

PAPER FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR RESEARCH,
POLICY & PRACTICE

HOUSING ASSETS, HOUSING PEOPLE

1-4 SEPTEMBER, GLASGOW

ONLY FOR NEAT PEOPLE

ON THE CHANGING DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL RENTAL HOUSING IN FLANDERS, BELGIUM
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Pascal DE DECKER^{1/2}, Bruno MEEUS³ & Caroline NEWTON^{1/2/4}

Abstract

The tone of the discourse on Social Rental Housing in Flanders has changed over time. Until the early 1990s, complaints on the role and functioning of social rental housing were nothing more than a relative unproblematic narrative in the margins, which was absorbed into everyday life practices. However, at some time during the nineties this low-scale debate became a highly politicised discourse at the level of the central government leading to controversial legislation and regulations, with even comments of the UN. The aim of this paper is to unravel the processes that fostered the discourse and to deal with its consequences.

To achieve this aim we first need to dismantle and analyse the discourse on social housing for which we build on both Deleuze's and Foucault's approaches of discourse analysis. According to Deleuze (1980) a discourse should not be analysed through deconstructing merely the linguistic propositions, a discourse needs to be placed within its contexts. Foucault (1972) also emphasises this contextuality. He argues that the task we should set for ourselves "*consists of not - of no longer treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*" (own emphasis). It is precisely this knowledge that can elucidate, in a third part of the paper, how the (discursive) actions of some of the protagonists enabled the jump in the discourse, thus putting it on the political agenda.

Both the theoretical frame and the analysis will be paralleled by and interwoven with the chronicle of social housing in Flanders/Belgium in an intermediary second part. All of this will finally enable us to draw some concluding remarks and to unveil the power of the social housing discourse in Flanders.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, social housing, Foucault, Flanders, Belgium

¹ Hogeschool WenK, St-Lucas, School of Architecture, Brussels & Ghent

² Faculty of Applied Engineering Sciences, University College Ghent

³ Institute for Social and Economic Geography, K.U.Leuven

⁴ STER* (Urban Planning research), Department of Industrial Sciences and Technology, Erasmus University College Brussels

1. Introduction

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) raised in its concluding remarks of the report on Belgium launched on 7th March 2008 critical concerns with regards to the ‘Flemish Housing Code’ (adopted on 15.12.2006). More specifically the language requirements (prospective social housing tenants have to speak, or commit to learn, Dutch) were being questioned and the Committee urged the Belgian State to “*ensure that linguistic requirements do not lead to indirect discrimination affecting both citizens and non-citizens who do not speak Dutch, on grounds of their national or ethnic origin, thus impairing their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, in particular their housing rights*” (UN-CERD, 2008, p. 4).

Thomas Hammerberg (2009) in his report to the Council of Europe also showed his concern, fearing that “*the obligatory language requirements⁵ for accessing municipal services may stigmatise persons whose mother tongue is not Dutch and jeopardise efforts to foster tolerant communities with respect to diversity*”.

The fear for possible racial discrimination wasn’t only formulated on this international level, already during the preparations for the adaptations of the decree a lot of ‘local’ (read Flemish) protest was heard. Voices of concern resonated in the media from institutions involved in human rights protection (in the broadest sense) to academics (Blommaert, 2005; De Witte, 2005; Delruelle & Torfs, 2005; Liga voor de rechten van de mens, 2005; RISO Antwerpen, Team Hoogbouw, 2005; Vlaamse Huurdersbonden, 2005; VOB, 2006; Animotto, 2008).

The ‘language element’ wasn’t the only concern of those challenging the decree. The introduction of a probation clause, which granted the social housing institutions the possibility to terminate a contract with those tenants who do not fulfil their obligations or are troublesome within or after a 2 year period, also is an offence to basic justice, since it is prohibited that the social rental agency is both judge and party involved in the dispute.

Both elements and precisely the fundamental critique on them made the Constitutional Court – after a complaint in August 2007 by the Human Rights League and an organisation defending the tenants - decide that the decree had to be modified on both issues mentioned. Consequently the Flemish Government rephrased parts of the decree, altering the ‘probation period’ to a ‘training opportunity’, the insufficient knowledge of Dutch did no longer result in being rejected but alternatively in a penalisation.

Despite the fact that the Flemish government was taken before the Constitutional Court and a revision was imposed, the underlying presuppositions didn’t change. In the course of the next years they were even reconfirmed in the ‘Social Rental’ decision⁶ of October 12, 2007 (and two changes since then). Again, the Flemish government recalled in a positive tone the measurements they intended to imply: the language requirement was being described as important to empower the tenants, as it would enhance communication and engagement with the institutions.

⁵ In the meantime some municipalities in the Brussels area also defined certain criteria with respect to the purchase of a plot for the construction of a dwelling.

⁶ A decree is a Flemish law; a ‘decision of the government’ (uitvoeringsbesluit) is a legal text any government needs to execute the laws. Next to that Minister can send letters to explain his interpretation of the decisions.

Additionally it was stressed that it would also enhance the safety⁷ and liveability of the complexes (Vlaamse Overheid, 2008, p. 7). Furthermore it was argued that in order to increase the ‘liveability’ of certain social rental estates “*exceptional measures*” were justified. An important one within the context of this paper is the augmentation of the maximum income level, in order to broaden the target group to ‘the middle classes’. The reasoning behind this was that a social mix in these complexes is the solution for all problems (‘the myth of social mixing’).

Some of these arguments, as well as the implicit meanings behind them, are also clearly present in the Decree on Land and Building Policy, voted on 27th of March 2009. This Decree is as controversial as the aforementioned Housing Code and her executive decisions. We can find two major forces driving the formulation of this piece of legislation. A first one is the re-formulation of an element already present in the Housing Code, namely the stimulation of social rental housing projects outside of the cities and a stop of new social rental construction in those municipalities, being the larger cities, where the market share of social rental housing already exceeds the 9%. Secondly, with the Decree the Flemish government is trying to keep the prices of plots, reserved for housing construction, affordable. In order to avoid that (poor) urban inhabitants move to the new non-urban social rental estates, the government guarantees priority to households with local bonds (a measure that is also introduced in the social rental legislation).

Here again a deeper layer can be revealed: the ‘land price argument’ was pushed both by the media debate about the ever increasing housing costs and by the building sector, complaining about the shortage of available plots (De Decker, 2007). And the call for social housing construction outside of the cities has to be understood within the social mix debate, which also steered the formulation of the language requirements in the Housing Code of 2006.

Soon after the approval of this new decree, a big controversy unfolded in the public media⁸: former stakeholders, the private developers to be more precise, were extremely hostile, especially towards the fact that new larger developments have to preserve 20% of the capacity for social housing⁹, within the planned development. Numerous politicians, especially right wing, jumped at the building federation’s protest of the decree. But also the Flemish housing minister stressed in debate with the public on the radio that he understood the concerns of the developers (who are basically fouled with the NIMBY-disease), when he referred to social tenants as “*the Flodder family*”. This pejorative notion to refer to social tenants comes from a Dutch movie, which was released in 1986. It tells the story of an anti-social marginal family that is temporarily relocated from their deprived neighbourhood (built on a poisonous dump site) to a luxurious villa in a very posh neighbourhood. The movie seriously exaggerates all

⁷ E.g. in cases of fire as the responsible Minister argued at several occasions

⁸ The umbrella organisation of municipalities asked – during the regional election campaign of 2009 – to postpone the execution of the Decree. But the new government intends to proceed (Vlaamse regering, 2009).

⁹ Note that ‘social’ in this case refers to 3 different types of subsidised housing. In the first place it refers to ‘classic’ social rental housing. But next to that, it also refers to houses built by social housing companies for purchase and plots of land. In the latter cases the term ‘social’ refers more to the institutionalised way of allocation than to the target group, who are middle classes (De Decker, 2001).

possible clichés of social tenants and the reaction of the elite neighbours is a painful reflection of the middle-class reaction against the new decree¹⁰.

Both cases illustrate how the Flemish parliament and government use a public discourse – a ‘sermon’ in the words of Bemelmans-Videc *et al* (2003) – that is framed in a positive way (e.g. the 20% reserved for social housing, showing a social attitude and a concern with the poor), while at the same time the controversy that arises clearly indicates that there is more to it than meets the eye. The aim of this paper is to unravel precisely the underlying, or hidden reasons that fostered the discourse, and additionally to deal with their consequences, being a decrease of affordable social rental housing in the cities (if the the mentioned laws are executed within the letter of the law).

In what follows, we will explain how, from the early beginnings of housing policy in Belgium and afterwards in Flanders, discourses on social housing were used by different actors to achieve specific goals. How, after a period when housing was high on the political agenda, the main discussions on social rental housing shifted to local settings and almost disappeared from the national plan. How they suddenly reappeared on the Flemish regional scale at the beginning of the nineties and affected the legislation caused by its coherence and raising popularity among influential people (see e.g. Schmidt, 2002).

To achieve our aim we first need to dismantle and analyse the discourse on social rental housing for which we build on both Deleuzian ideas and concepts and Foucault’s approaches of discourse analysis. This knowledge can help to elucidate, in a third part of the paper, how the discourse on social housing became a highly politicised story. Both the theoretical frame and the analysis will be paralleled by and interwoven with the chronicle of social rental housing in Flanders/Belgium in an intermediary second part. All of this will finally enable us to draw some concluding remarks and to unveil the power of the social rental housing discourse in Flanders.

2. Theoretical Frame

Discourse Analysis emerged during the late 1960s as an interdisciplinary practice, which was influenced by several disciplines including the humanities, and social sciences, such as linguistics, anthropology, and sociology (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 17). Since then, discourse analysis has become commonly used in many other social science domains, but it wasn’t until Beauregard’s 1993 book ‘Voices of Decline’, that it came to the fore within urban studies. From that moment on, its impact has grown, but in making use of the tool, a researcher has to be conscious of its theoretical roots (Boyle & Rogerson, 2001; Lees, 2004).

Because of its broad application, numerous definitions of discourse analysis can be found. We start on the basis of Hajer’s (1995; 2008) conceptualisation. For him discourse is “*an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is allocated to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduces in an identifiable set of practices*” (Hajer & Uitermark, 2008, p. 3). Fairclough (1992) states that a discursive event consists of three dimensions: discourse as a piece of text, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice. The first dimension covers the strictly formal aspects of a text, such as grammar, and text

¹⁰ The movie was very successful and an extra two movies were produced as well as a TV series and a website in different languages, including English: <http://www.flodder.tv/flodder-englishs.html>

structure. He pays attention to the selection of words or metaphors used by a speaker or writer, because they are related to the third dimension, namely discourse as a social practice. Through text and words people express the different ideologies present in society, to which people adhere or not. The choice of words can give an indication of these ideologies. Fairclough's second dimension pays attention to the context in which the text/conversation came into being, meaning not only the physical context but also the discourses that are used and combined, and the ways these are perceived by the reader/receiver. In other words, can he/she understand what is being said? Do they both share the same frame of reference, and if not, will this lead to discussion? (Macleod, 2002; Peleman, 2002).

