., under the influence of urban regeneration policies, or as a consequence of in situ changes or residential mobility (see the paper by Hedman and Andersson), but in general this does not radically alter their relative ranking in a city. For example, Tunstall (2016, this issue) cites evidence that the relative social status of neighborhoods in inner London in 1896 correlates highly with measures of deprivation for the same neighborhoods nearly a century later in 1991, and here own results, spanning 26 years, reveal a similarly slothful change. This also means that whilst policy measures, e.g., urban regeneration policies, may have effects (e.g., with respect to social cohesion or neighborhood reputation), these effects are often less marked than policy-makers might expect.

A final note

For many decades, in various countries, local and national governments, often in combination with private partners, have implemented policies with the aim of countering neighborhood decline. This has been done under various headings, such as urban renewal, urban restructuring, social renewal, state-led gentrification, big cities policies, and many more. However, the economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures have led to a major policy shift and changing priorities (Zwiers et al., 2016, this issue). Neighborhoods and neighborhood decline are not high on the political agenda anymore. Implicitly, or sometimes even explicitly, governments point to the need for residents themselves to solve problems in their neighborhoods: they should be the main actors of neighborhood regeneration. However, when the problem consists of a decline in social cohesion and in the willingness to interfere with neighborhood developments, it is risky (or overly optimistic) to count on local residents or entrepreneurs. Articles in this special issue indicate that the economic crisis, in combination with many other developments, does affect poor neighborhoods (and consequently the people living in these neighborhoods) more severely than more affluent ones. It is not efficient to stop supporting vulnerable neighborhoods, as it may nullify the (often long-term) investments that have been undertaken in the past in such neighborhoods. Moreover, it is neither realistic nor reasonable to expect residents to solve the problems in their neighborhoods. People in poor neighborhoods not only marshal their energies in their daily struggle to get by, they are often also faced with an environment with a high degree of cultural diversity, a lack of mutual trust between residents, a high level of turnover, and a high risk of being a crime victim. These are all ingredients that reduce the likelihood of people being, are willing, or able to intervene in their neighborhood in a positive way (see, e.g., Kleinhans & Bolt, 2014). Therefore, it is, in our view, the responsibility of (national and local) governments to prevent neighborhoods from sliding down to a level where the safety and health of their residents are compromised.

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