Fairclough's and Hajer's approaches to discourse analysis, which integrate both discursive and social practices (Macleod, 2002) lead us on to Foucault's conceptualisation of discursive practices. In 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1972) Foucault shows that "*'discourses', in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words*". He argues that the task we should set for ourselves "*consists of not - of no longer treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*" (emphasis added). Thus, through the use of language, meaning is attached to social phenomena, but these phenomena are not merely being described, since through the discourse, significant meanings are attached to them. Because of this, discourse also reproduces the social phenomena it is "*talking about*". Precisely this element will be significant when discussing the position of the social tenants.

Foucault's interest in discourse is obvious. The relationship with power and knowledge is clear. When we are cautious about the discourses present in a society, we are able to understand the relationships between the actors and the *regimes of truth* that are produced. Every society has its own regimes of truth: norms, values and discourses that are considered to be the legitimate ones, and which organise and normalise society. These are articulated by those who are regarded as being authorised to do so. Thus, discourse is able to (re)produce power relationships. Deleuze (2004 (1988), p. 154-155) also stresses that language and the way it is used is much more than some sort of coding used to communicate, it is "*...a political affair before it is an affair for linguistics;...*". Since often, as Blommaert (2007) writes, language and the messages they contain, include a series of evaluations (e.g. the Flodders are bad neighbours). And when articulated in the public sphere by (more or less) people with authority like members of parliament, (former) ministers, mayors or university professors, they contain an appeal to essential truthfulness (Blommaert, 2007, p. 52).

Additionally Deleuze (2004 (1988), p. 229-255) brings to our attention that 'macro-societal' ideas, concepts, norms, etc. are not only present on this, what Deleuze calls molar level, but also on the lower every day life level (what Deleuze calls molecular level). And it is precisely because they interact that power and control can be exercised. Or in Deleuze's words: "*In short, everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 (1988), p. 235). In this paper we try to understand where and how these relations between both levels have been established.

Deleuze (1980) stresses that a discourse should not be analysed through deconstructing

merely the linguistic propositions, but that it needs to be placed within its contexts, as it was also conceptualised by Foucault. This paper is grounded in the knowledge that by working from a rigidly framed definition of discourse, analysis will not be useful. Instead discourse analysis is approached as a way to understand why people are talking (or acting) about certain matters in a specific way. What is their motivation for doing so, are there hidden assumptions that influence their thinking, which are then reflected in their speech? Discourse analysis is used to investigate if dominant norms and values are dispersed within the actions, and within the habitus of certain groups, even if these norms are in fact oppressing them.

We partly follow Macleod's approach, relying on both Foucault's and Parker's notions of discourse (Macleod, 2002, p. 21), emphasising that a discourse is more than mere text; it is also the gestures that accompany it, or it can be the act that is a consequence of it (consider the actual increase of income levels for social tenants, which is the translation of the societal discourse that tells people that "*mix is the max*" (De Decker, 2005). Accordingly, we strongly adhere to Foucault's notion that a discourse is "***a practice that systematically forms the object of which it speaks***". Taken together, this leads to the following working definition: Discourses are practices (mostly formed in texts); they are (or become) a coherent system of meaning about objects, containing subjects, and while aware of other discourses they reflect on their own phrasing within a historical and geographical context.

One additional comment deserves our further attention, namely a comment made by Foucault about the unspoken: "*The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say...*" (Foucault, 1977). Accordingly, it is also important to analyse these hidden messages, which might actually tell us more than the spoken word.

Let us now introduce the Flemish (social) housing context, so that, in a later part we can connect both theory and practice.

3. The early years: the politics of representing housing at the national scale

The housing section of the Census of 2001 shows that 73% of Flemish households privately own their dwelling, a high number compared to the Western European (EU15) average of 62% (figures for 2001-2002, Edgar *et al.*, 2002). Conversely, only 6% of Flemish households rent a dwelling provided by the state, while the Western European (EU15) average fluctuates around 11% (figures for 2001-2002). Neighbouring countries such as France (18%), Germany (15%) and The Netherlands (38%) have percentages considerably in excess of the average. This situation has not resulted from a complete absence of housing policy in Flanders or, by extension, Belgium¹¹. In fact, quite the reverse is true, as housing policy has traditionally played a crucial role in the general welfare policy for large sections of the population (De Decker, 2004). The continuity of housing policy throughout the 20th century follows from the political dominance of the Christian Workers' Movement, a pillar of the Catholic, and later of

¹¹ The devolution of Belgium is an ongoing story since it started in the 1970s. Flanders, Wallonia and The Brussels Capital Region now have their own responsibilities including housing, spatial and urban planning and social welfare.

the Christian, Democratic Party, who acquired and subsequently retained power, allowing them to put their housing policy into practice.

The major historical continuity in Belgian housing policy can be found in its fundamental trends: grants and tax exemptions favouring single-family housing with gardens, property and diffused housing going together with a quasi non-regulation of private renting and a very small social rental sector (De Decker et al, 2009). In order to understand the effect of discourses, they have to be contextualised, as such we have to go back to the roots of Belgian housing policies and the position held by the social rental housing sector. The first public housing legislation was introduced in 1889 and quickly a public perception of this housing solution emerged, Mougénot (1988) argues that *“from 1880 to 1920, not only most of the institutional components of this policy developed, but also most of the perceptions commonly associated with it”* (p. 532).

The 1889 Housing Law – ending the non-intervention ideology of the then elites (Goossens, 1982) - was provoked by heavy social unrest in 1886. The law was born out of fear (Van Poucke, 2008). Its content was consistent with the reasoning that already developed during the 19th Century. The early industrialisation (in e.g. Ghent already at the end of the 19th Century), is an important explanatory factor for the Belgium case, as it went hand in hand with urbanisation, which at that time went hand in hand with dreadful and unhealthy living conditions. This situation created dangers for the then Liberal and Catholic elites on at least three domains: health (with lethal epidemics at different occasions), morality (with promiscuity and secularisation) and socialism (threatening the political power balance).

In order to fight these threats, no housing or urban policies were developed at first, instead the mobility policy – aiming at keeping the workers out of the (nevertheless growing) cities, created a commuting working force. The workplaces (some Flemish cities, Brussels and the Walloon industrial axe) were made accessible by the construction of what would become the world’s most dense railway and light railway network. Commuting was made affordable by the introduction of cheap (‘social’) tariffs (De Decker, 2008).

Housing measures would – because mobility policies could not avoid urbanisation – become the second type of policy to counter the ‘evil’ consequences of the twin development industrialisation-urbanisation¹². The 1889 policy would become its consecration. Although the law was in theory ‘tenure neutral’, only the measures promoting home-ownership would become ‘successful’¹³ and concerned cheap (“social”) loans and tax exemptions.

The stimulation of home-ownership for the working classes¹⁴ had as its goal, on the level of the individual household, to discipline the workers. It was assumed that workers would identify themselves with owner-occupier classes and that consequently they would no longer support collectivist ideas and abjure strikes and violent actions. At societal level, the goal was similar, namely to prevent a concentration of workers in

¹² In order to fully understand the Belgium housing model a third type of policy, basically a no-policy, that on spatial planning has to be linked with both others. The absence of a spatial planning policy (and a land policy) implied that land for housing was massively available, keeping land prices down.

¹³ Note that the appreciation of “success” also is a discourse since, at that time, the new construction levels reached, still remained largely unsatisfactory to deal with the needs. The same counts for the post-Second War period, with the welcoming of high new private construction levels, which – if compared with neighbouring countries – were rather low (Feddes, 1986).

¹⁴ Being the ‘better’ or ‘deserving’ workers to acquire property (Goossens, 1982; Mougénot, 1988).

order to avoid the development of socialist masses in the city. This included, at least at the rhetorical level, the construction of dwellings for the workers outside the cities, a mixing of classes, a spread of the dwellings and an isolation of the workers' families (Goossens, 1982).

This promotion of homeownership went – already at that time – hand in hand with a negative discourse concerning social rental housing, which, as Mougenot (1988, p. 546) writes “*only ascribed to social (tenants and collective) housing an inferior status, where limited rights were associated with the social and moral unworthiness of the inhabitants*”. The first social housing agencies were established shortly after 1900, and although generally represented as being successful, little effect was observed on the field and inhabitants had difficulties identifying themselves with “*these mass-produced small homes which the local building societies are now able to build*”¹⁵ (Mougenot, p 545). In the public discourse tenants were perceived as truly destitute, and should be thankful for the possibilities created by the new policy. Consequently “*the political power was, at the same time, confirming in a naturally obvious manner their inability to belong to the category of real-estate owners. Proletarians, without any social recognition, have only duties towards the housing societies (even today these duties can be described as feudal); the inhabitants of these houses cannot be differentiated or identified in any way. This negative attribute, this inability to be anyone else other someone ‘receiving aid’, is materially visible in the very existence of the social housing estates with compare negatively with the vast variety of individual housing*” (Mougenot, p. 545).

So, with roots in the development of the 1889 law, by the end of the First World War, the Belgian ‘housing model’ (Mougenot’s words) is established around the following features:

- A private rental sector, with almost no state-intervention and landlords who can independently set their rents and easily terminate contracts, consequently creating an unattractive sector;
- A small and visible sector of (stigmatised) social rent, in the long run resulting in an unreachable and unattractive sector^{16,17};
- Wide support for the promotion of homeownership based on (1) household initiative (self-promotion and self-construction), (2) single family housing, (3) with a garden and (4) dispersedly located outside the cities.

Being unpopular from the start, social renting would remain marginal. All successful later housing laws, from the 1948 De Taeye Law onwards would promote and stimulate homeownership, using a wide range of techniques (grants, cheap loans, social purchase dwellings; social plots of land, tax exemptions...). The obsession of Belgian governments with homeownership and individualised provision is clearly illustrated by two examples:

¹⁵ One should point to the ambiguity of this rhetoric since in the years before the private sector had constructed huge housing areas for the workers with the same small dwellings. See e.g. Smets (1977).

¹⁶ With respect to the inter-war period, Goossens (1992) concludes that the social rental housing sector was a ‘Fremdkörper’ after his analyses of the way the government boycotts the construction of well-designed garden neighbourhoods for social renting (see also Smets, 1977).

¹⁷ Note that again discourse is at play: While the politicians refer to social rental housing as a tenure for those who cannot house themselves, they deliberately kept the target group broad, which remained that way until 1961, when income eligibility rules were introduced for the first time.

1. The reconstruction after the First World War is illustrative for the already established Belgian attitude towards housing. After this war – which left some regions with huge damages - the possibilities for a new or modern approach – prepared at e.g. a London conference with modernistic architects and planners - were left for what they were and the people – getting an individual grant - were forced to rebuild their properties as they were before, in the absence of a collective approach (Goossens, 1982; Smets, 1977; 1985).
2. After the credit crunch of the 1930s, in 1935 a second national housing society was set up, the ‘Société Nationale de la Petite Propriété Terrienne/ Nationale Maatschappij voor Kleine Landeigendommen’ (SNPPT/NMKL - ‘National Society for Small Land Owning’). Local branches began building dwellings that were to be sold at lower prices. But the striking feature is that the intention of this initiative - during the economic crisis of the 1930s in an era without social security - was the promotion of a partly autarkic subsistence economy as a cheap alternative to unemployment benefits (De Decker *et al*, 2005). The “deproletarianisation of the masses” via suburban housing was the goal of the SNPPT/NMKL as family life, private property and rural life were core values. And again, as with the post-war reconstruction, the architecture of the dwellings reflected these values in a classical, rural style using regional materials in freestanding houses with gardens (De Caigny, 2007, p. 68-69). The government hoped to bring the unemployed labourers back to the countryside, away from the moral decay and critical thought of city-life.

Although social rental housing was a marginal phenomenon, the first social housing company was founded in 1904 in Ghent, with the first 241 houses financed by charity organisations, the city and the industry. But later legislation and/or investment booms related to social rental housing were crisis-led (often in combination with governments of national unity, including socialist and communist parties¹⁸ and favouring more collective and planned solutions). So after the two world wars¹⁹ legislation was approved. The election victories of the extreme right in the Flemish cities at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s²⁰ marked a new moment of crisis, which led to the construction of an additional 10,000 social rental dwellings²¹.

¹⁸ When talking about housing in relation to ideology one should avoid simple dichotomies in that the Liberals and the Catholics (helped by the 1891 Papal Letter *Rerum Novarum*, an extremely important law according to Van Reybrouck, 2008) are pro ownership and that the Socialist are in favour of planned social rental housing. If there were plans for more collective housing, they were the result of Socialist pleads (e.g. the construction of the garden neighbourhoods after the first world war and some high-rise estates in the cities in the 1960s). But this does not imply that all Socialist were addicted to either the garden neighbourhoods or the high-rise estate. On the contrary, within the Socialist movement, the advocates of the mentioned models were a minority (see e.g. De Caigny, 2007). Note that, although the Christian Workers Movement (ACW – Algemeen Christelijk Werknemersverbond - the largest social movement in the country and founded as an anti-socialist movement in 1921) advocated homeownership; but once social housing companies were found, the movement (successfully) tried to control the sector. After the Second World War, their Chairmen, Willy Dhavé, also became the chair of the umbrella organisation of social rental housing companies between 1966 en 1995. Today the manager of the latter comes from the Research Unit of the labour movement (ACW).

¹⁹ After the first World War, the umbrella organisation of social rental housing associations was founded (1919) and after the second World War a new financing scheme came into force (1949 Brunfaut Law).

²⁰ The Huyse Report of 1992 linked the victories of the ‘Vlaams Blok’ (the extreme right in Flanders) to the problematic situation in certain urban neighbourhoods. The suggestion was made to invest in

In short, in the margins of the owner-occupier mainstream, the 20th century saw the production of a new but limited category - the social tenant - that deviated in many regards from the norm that was embodied by the owner-occupier. Indeed, the social tenant contrasted with the majorities' category of homeowners and hence was 'deviant'.

4. The downscaling of housing policy and discourses on social housing in local settings

The limited budget that was allocated to the social rental housing sector and the very narrow sighted and unimaginative vision on the subject made that, very soon, boring (high-rise) estates were constructed in the cities and equally uninspiring small scale social neighbourhoods in the suburban zones. Consequently architecturally homogeneous small extensions of existing village cores were developed all over Flanders / Belgium. Around these, the typical Flemish sprawl spread further (De Decker, 2008).

Qualitative research in a small town (Aarschot) in Flanders focused on how exactly social housing is represented currently and historically, when the first suburban estates were developed amidst private home owners (Meeus, 2004). The results of the research revealed that the historical discourses on social rental housing residents were brought into action as *a means for local social exclusion*.

The research, consisting of around 20 interviews with social renters and neighbourhood residents was undertaken in 2003-2004 in a village (Ourodenberg) in the suburbs of the small town of Aarschot. In this village, the 'Gijmelbergwijk' a social housing area containing 208 homes was developed in the early 1970's. During the 1970's, it was made possible for tenants to purchase their rented homes, and as a result currently only 169 of the dwellings remain socially rented. The 'Gijmelbergwijk' estate was built to enhance the housing circumstances of poor people living within terraced housing in the city centre of Aarschot and in trailers, wooden barracks and other low quality housing located at the outskirts of the city. The estate was built on grounds that were jammed between two railroads and that already housed the city's cemetery and an informal trailer park.

The relationship between the inhabitants of the estate and the residents of the neighbouring Ourodenberg village in the first years after the arrival of the estate in the neighbourhood can be compared to the situation described by Elias and Scotson (1994 (1965)) in their infamous study about the *'The established and the outsiders'* in Leicester. From the arrival of the housing estate onwards, a local gossip circuit developed within the village of Ourodenberg. Local discourses, under the form of biased stories about the social housing residents, were used to find favour in the eyes of the other established residents of the village and to distance oneself from the social housing residents. As such neighbourhood related gossip, alleged drug related stories

housing, neighbourhood redevelopment, with a specific focus on the 19th century (workers) areas (Huyse, 1992).

²¹ Note that also the demolition legislations of the 19th century were introduced after moment of crisis, in that case cholera epidemics, and the first housing law was introduced after the deadly strikes and riots of 1886 (Goossens, 1982).

and other hearsay rumours surfaced. During the process of bidding against each other, the stories went further and further away from the facts, the own group appeared superior and the social housing residents more deviant. At the moment of the research older neighbourhood residents still recalled some of these stories. In one of these recurring stories, the vicissitudes of a family of former caravan residents were recounted:

"Their bathroom was full of cans and cardboard, in the bath tub yes. The doors were cut into pieces and burned into the open fire. Etcetera. They have nothing so you can't ask anything back. They are all on social security, you know. [against husband] It's true, isn't it? Dré told us, the one who promises the houses. And how many dust carts came out of their house? (woman, 62, Ourodenberg)

"There were also caravan dwellers, people who cannot live in a normal house. They don't understand. When the heating is broken, they even venture to remove their inner doors and burn them to warm themselves." (man, 63, Ourodenberg)

Since the social housing residents originated from different parts of town, the social bounds were not strong and they were not yet organised to counter the local gossip circuits. The consequences of the gossip were quite clear as a social renter explains:

"Years ago, when I was 16, 17 years old, there have been sad moments. From my own experience, I know, from my buddies at school. Their parents asked, 'where is he from?', 'well he is from the estate', than they had to stay away from me. You had to stay away from the kids from the estate. [...] I think that changed a lot nowadays, I think it even disappeared." (social renter, 40, Ourodenberg)

Indeed, the local issues in the village calmed down as a consequence of two important evolutions. At first, the residents from the estate started to organise to arm themselves against the local stigmatising power. They established a club house at the end of the nineties, at first supported by a fund on urban renewal (see Loopmans, 2007) and later on its own financial terms. Their association consolidated the social networks in the estate and formed the mouthpiece of positive discourses on the estate which often reached the local press. At the same time, and maybe even more important, the established residents in Ourodenberg aged and their children left the village while new suburbanites without any bounds with the local community arrived. As such the gossip circuit loosened its power and function.

"In the beginning when we lived here, we knew everyone, but now... Ok, the first ones who arrived here, them we also knew" (man, 72, Ourodenberg)

5. Back to the national scale: the sudden upscaling of the local skirmishes

The example of the estate in Ourodenberg is exemplary for the typical local conflicts that occurred in Flanders whenever social housing estates were built to house poorer households. In almost every corner of the region, cities, towns and villages have their Chicago building(s) (Antwerp, Genk), their Dallas estate (Lokeren), their Formosa (Wetteren) or Korea (Ieper) neighbourhood; or - as in Aalst, their 'sex blocks' (see figure 1), where the people who did not have the resources to build or buy their own dwelling were housed and where the local neighbourhood residents had funny stories about. The range of these typical local discourses hardly extended the local neigh-

bourhood setting but since the estates and the related local gossip were spread out over the country, almost everyone could easily quote a story or two about some deviant social renters in their hometown. In the early nineties, local discourses - fostered by strategic gatekeepers like mayors and members of parliament, combining parliamentary work with local activities (e.g. being in the board of a local housing company) - started to reach the national media. But before dealing with that, we have to picture the condition of the Belgium state at that time and the raise of the extreme right in Flanders' large cities.

Figure 1 Life like it is, the Rozendreef (Rose Lane Estate)



The Rose Lane Estate was pictured and commented during the Aalst Carnival Parade of 3 February 2008, with accompanying text, under the heading: “Life as it is at Marie-Jeanne’s in the sex blocks of Rose Lane”.: “Marie-Jeanne lives in the blocks on Rose Lane. Indeed, in the sex blocks. The poor thing experienced a lot of misery. But she copes. With five children (from three men) on a small flat, you have to do it. The eldest daughter is pregnant, her son is an alcoholic and her lover is addicted to gambling. But, what is the worst is that nobody wants to listen to her story. We [the carnival group] bring her glory”.

(own translation out of the local dialect – with thanks to Katrien De Mets)

5.1 The state in bad shape

During the 1980s and the early 1990s, the Belgian state experienced a deep malaise, to use the words of Blommaert (2007, p. 122 – see also De Decker et al., 2005), and started to lose its legitimacy (Huyse, 1992). After an explosion of unemployment – from circa 80,000 in 1972 to the stable number of circa 600,000 in 1983 -, the government was hit by huge debts which provoked stringent budget cuts. The social security was downsized (introducing the end of the social democratic post-war consensus). And at different times the democracy was at stake since some of the governments ruled with mandates without confirmation of the parliament and the country was hit by a series of scandals (the CCC bombings, deadly robberies on supermarkets, the Heysel drama etc). Concerning housing, this period was marked by a spectacular drop of new housing construction (social as well as private), the freeing of private renting with an increase of rents and the raise of the length of the waiting list for social rental housing, all together created a ‘housing crisis’ (De Decker, 2002).

Next to these problems are those fostered by the perpetual restructuring of the Belgian state. In the early 1970s, the first steps were set to restructure the unitary Belgian state into a federal state. During this period, which has lasted for about 30 years, 'form' has overruled 'content'. Political parties and the bureau-cracy have constantly been drawing and redrawing administration structures and organisation charts. Getting the right party person on the right place has been more important than the kind of policy he or she should develop given the state of society. Especially in the 1980s and to a lesser extent in the 1990s nearly no serious research was done in fields such as spatial planning, housing or urban development. This loss of antennas completely alienated the state apparatus from the public and from reality. For years, the governments flew blind.

Finally we have to stress the neo-liberal turn. In the early 1990s, the process of undermining the legitimacy of the state and politics was given a further boost from the inside by the discourse of a major Belgian politician and former minister of Budget, Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the Conservative Liberals (De Burghgraeve et al., 2000). In his writings, *The Citizen's Manifestoes* ('*Burgermanifesten*'), 'baby-Thatcher', as he was labelled in the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, identifies some objective features of the alienated relation between the state and its subjects, between politics and citizens. Unlike his diagnosis, which is largely correct, his solutions are a problem: direct appeal to the citizens through multiple referenda and more direct power for individuals within a liberated market economy with a far thinner state. This line of reasoning is flawed, according to Rogiers (2001) and Blommaert (2001), because the neo-liberal view of 'a citizen' is fallacious. Verhofstadt's citizen is alert, emancipated and free. His citizen criticizes the state for being too patronising in its laws and structures. In fact Verhofstadt's citizen mirrors the educated middle class living in wealthy suburbs and in some gentrified inner city areas. He or she has the necessary social skills and social capital, and he or she can financially afford to live in a free market economy.

The essential point is that Verhofstadt was arguing for less State just when the population was hit hard by the economic crisis. He was arguing for a thinner state at a time when the Belgian state already could not, for the budgetary reasons we mentioned, respond adequately to the situation. Precisely when the State left behind - or had to leave behind - its weakest citizens, a major Belgian politician launched an attack on the welfare state and its 'conservative, corporatist' institutions (trade unions, health insurance cooperatives). Many ordinary people have interpreted this as a flight of the State and its major representatives, the politicians, from their responsibility to protect the people (Rogiers, 2001). The State did not only lose legitimacy through its weak performances (Huyse, 1996), the Belgian democracy put the very reason for politics, the ability to remake society, out of the people's hands. Thus the neo-liberal discourse reinforced what many people experienced in daily life: the state and politics let them down at the moment when their material circumstances got worse.

To sum up: Belgium entered the 1990s with (a) a 'poor' state, (b) a state lacking any insight in new societal trends and/or newly developing problems, and (c) administrative chaos. Without doubt this undermined the legitimacy of the state and of traditional politics, with disastrous consequences: an enormous list of *ad hoc* policies, governments which did not last for long, form overruling content, and a lack of knowledge due to a lack of (social) research. This added up to the consequences of economic restructuring: people lived under increasing economic risk but the State did not provide any reassurance, notwithstanding the fact that this should be one of its

primary functions (Burgers, 2001). The state was unable to provide any counterbalance to the crisis or to the market forces reshaping economy and society. The people - 'citizens' in Verhofdstadt's words – should not cherish any illusions: the high days of the welfare state are over. "*You are on your own in the market*" became the idiom. The solution to all societal problems is making politics redundant, or reducing it to a slavish servant of the economy and enforcer of social control in the name of the market, and relying upon the self-activation of empowered citizens.

5.2 *The raise of the extreme right*

The combination of economic restructuring (causing unemployment and material insecurity), a weak state and an anti-state and anti-politics discourse provided fertile breeding ground for the extreme right Vlaams Blok. The Vlaams Blok was founded at the end of the 1970s as a splinter party of the Flemish nationalist party Volksunie. For more than 10 years the party hardly had any success. This changed by the end of the 1980s when its programme was radicalised and efforts were concentrated on Antwerp and to a lesser extent on Ghent. In general, the programme of the Vlaams Blok focused on extreme xenophobia (with racist ingredients), extreme nationalism, a phobic insecurity and simplistic economic proposals.

In the urban context, the programme clenched '*Foreigners, Security, Dirt and Despair*'. '*People living in Antwerp have lost their faith in the city council through its corruption and dirty tricks. More and more dirt, more migrants and ever more crime reinforce the flight out of the city and make the Antwerp neighbourhoods unliveable*', is a representative quotation out of a Vlaams Blok pamphlet (De Burghgraeve et al., 2000). The programme for the 1999 regional election in the Brussels Capital Region was bold: '*Brussel Bevrijden*' ('Liberating Brussels') from migrants (30 to 40% of its population), from the European institutions (which alter the true character of the city and fuel land speculation and price increases), from the Belgian federal state (which is hindering Flemish independence) and from French speaking institutions (which have no place in a historically Flemish city). Today, the discourse has softened a little, but basically, it continues to aim at organising a repressive and discriminating city, especially for foreigners.

The strength of this discourse is, according to De Burghgraeve et al. (2000), the recuperation of an old ritual: the call for a scapegoat. It is a well-worn technique for creating a '*we-feeling*' (a feeling also invoked by democratic Flemish politicians who want to create a Flemish nation-state).

To understand the election victories of the Vlaams Blok²² in the Flemish cities, one has to see that the general developments discussed above intersect with the accumulation of long-standing anti-urban policies of the past, namely the concentration of poor and vulnerable people in old city neighbourhoods and some social housing estates. We already referred to this phenomenon: the citizen who does not suffer from the new economy and the refurbished Welfare State does not live in the centre of the city, he/she lives in the suburbs and if he or she lives in the city he/she lives segregated from the poor. It is the poor, the old, the vulnerable, the people without appropriate social skills who feel the State and politics have let them down, who first voted Vlaams Blok. A survey made after the Vlaams Blok's first electoral victories disclosed very

²² Note that early 2004, the Supreme Court of Ghent found three Vlaams Blok associations guilty for being racist.

negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, the major scapegoat of the Vlaams Blok at that time, among the elderly, people with little education, people with low earnings and low social status (Billiet et al., 1990). This was confirmed by more recent research on subsequent elections (Billiet & De Witte, 2001; Elchardus & Smits, 2002).

The Vlaams Blok filled the gap left by the State and by the other political parties. The latter, busy with restructuring and then with occupying the new levels of the reorganised state, became alienated from the electorate. The traditional parties left the neighbourhoods (Cools, 2004). The Vlaams Blok was the first political party to understand that problems were worst in the old neighbourhoods in the large cities, with their bad, insecure and expensive housing and a deteriorated environment coinciding with unemployment, low benefits, hopelessness and potential inter-ethnic conflicts.

5.3 *Discourses on social rental housing: from inclusive to exclusionary*

The scaling up of the discourses on social rental housing started at the end of the 1980s and since then underwent major changes. At first they were fostered by an inclusive discourse; later the discourses became exclusionary.

Round 1: a pro social inclusion discourse

A first discourse that made the jump was linked to the decentralised organisation of social housing policy, and the weak central control, which allowed the local managerial boards, in which politicians occupied several chairs, of local social housing companies often allowed to loosely interpret the allocation criteria²³. The rumours reached the national media at the end of the 1980s fostering discourses about *political favouritism* and *millionaires* living on the social housing estates. These discourses are very similar to the ones encountered in the case study of Aarschot, from which we reproduce a representative quote:

"Who is the mayor here? He's a socialist. Well, if I have a socialist party membership and I want a house, he will let me go first instead of someone with a blue card [liberal party membership]" (Man, 51, Ourodenberg).

The second element is very much linked to the first since one of the major consequences of the political favouritism is that people in housing need cannot enter social rental housing. Already earlier, Demal-Durez (1982) found that one third of the social tenants had an income too high to qualify for a social rental dwelling. This was brought to mind by Luc Goossens, housing professor at Antwerp University, in a national newspaper in 1991 claiming that halve of social tenants should not be in a social dwelling because their income was too high income (*De Morgen*, 12 June 1991). And the general administrator of the umbrella organisation VHM²⁴ confirms in a reaction to Goossens that the social housing sector, next to very poor people, actually provides for the whole gamma of income groups (Desmet, 1991).

Fact is that at the beginning of the nineties a relatively large consensus existed on the fact that social housing was not accessible for the lowest income households. Of course welfare workers referred to it, but more importantly, people and organisations

²³ In a third of the cases the allocation criteria were ok, while in another third of the cases this was absolutely not the case, the remaining third was too obscure to analyse (De Decker, 2005).

²⁴ Vlaamse Huisvestingsmaatschappij (VHM), the umbrella organisation of housing companies.

in strategic positions discussed the same diagnosis as well as its consequences, being a tightening up of the allocation rules in favour of the most needed. The fact that this discourse is taken to a national level is of importance, because it were precisely politicians and organisations who were both in tactical positions and who had sufficient authority²⁵ to make it a discourse with broad societal esteem. Of great importance with respect to the issue is the affirmation of this discourse by the liberal Minister Waltniel (1989). In his Policy Note, he stresses that new social housing regulation (1988), already took these thoughts into account²⁶. And simultaneously, Verhofstadt (1990), at that time party chairman of the Liberal Party, a former federal Budget Minister and a political star, states that social housing should go to those most in need.

In 1989, the two major historical players in Belgium's housing policy, the Socialist Party and the Christian Labour Movement, held – thereby reacting to the housing crisis mentioned above – a conference on housing. Both stressed that the housing money should go to the weakest. Soon after the conference of his organisation, C. Decaluwé (1990), working at the research unit of the Christian Labour Movement and a member of the board of the umbrella organisation VHM²⁷, recalled that the allocation of social housing did not favour poor people. Decaluwé, would later, together with his colleague from the Socialist Research Unit (B. Forier²⁸) and professor Goossens, reconfirm his position in an opinion in a major newspaper (De Standaard, 1 July 1991).

Another effect of the election victories of the Vlaams Blok was the appointment of a Commissioner responsible for a migrant policy. She had the duty to research the position of the migrants in Belgian society and to give suggestions on how to foster their integration. Paula D'hondt, the commissioner from 1989 to 1993, a former minister connected to the Christian Labor Movement, fiercely criticised the used allocation procedures and added that not only the poor were discriminated, but the migrants even more (D'hondt & Vinikas, 1993). Her argument was taken over by the Flemish administration in their recommendation for the government formations in 1992.

To sum up. Although no research was available to the mentioned commentators²⁹, at central level a consensus existed on the fact (1) that social rental housing was not going to the people who needed it the most and (2) that allocation acted at its own discretion. At that time there also was agreement on the solution, being (1) tightening the control on the allocation process and (2) creating better procedures suiting the allocation of poor people. According to minister Waltniel the latter already happened in the new social renting regulation of 1988 and later, in 1994, the socialist minister De Batselier made the allocation of a certain percentage of social dwellings to real poor people compulsory. It would provoke the sector at that time. But in 1991 the trade union of social housing companies (VVH), later spokesman in favour of pro-discrimination regulations, agreed with that, although several voices raised concerns regarding the financial consequences.

²⁵ See the theoretical section for an elaborate explanation of both elements.

²⁶ To be complete we need to add that the intentions expressed in the policy note are not really in line with the truth as the income level - as an eligibility criteria - was even augmented.

²⁷ Later Decaluwé became MP.

²⁸ Forier later worked at the cabinet of the socialist ministers responsible for housing. Currently he is the manager of the largest social housing company.

²⁹ Implying that their opinions were largely fostered by local practitioners combined with some gut feeling.

Breeding grounds of the discursive turn

The discursive turn from inclusive to exclusionary had different types of fathers. The first one was of course the raise of the Vlaams Blok as an important political factor (taking voters from the Socialist at first). This had (at least) two dimensions. The first was a discursive one: the blaming of migrants for all evils, through its continuity, its coherence and its prominent media appearances, became more and more generally acceptable. Racism, openly practiced, and xenophobia became common. The second is political; through linking the migrant's problem to 19th century old industrial neighbourhoods and social rental housing estates, the Vlaams Blok fostered reaction among the democratic parties. These were hostile at first, but gradually they were taken over (Blommaert, 2007).

The second one concerns the position of the social housing companies. This had three components and all are linked with the crisis described above. First, the financial austerity of both the state and the public led to a spectacular drop in new housing construction. This fostered the waiting list for social houses to lengthen and the waiting times to increase. Second, the near absence of the government left the social housing companies – confronted with this waiting list, but also with severe renovation needs –, out in the cold. Both frustrated the companies. The third and probably the most important component, concerned the rapid change of the profile of the social tenants as they were becoming poorer³⁰ and more coloured. This change created, in the eyes of the social landlords two problems: firstly a financial problem, since rental income per tenant dropped and secondly liveability problems caused by inter-cultural conflicts.

Furthermore policy measures (or the absence of them) did influence the discursive change. A crucial factor was the introduction of the social rental legislation introduced by the Socialist Minister De Batselier at the end of 1994. Although it was a compromise, it gradually annoyed the social housing companies. On the one hand this new piece of legislation tried to deal with the complaint that too little poor people could enter social housing, which was answered by allocating a vast percentage of dwellings to people with a very low income. On the other hand, it dealt with the warnings concerning the financial liveability of the sector by changing the income criteria to attract middle income people who pay a higher rent, which is in relation to their income. Additionally, the concept of social mix got written down in the regulation. Meant as a safety-salve for specific local application, social mix became Pandora's Box since the no minister since then ever succeeded in defining what exactly was meant by it. But nevertheless, the political field kept presenting it as the miracle solution (Loopmans et al, forthcoming) – “*harassing the sector*” as E. Thora (2002), the manager of a large social housing company, phrased it years later in the Flemish parliament. Accompanying measures frustrated the sector even more. On the one hand he obliged the housing companies to yearly report on their allocation policies while on the other hand the installation of a commission to study the liveability problems postponed any concrete measures to be taken.

Much later, in 2002³¹, a letter from the liberal housing Minister Gabriëls added fuel to the flames, by obliging the social housing companies – already then trying to

³⁰ This is a retrospective interpretation based on research that came available in 2001 (Pannecoucke et al, 2001).

³¹ On 3 January 31t2002, Jacques Gabriëls, then the minister of housing posted a circular concerning the

limit the intake of foreigners – to allocate social rentals to political refugees (even if their procedure was not yet finished).

As said, the discourse changed from promoting (larger shares of) social rental dwellings for poor and/or foreign people to advocating lowering intake of certain categories of people. The 'labelling' of certain categories changed during the time, depending on (a) who was the minister and (b) who spoke out. With the risk to simplify, speakers from left wing political parties or organisation are using a more euphemistic phrasing than right wing parties, who were more direct in blaming the offenders³² - but both very quickly agreed on the causes and solutions. These contemplations and the fear to get convicted for racism and discrimination stimulated the use of other 'concepts' and 'words' to describe the problems. 'Migrants', 'low income people', 'poor people', 'anti-social people', 'social frauds', 'addicts' became largely interchangeable terms, depending on who was speaking and to whom one was speaking.

What people say at home, or at the bar in a pub, or discuss within an organisation, even a local social housing company, is not a discourse. In order to be successful - this is e.g. provoking a change in legislation or the rejection to build new estates by municipalities - it has to be systematic and coherent, it should be pronounced by people appealing to essential truthfulness (see higher), link local with central level and reach the public through mass media, it should be, as Blommaert & Verschueren (1998) argue, '*quotable*'.

Or as we have elaborated on in the theoretical part using argumentations of Foucault, Deleuze and Blommaert, politics happen on both a macro and micro level of society and discourses (re)create power relations. Within the frame of this paper we cannot fully elaborate on every quote of a politician or article in a paper³³. We want to stress that although a multitude of actors (politicians, academics...) and institutions (media, ngo's, human right organisations,..) all have had and still have their say in the debate, it are people active in the social housing sector that have actual steering capacity. Managers and presidents of social housing agencies and the umbrella organisation VVH³⁴ often have a very direct impact on the agency's policies. This is significant as it are often politicians who hold a chair in the board of these companies. As we will conclude further in this piece, they eventually jeopardised their own organisations.

This is already an illustration of the first point we are making in the next paragraph, namely how the link between, or jump from the every day practice (Deleuze's molecular level) to the national scale (Deleuze's molar level) is made. People who cumulate jobs and function are in a prime position to take certain narratives to a higher

registration and allocation of social dwellings to applicants for a political refugee status as well as to the 'sans-papiers' (people who are illegally living in Belgium for a number of reasons).

^{32,33} See e.g. Bart Somers, currently the liberal Mayor of Mechelen and former chairman of his Party (and Flemish minister-president from 2003 to 2004), in a reaction (De Standaard, 28 July 2009) to a newspaper article regarding the escape of a criminal from north-African descent, who grew up in a problematic neighbourhood in Mechelen, stressed that delinquents and incorrigible youngsters need to be severely disciplined. Somers was, as the mayor of Mechelen, one of the first to plead for a stop of new social rental housing construction in the larger cities (Somers, 2003).

³³ A rough inventory of public quotes for the period 1988-2002 adds up to 174 pages (Tahome, 11).

³⁴ VVH stands for 'Vlaamse Vereniging van Huisvestingsmaatschappijen' or 'Flemish confederation of social housing companies'. It is the trade union of the social housing companies.

level. Let us look at e.g. C. Decaluwé, already mentioned above. Before he became Flemish Member of Parliament for the CD&V (Christian Democratic party) he was working at the research unit of the Christian labour union ACW from 1987 to 1995. Besides numerous other functions, he held or still holds director positions in the following housing associations: ‘Domus Flandria’³⁵ (1991-1995), ‘Elk zijn huis’³⁶ (1993-current) and even in the umbrella organisation VHM (1989-1999) and the VLM³⁷. Thus, Decaluwé isn’t only politician on two scales (he is also a member of the municipality council of Kortrijk), he is also a ‘landlord’ on two scales and on the top of the biggest social movement in Flanders. Like Decaluwé, many others can be named³⁸.

The second point we want to make is about the important role played by the media, which are full of sound bites, quotes from prominent persons and reportages following incidents³⁹. Let us consider the infamous ‘jar of chocolate paste’ incident. The high-rise estate on the left bank of the Schelde in Antwerp has always been suffering of a bad reputation. On 17 March 1997 the local newspaper reported the incident about a glass jar that was thrown from a high floor of the ‘Chicago building’⁴⁰. The article titled ‘Are our children inferior?’ and the tone of the article went from a general feeling of unsafety amongst the inhabitants because of objects that are thrown (even a shopping hamper was mentioned) to a feeling of unsafety because of youngsters who are hanging around... “*not often with good intentions*”⁴¹. The next day an article in the same newspaper titled ‘Life in the Chicago block is like hell’. In this account the mother of the girl on who the jar fell spoke out: “*It is not a migrant’s problem. The majority behaves, it is those ten out of 200 families that don’t show good manners and throw their stuff around. Because they are too lazy to walk to the garbage bin*”.

One day later the same newspaper could already publish a reaction of Leo Peeters, then the minister of housing. Although he was not a supporter of leveraging up the minimum income (as an eligibility criteria), he did state that a social mix might be a future solution for problematic social housing estates (in the broadest sense), while in the mean time he emphasised that priority should be given to enhance the liveability of these neighbourhoods.

When analysing this course of events several elements can be determined. First of all we see that a local incident, caught by local media was able to ignite an upsurge of ‘floating’ ‘common people’s stories and reshape them into highly public discourse with effect on a political scale. A second, and very important observation, is the change in the tone of the press coverage. From a non-coloured, non-racial, but nevertheless dangerous incident to a racially related discourse with a more ‘aggressive’ tone, as it went from the throwing of an object (which could have been done by anyone) to the expression of concern that certain families were responsible for the

³⁵ A financial vehicle found in the early 1990s to build 10,000 additional social rental dwellings next to the VHM.

³⁶ This is a local social housing company.

³⁷ VLM stands for Vlaamse Landmaatschappij, the organisation that had its roots in the above mentioned SNPPT, the National Society for Small Land Owning

³⁸ Our inventory reveals: mayors, aldermen, MP’s, chairmen and board members of social housing companies, managers of social housing companies (local and regional), journalists, academics, ministers, employees of ministers, chairmen of political parties, organisations like tenant’s unions and local welfare work, etc

³⁹ A rough inventory of public quotes for the period 1988-2002 adds up to 174 pages (Tahome, 11).

⁴⁰ Please note the naming of these estates, already addressed higher.

⁴¹ Quoted from the Gazet van Antwerpen newspaper article by journalist K. Tuerlinckx on 17 March 1997.

problems, explicitly emphasising that '*the majority is ok, but ...*'.

Let us now reflect back upon Foucault's remark about 'the unspoken': an equally amount of information is inferable from that which is not explicitly stated (Foucault, 1977), additionally let us also recall the fear for penalisation when caught making racist remarks. It then becomes clear that the messages that filters through to the readers of the newspaper and the general public as a whole was that of coloured people making trouble in social housing estates.

Although these sorts of statements are quite provocative and politically incorrect they truly are in line with reality. But as stressed before it is not quite enough to have someone, most often a very local, middle-of-the-road, person telling scuttlebutts to speak of a discourse. It is only when people with authority rephrase these ideas, and when they can stay in society in a more lasting way that they can become a discourse and start influencing the things they speak about (see Foucault, Deleuze, Mcleod and Blommaert). It is precisely this that we will turn to now.

Round 2: towards an exclusionary discourse

One condition to make a discourse successful is that it reaches the media in a more or less permanent way. As said, to be picked up it had to be quotable. This means that it has - in an over-mediatised society - to be either provocative or pronounced by a person with an important/relevant function and/or reputation; or all at once. This certainly was the case as one of the persons that lit the fire, Bob Cools, was (and still is) a conspicuous, provocative, literate and catchy, communicable personality, and at the time he entered the debate the socialist second term mayor of Flanders' largest city Antwerp. Earlier he was alderman of spatial planning. He was a member of the managerial boards of Sabena (the national airline company) and the NMBS (the railway company) for the socialist party. He also was a member of parliament and of the central bureau of his political party. Given the fact that Cools is a well-known and respected person, who also wrote a book on the urban problems⁴² (Cools, 1993), and he was the longstanding chairman of an Antwerp's (socialist) social housing company (Onze Woning). Through his provocative way of speaking - often seeking controversy⁴³ - and his will to comment, he is at that time a very popular person for the media.

It was Cools who connected the raise of the Vlaams Blok with migrants in social housing. In a 1990 interview he pleaded for the concentration of migrants, since, in his opinion, the dispersal of migrants, through the allocation processes of social rental housing stock led to an uncontrollable spread, dispersing xenophobic and racist feelings throughout the population.

"If I put one Moroccan in a social flat, the whole building will vote for the Vlaams Blok" (De Standaard⁴⁴, 9 June 1990)

Years later he recalled that the concentration of migrants in social housing flats - up to 55% in his company - gave a lot of trouble with respect to living together. And he suggested a threshold (De Morgen, 29 May 1997), basically implying that he replaced

⁴² Cools would later become chairman of the local social service of the city of Antwerp, and after his retirement, finished a PhD on working with different lifestyle in social housing (Cools, 2004).

⁴³ Which is partly the reason why he couldn't hold on to a third term as mayor of Antwerp

⁴⁴ With a 2 paged follow up in the journal De Morgen (11 June 1990) with a reaction of the chairman of the socialist party, stating that he is pro social mix.

his concentration solution by a pro mix solution, which he would advocate by pleading to open up social housing to middle income groups⁴⁵. In his PhD he researched the possibility of an allocation strategy based on lifestyles (Cools, 2004), since he understands why people concentrate as follows:

"There are reasons for: social, religious, medical, ethnical, and even cooking and dining cultures" (Het Nieuwsblad, 15 maart 1998).

In 2003 Cools emphasised, in the monthly publication of the VHM, that problems of cohabitation (e.g. disagreements, fights, ...) in social housing estates were induced by the differences in customs and habits of the inhabitants (Cools, 2003, p. 16), as such again implicitly pleading for some sort of 'possible voluntary segregation'.

Another booster was Achiel Smets, year long chairman of another Antwerp social housing company (De Goede Woning, of Catholic signature), former Member of Parliament for the Christian Democrats (left wing), and member of the Antwerp council. He fluttered the doves under a heading in de newspaper De Morgen (28 jan. 1990) "*The ghettos of the Goede Woning. Objective allocation does not work. Plead for the segregation of migrants*". At that time Smets was even more fundamentalist than Cools. The solution he putted forward was the concentration of migrants in ghettos at the edge of the large agglomerations. He only wanted to allow migrants who were willing to integrate, what meant...

"... they are speaking Dutch or are willing to speak Dutch. They have to be quiet after 10 p.m and their children should not play in the elevators. (...) And we stick to 10%. Those people are allowed to cook their own specialities, but it had to be decent" (De Morgen, 28 January 1990).

Some years later, he pleaded for a far reaching discretionary power in order to allocate social dwellings.

"I do not accept that we ourselves cannot decide. We know the dossiers. We – in Antwerp – have the largest numbers of migrants. And we know that too many Moroccans in a flat creates a disaster. 10 to 15% is a disaster" (Knack, 18 May 1993).

And finally, Smets dealt with the price he paid:

"I housed a lot of migrants. I am proud of it, but it nevertheless made me loose my seat in the council. The inhabitants of Antwerp do not want a Moroccan next to them" (Gazet van Antwerpen, 24 February 1996)..

In all the previous we have already shown how different lifestyles can create frictions on the everyday, local level. A provocative formulation of these events, incidents or animosity by local and national media can put the event in the spotlight. These sorts of occurrences can be read in a political way, as such being picked up by politicians and put on the national agenda, thus jumping scales, or as Deleuze would phrase it: "*In short, everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 (1988), p. 235). We have also shown that very quickly the discourses get 'coloured' and alternating associations are made with poverty, a-social behaviour, fraud, etc.

⁴⁵ Referring to earlier remarks in this paper we like to (re)stress that social housing was already opened up to more 'middle class' people, but one needs to be aware that this category becomes (or tries to become) a home-owner as soon as possible.

In what follows we will further elaborate on the discourse on social rental housing and the problems with it. Given its importance for the sector we will start with the role played by the Flemish confederation of housing agencies – VVH. Then we will shine a light on the role played by civilian organisation PASH. We will end this section by exploring the influence of several ministers from different political fractions.

Soon after the new social rental regulation introduced by housing minister De Batselier in September 1994, the trade union of the more than 100 Flemish social housing companies (VVH) became one of the major actors in the discourse. This is a union of the local social housing companies, which was founded to stand up for their rights against the bureaucracy of the official umbrella organisation, the VHM (see further). It was the new social housing legislation that did make the VVH take on a critical attitude towards the VHM and the authors of the legislation: the Flemish government and the housing minister in particular. In order to combat this '*inadequate legislation*', the VVH deployed two kinds of actions. The first type focussed on the creation of an internal consensus regarding the subject, being the increase of the incomes to be eligible and the decrease of control. For the promotion of internal streamlining, the VVH rode on two tracks. Firstly, they released their own information magazine (VVH Info), in which opinions and articles '*on the correct issue*' are published. By interviewing local managers, local chairmen of social housing companies, local politicians and MPs, who always seem to agree with the point of view of the VVH, they try to streamline the opinions regarding the issue. The second technique used to achieve internal streamlining is doing interventions on all kinds of general meetings of the social housing sector, e.g. the general VHM meeting. Sometimes these actions get press coverage and an account of the interventions is always printed in the journal of the VHM.

In order to influence the outside world, the VVH uses the strategy of press conferences, often held at a strategic moments, for example at the end of August. During this period, politics is quiet and for the press the events to be covered are limited. Usually their way of handling evokes a coverage with suiting headings and pictures in the written press, and also often on the radio and (the commercial) television. In between other press notes – often reactions on ministers' point of view - are launched. Further, the VVH uses incidents (see above) or wrong policies in other fields (e.g. on waste in high-rise estates) in convincing the public of her opinion.

In a press note of November 1994, the VVH reacts on the new legislation stating that it deals with a lot of relevant issues, but not with (among others): (1) the possibility to react adequately in case of rent arrears, criminals, maladjusted persons and drug addicts,... and (2) the spread of migrants by limiting their share in the social housing estate in relation to the level which exists in the municipality as a whole.

During a broadly covered press conference in august 1996, the VVH recalled and reinforced her complaints and demands. In the slipstream of the larger housing companies she asked to get the possibility to allocate social rental dwellings to high income households, since otherwise the social housing sector would become a sector of the poor and the marginal, with in the end the formation of ghettos. One of the board members elaborated on the migrant issue and argued that 'some' social housing companies had registered so many 'labour migrants', that they, if allocating according to the book, would be unable to allocate a dwelling to a 'native' for years. That same

year, in her newsletter, the VVH again argued for measures against 'known defaulters' and 'socially not adapted persons'.

The VVH complained a year later that the desiderata of the sector were neglected. This (again) concerned the wish to refuse, or evict, for (known) anti-social behaviour⁴⁶, since the introduced measures were - due to complex legal interferences - not applicable. They also accused the government for the first time - it would become a never ending accusation (see Thora earlier) - for not defining 'social mix': it is in the regulation, but no one knows what it means. According to the VVH dealing with social mix was dealing with different subfields. The first concerned the concentration of migrants. According to the VVH the *"fragile relationship between natives and foreign people in some neighbourhoods is a fact. The fear and the discontent of the native inhabitants has as a consequence that municipalities are not longer willing to construct new social housing developments."* Therefore the VVH 'dared' to make a plea for an acceptable dispersal policy. The reference was education: *"a survey among teachers learns that when a certain amount of migrants is enrolled, the irreversible process of native pupils leaving the school, starts"*.

The second field concerned disturbing and anti-social behaviour. According to the VVH the practice learned that there was a clear connection between the increasing marginalisation of the sector and the increase of antisocial behaviour. *"It does not necessarily concerns criminal facts, but concerns nuisance, night tumult, intimidation, dog shit,... and bad upkeep. But next to that, the social housing companies observe an increasing number of criminal facts like theft, vandalism, drug abuse and dealing, and sexual offences"*. The legislation gave no power to the housing companies to deal with these issues: *"Worse, in case of termination, an evicted can become a full-fledged candidate again. The VVH asks firmly to deal with that"*.

Subfield three concerned the concentration of the most vulnerable tenants. *"The last few years, very low income household are overrepresented among new tenants. If the trend continues, the phase of marginalisation will soon be reached. The current eligibility rules do not allow that two income households enter."* In order to allow that higher income households could enter social rental housing again, the income eligibility levels needed to go up and the raise of rents needed to have a ceiling (since otherwise they would take off to the private rental sector).

To conclude the chapter on the VVH, we finish with a quotation from Victor Geerts, a now pensioned manager of an Antwerp social housing company and at the moment of speaking secretary of the VVH. The quotation was made at a tenants' conference on social housing problems, organised in Antwerp (De Morgen, 30 November 2001). According to Geerts, *"Antwerp social housing tenants are fed up with the "poor, mostly foreign risk groups" who threat the liveability of their dwellings. (...) Poor people have another culture, with which the original inhabitants of social housing find it difficult to live with. These neighbourhoods have ceased to be a mirror of the social mix they were before. During the years, the income eligibility rules have decreased⁴⁷, what changed the social composition of the estates. These days, more poor people are living in social housing. They have another culture. And, I am not only talking about the foreigners. (...) Also individualism is in play: "I do what I want to do and my*

⁴⁶ The 2009 adaptation of the social regulation stipulates that the social housing company can refuse an allocation when they can prove that the candidate is a *"serious tread to the physical and psychic integrity of the inhabitants"*

⁴⁷ This is a false argument: see further, and see De Decker & Pannecoucke (2001).

neighbour has nothing to say about it. So the radio plays loud, dirt is everywhere and the dog, locked up in the flat, barks all day. This is the mentality of especially young households. In this group, we find a lot of problems. Ah, I can understand it. Lots of them are single mothers, who ended up in social housing after a divorce because they cannot afford anything else.”

The social tenants - dominantly natives -, in Antwerp organised themselves in PASH. They also had their complaints, especially concerning the life on large social high-rise estates. PASH listed, in a note to the Parliament (13 June 2001), the following problems:

- tenants are forced to live near each other: they have neighbours on the other side, under, up and next to them;
- tenants are forced to use the same common spaces in order to reach their dwelling: corridors, elevators, stairs, front doors...
- tenants are forced to use the same infrastructure: underground garages, cellars, letter boxes, washing rooms,...
- old social dwellings are badly isolated, resulting in smell and noise overload
- the immediate environment (green spaces, playgrounds, parking spaces, footpaths, ...) have to be shared by a lot of tenants.

PASH – who especially in its first years was strongly anti-migrant⁴⁸ - would later become the privileged discussion partner of housing minister Keulen (2004-2009) and become the core of a regional overlapping tenant’s organisation, now re-presented in the Flemish Housing Council.

Fact is that, when the millennium turn was in sight, there was a broad consensus among the democratic parties on policies promoting social mix, which in fact should be read as an attempt to limit the in stream of a different category of people labelled as problematic. Take e.g. the Christian Democrats. In the preparation of the elections, their Chairman, Marc Van Peel, MP, phrased the issue of social mix under the heading ‘*Security, tolerance and justice*’⁴⁹. The text defines so-called ‘*end terms for tolerant living together*’. Statement 2 says: ‘*The presence of ethnic minorities is a richness, not a thread. Nevertheless we should, by 2002, have realised the “social mix” in the urban quarters. The concentration of vulnerable people, migrants and other social weaker persons should not be higher than 20%. A too high concentration of migrants and other socially weaker persons can be a major source of intolerance. Therefore, we should have a policy of spread and mix. (...) New construction of “large blocks” should be decreased and replaced by a policy of small scaled projects.*’

Also some Antwerp Social Democrats joined the discourse. In a report, the journal *Gazet van Antwerpen*⁵⁰, referred to Robert Voorhamme and Patrick Janssens, who were respectively the local Antwerp Chairman (and MP) and the nation chairman

⁴⁸ A community worker revealed that they had to work hard to keep them out of the Vlaams Blok water (De Decker, 2004).

⁴⁹ Fax: internal document that was widely covered by the media (journals, radio and television, 26 March 1998). Also because it provoked a young and promising Moroccan female politician, working for a Christian Democratic Minister (Lanjri, 1998). The topic got already dealt with before and later the thesis would be repeated.

⁵⁰ It is not clear who said what (*Gazet Van Antwerpen*, 28 January 2002). One of the authors, being there, only heard the speech of Voorhamme.

of the Socialist Party, both members were on the board of social housing companies⁵¹. Concerning the income levels, it was stated that: *'The thresholds should go up. Every social housing company in Antwerp, with far the greatest number of social rental dwellings in the country, is now confronted with financial losses. In order to give them more breathing space, the thresholds should go up. (...) If the minister doesn't change them, then he de facto causes the tearing down of the large social housing complexes. A building like the "Chicago block" is destroyed by the income eligibility rules, since you do not have a mix of social classes'*.

Already earlier, in 1997, in a policy proposal note⁵², two members of the board of an Antwerp social housing company, therein appointed by the Green Party, called for *'a well-considered appointment by a screening of candidates in order to know his/her wishes and to avoid disturbance of existing equilibriums.'* They also made a plea for a selective increase of the eligibility income in problematic estates, the integrated dispersion of migrants, the allocation of not integrated migrants into heterogeneous estates with different live styles but with social and technical accompaniment⁵³, a child density index for complexes around an inner square, no new social housing near existing complexes, the obligation of social accompaniment for problem tenants, who – at best – should not be located in high density complexes around an inner square.

We conclude this section with two widely covered statements of two former housing ministers at the beginning of the new millennium. The first is B. Anciaux, a former democratic nationalist who founded a new social liberal party (Spirit) and was Flemish minister of culture at that time. His outpourings, which went hand in hand with his dismissal 'for personal reasons', decorated the front page of the most popular journal with the following sentence accompanying a photo: *"If the social estates are in flames, we cannot stick to the fine architecture of our own house. Then we have to extinguish"* (Het Laatste Nieuws, 14 May 2002).

Anciaux's successor as housing minister, the liberal J. Gabriëls, also hit the front pages of newspapers and weeklies with eloquent phrases on social housing. Gabriëls, who would *"not house his own rabbits in the flats of an Antwerp estate"* (an article's title - Gazet van Antwerpen, 30 Oktober 2001; Dag Allemaal, 30 January 2002), wanted to use an integration criterion as part of the allocation rules. The minister said that social housing companies should have the opportunity to refuse some people. *"Income can not be the only criterion to get a social dwelling. The social basis is also important. I do not want to label particular groups, but flats such as in Antwerp, with 80% foreign people and only 20% natives, cannot be good for integration. (...) Housing may not be element of jealousy among natives"* (De Morgen, 10 June 2002).

6. Current discussions

Gradually the described debate cooled down. Basically because the social housing sector pulled back, since her worries as time went by were taken more and more

⁵¹ Patrick Janssens combines the mayorship of Antwerp with a seat as MP. Voorhamme, who is a former MP, is an alderman in Antwerp since 2003. Both had/have functions in social housing companies.

⁵² Document dated 29 September 1997.

⁵³ *"Different life styles cause resistance, rejection, resentment and prejudices. A well-balanced mix of different life styles give opportunities for living together"*.

serious by the successive ministers and governments. The vague concept of social mix and the consensus on the strife to attract more middle income groups to social rental housing (what implicitly implies less poor – read: migrant – people) functions, next to the attempts of the government(s) to change the legislation in line with the complaints, as lubricating oil⁵⁴. And as currently incidents are as good as absent, more breathing space is created, as the mass media have no tit-bit, what is not surprisingly, since (largely ignored) research in de meantime shows no general malaise in social rental housing. On the contrary, the satisfaction of people living there is high (Pannecoucke et al, 2001; Stoop & Albertijn, 2003; Heylen et al, 2007).

In looking back, the exclusionary discourse escalated after the new social legislation in 1994, finally forcing the government to intervene and change the existing allocation rules. This has been a difficult search since new regulations – which in their consequence undoubtedly exclude people – had to compromise with (international) legislation concerning discrimination, xenophobia and racism. That this has been a delicate exercise was shown in the introduction, but it is also illustrated by the number of new rules. The 1999 allocation regulation was withdrawn in 2000 and replaced by a new one; in 2006 the 1997 Housing Law was changed in order create a frame for new allocation rules, which were introduced in 2007, but changed already twice and the newly appointed government already announced an evaluation (Vlaamse regering, 2009) of the existing rules. Together the following three elements are of importance: (a) Regarding the allocation criteria, the income levels have been (and will be) raised to allow middle class families to enter the estates. (b) Local governments are granted more autonomy with regard to allocation criteria and the management of the estates. And (c) permission was granted to screen candidates before a dwelling is allocated to them.

The delicateness of the equilibrium was illustrated by the hostile reactions to the Land and Building Decree of 2009 (see introduction). Intentionally this decree wants to answer two issues. The first concerns a very general complaint about raising housing and housing land prices⁵⁵; the second concerns the wish to disperse social rental housing outside the larger cities⁵⁶. This latter is a request from the cities who argue that the concentration of the necessary⁵⁷ social rental housing channels low income households to the cities, as such affecting their fiscal base.

The resistance against this decree – which is a resistance against the obligation to foresee social rental housing and not against freeing building land – can be evaluated as collateral damage of the discourse. As shown, social rental housing was never a popular item – numerous non-urban municipalities do not have any, but the discourse re-established the ‘old image’ (see Mougenot earlier) that social rental is the sector of the non-deserving. Developers argue that introducing social (rental) housing will have an impact on the saleability of the dwellings; and – to be honest – are the

⁵⁴ Very recently, the chairman of the VVH, a former manager of a local Antwerp social housing company, Kockx, states that his organisation will take on a more positive attitude. He wants to get rid of the image of ‘bad guys (Kockx & Olivier, 2009).

⁵⁵ This is actually a separate discourse, because it has already been illustrated by several authors that there is no real ‘affordability problem’ Pannecoucke et al, 2001; De Decker et al, 2008; Winters & De Decker, 2009).

⁵⁶ See Somers (2003) for Mechelen above. See also Vandenberghe & Claeys (2008) for Antwerp.

⁵⁷ The waiting lists are long and estimations show that in Flanders alone an additional 180.000 units are necessary (Winters & De Decker, 2009).

municipalities to blame when they refuse to house people who affect their financial base negatively and are troublesome?

Currently, local debates on the spatial planning of new social dwellings are often overshadowed by the importance of this discourse that emphasises the ‘pathologies’ of the social renters. They currently use the in Deleuze’s words discourses on the ‘molar level’ in lower every day life. A second part of the qualitative research undertaken in the suburbs of Aarschot, focused on this lower every day life. It followed the struggle of a group of neighbourhood residents in ‘Orleanstoren’ who tried to avoid the coming of a new small estate of 28 dwellings for social renters. The residents, who reacted against the estate, were all private homeowners and were living in a picturesque environment with a view over the city. While the older residents were happy that finally the wasteland in front of their doors would be cleared, the younger suburbanites feared the lowering of status of their neighbourhood and the intrusion of noise, deviant behaviour and foreigners into their comfort zones and as a result, the lowering of the value of their house.

Interestingly, the city’s housing alderman and the opponents of the project used the same arguments. The mayor of Aarschot and alderman of housing policy supported his policy as follows:

“We strive for a mix. Since we do not want to create ghettos, we want to keep a good spread. Furthermore, we want to achieve a healthy balance between dwellings for social buy and social rent. (De Standaard, 11 December 20/07)

For him, the way social housing was conceived under the form of the ‘Gijmelbergwijk’ with its 208 dwellings for social rent was not the best policy option: *“Putting people outside the city in some sort of ghetto, that’s asking for trouble”* (interview, 2004). Smaller scale projects as the one in Orleanstoren indeed supported his view of social mix. But at the same time, the neighbourhood residents, when explaining their opposition against the new dwellings, expressed the following discourse:

“I think that they are centralising the social dwellings a little bit too much, that they are on the way to making a ghetto of it. [...] The Gijmelbergwijk also has problems, as it seems, just because of a too high concentration, thus it is better to spread them a bit” (Woman, 47, Orleanstoren).

The social mix discourse can thus always be supported or challenged depending on the scale one is referring to. It shows however the fact that both stakeholders indeed see social rent and its inhabitants as highly problematic. Following the neighbourhood residents, selling⁵⁸ the social units could be a solution to the problem of the planned dwellings

“An allotment always works well. A social estate with rental dwellings, not with dwellings for sale, on the other hand, deteriorates fast. If they would sell the dwellings, I would be more positive.” (Man, 40, Orleanstoren).

Finally, one resident again expressed the old favouritism discourse and hoped that due to the picturesque environment there would be some sort of selection of the social renters:

⁵⁸ The 2006 Housing Law also introduces a right to buy of houses, not flats.

“Oh well, I suppose that a certain elite will come to live here, someone who knows someone. So, in that respect, we don’t have much to fear.” (Man, 48, Orleanstoren).

The end so far, thus as to today, is that the discourse (re)created the negative image of a social tenant. As mentioned above the protagonists and the social rental sector at large have eventually fooled their own nest. By (re)creating a negative image of the social tenant, and linking a broad range of concepts, such as he/she is poor, a migrant, addicted, making noise, creating an unsafe environment, and so forth, a stigma is created and the problems have grown rather than solved by repressive measures and bold phrasing by certain politicians.

7. To Conclude

When we see that, from the early 1990s onwards, concepts such as “social mix” and “anti-ghetto” are being included in (the motivation for) pieces of legislation, consequently creating laws and regulations that in practice exclude certain population groups, we need to critically ask what made this possible.

To answer this we focus on two elements. First of all we can agree with the theoretical contemplation of both Foucault and Deleuze when they argue that “*discourse (...) systematically form the objects of which they speak*” (Foucault, 1972) and that language is “*a political affair before it is an affair for linguistics;...*” (Deleuze (2004)). We have illustrated this by showing how the discourse - through jumping scales from small every day incidents to the regional political agenda - was able to steer the creation of new pieces of legislation and regulation. But this is only halve of the power of the discourse, as afterwards - this is after the new legislation is implemented - it is also used to legitimise it. Politicians and policymakers can stress that, following the discourse, they are actually doing what the sector - considered as holding the knowledge regarding a certain issue - is asking.

Secondly we want to argue that, in order to have full effect and as such to be regarded as a discourse the way it is defined by Foucault, Deleuze and Blommaert, it has to meet a certain set of criteria:

1. There has to be some sort of fertile breeding ground. In our case this has at least two dimensions. First, there is the historically marginal position of the social rental sector, with the consequence that no firm advocacy can be found. Today quasi nobody stand up for social rental housing. The second concerns real worries following from the impoverishment of the tenants, leading to decreasing rental incomes at a moment that more money for renovation and social support is needed⁵⁹;
2. The discourse is experienced as a coherent and very rational line of reasoning. With regards to solving the problems in social rental housing estates with concepts such as ‘social mix’ on the one hand and ‘voluntary concentration’ on the other, the lines of reasoning, elucidated by some of the protagonists (look back to the reasoning of e.g. Bob Cools), can easily be followed and understood, even if it is against ones own opinion.

⁵⁹ Note that welfare and housing policies are completely separated and that no money is going from the welfare department to housing.

3. The discourse is constructed and supported by leading figures, whose authority is widely acknowledged and widely respected. Their contemplations and views on the subject are considered as truthful, by the general public.
4. There are close personal and/or institutional links between the local and the regional level.
5. A counter-discourse is absent, not fully developed or is being ignored, as is possible research on the subject.

8. References

- Animotto (2008). *De Vlaamse wooncode: een bron van discriminatie?* www.animotto-jonglinks.be.
- Bemelmans-Videc, M.-L., Rist, R.C. & E. Vedung (2003). *Carrots, Sticks & Sermons. Policy Instruments and their evaluations*. New Brunswick & London: Transactions Publ.
- Billiet, J., A. Carton & R. Huys (1990). *Onbekend of onbemind? Een sociologisch onderzoek naar de houding van Belgen tegenover migranten*. Leuven: Sociologisch Onderzoeksinstituut, KU Leuven.
- Billiet, J. & H. De Witte (2001) Wie stemde in juni 1999 voor het Vlaams Blok. *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* 22 (1) 5-35.
- Blommaert, J., & Verschueren, J. (1998). *Debating diversity*. London: Routledge.
- Blommaert, J. (2001). *Ik stel vast. Politiek taalgebruik, politieke vernieuwing en verrechtsing*. Antwerpen: EPO.
- Blommaert, J. (2005). Gien Vloms, gien ois. *Knack*, 19 Jan., p. 37.
- Blommaert, J. (2007). *De crisis van de democratie. Commentaren op actuele politiek*. Antwerpen: EPO.
- Boyle, M., & Rogerson, R. J. (2001). Power, Discourse and City Trajectories. In R. Paddison (Ed.), *Handbook of Urban Studies* (p. 402-416). London: Sage.
- Burgers, J. (2001). Honderd jaar zorgzaamheid. *Geografie* 10 (3) 14-17.
- Cools, B. (1993). *In de naam van de stad*. Antwerpen: Hadewijch.
- Cools, B. (2003). Verdraagzaam samenleven in de social huisvesting. *VHM Informatieblad* (52) 16-19.
- Cools, B. (2004). *Sociale Huisvesting*. Brussel: Politeia.
- De Burghgraeve, P., Corijn, E. & P. Verbraeken (2000). *Vlaanderen, wat we zelf doen, doen we beter niet. Een discussietekst*. <http://worldonline.be/~dockx/VlaanderenZelfBeterNiet.htm>.
- De Caigny, S. (2007). *Bouwen aan een nieuwe thuis. Wooncultuur in Vlaanderen tijdens het interbellum*. Unpubl. Ph.d K.U. Leuven, Leuven.
- Decaluwé, C. (1990, ed.). A.C.W. en huisvesting. *De gids op maatschappelijk gebied* 81 (3).
- De Decker, P. (2002). On the rise of social rental agencies in Belgium. *Urban Studies* 39 (2) 297-326.
- De Decker, P. (2004). *De ondraaglijke lichtheid van het beleid voor de stad in Vlaanderen. van geïndividualiseerd woonmodel tot stedelijke crisis: een sociologische studie*. Unpubl. Ph.d Antwerp University, Antwerp.
- De Decker, P. (2005a). Is mix de max? *Ruimte & Planning* 25 (1) 3-7.
- De Decker, P. (2005). 'In sommige sociale woonblokken zou ik mijn konijnen nog niet durven steken'. Over sociaal verhuren, de creatie van een reputatie en haar gevolgen. In P. De Decker, L. Goossens & I. Pannecoucke (eds) *Wonen aan de onderkant* (p. 283-298). Garant: Antwerpen.
- De Decker, P. (2007). Is wonen niet altijd te duur?, *Ruimte & Planning*, 27(1) 3-9.
- De Decker P. ((2008). *Understanding housing sprawl in Flanders, Belgium*. Paper presented at the ENHR Conference, Dublin, 6-9 July.

- De Decker, P., Heylen, K. & I. Pannecoucke (2008). *What's left after paying the housing bill? Evolution of the equivalent residual income for Flanders, Belgium 1985-2005*. Paper presented at the ENHR Conference, Dublin, 6-9 July.
- De Decker, P., C. Kesteloot, De Maesschalck, F. & J. Vranken (2005). Revitalising the city in an anti-urban context: extreme right and the rise of an urban policy in Flanders-Belgium. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (1) 152-171.
- De Decker, P., Kesteloot, C. & C. Newton (2009). Where are vulnerable people to live in a State obsessed with homeownership? In J. Doherty & B. Edgar (Eds): *In my caravan, I feel like superman. Essays in the memory of Henk Meert 1963-2006* (p. 7-30). Brussels/Saint Andrews: Feantsa/Centre for Housing Research.
- De Decker, P. & I. Pannecoucke (2002). Gekneld tussen satisfactie en marginalisering. Het debat over de sociale huursector in Vlaanderen in haar context. In V. Heeren, V. (ed.) *Hoorzitting over de sociale mix en de leefbaarheid in de sociale huisvesting*, Vlaams Parlement, Zitting 2002-2003, 16 december 2002, Stuk 1498 (2002-2003) – Nr 1, 43-81.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004 (1988)). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.
- Delruelle, E. & R. Torfs (2005). *Eindverslag Commissie voor Interculturele Dialoog*. www.intercultureledialoog.be
- Demal-Durez, M. (1982). *De begunstigden van het sociaal huisvestingsbeleid*. Brussel:N.I.H.
- De Smet, H. (1991). Gelijk heeft men meestal niet alleen... *VHM Driemaandelijks Tijdschrift*, 1, (2) 2-6.
- De Witte, J. (2005). Sociale huisvesting mag niet discrimineren. *De Standaard*, 6 dec.
- D'Hondt, P. & B. Vinikas (1993) *Tekenen van gelijkwaardigheid*. Brussel: Koninklijk Commissariaat voor het Migrantenbeleid.
- Edgar, B., Doherty, J. & H. Meert (2002). Access to housing. Homelessness and vulnerability in Europe. Bristol: The Policy Press & Feantsa.
- Elchardus, M. & W. Smits (2002). *Anatomie en oorzaken van het wantrouwen*. Brussel: VUBPress.
- Elias, N., & Scotson, J. (1994 (1965)). *The established and the outsiders*. London: Sage.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Feddes, A. (1995). *Woningmarkt, regulering en inflatie: het na-oorlogse volkshuisvestingsbeleid van tien Noordwest-Europese landen vergeleken*. Utrecht: Nederlandse Geografische Studies.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Goossens, L. (1982). *Het sociaal huisvestingsbeleid in België. Een historisch-sociologische analyse van de maatschappelijke probleembehandeling op het gebied van het wonen*. Unpubl. Ph.D, K.U. Leuven, Leuven.
- Goossens, L., De Caluwé, C. & B. Forier (1991). Kansarmen eerst. *De Standaard*. 1 July.
- Hajer, M. (1995). *The Politics of Environmental Discourse. Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. New York: Clarendon Press.
- Hajer, M., & Uitermark, J. (2008). Performing Authority: Discursive Politics after the Assassination of Theo van Gogh. *Public Administration*, 86(1), 1-15.
- Hammerberg, T. (2009). *Belgium*. Strassbour: Report by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights for the attention of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly.
- Huyse, L. (1992). *24 november 1991. De betekenis van een verkiezingsuitslag*. Leuven: Kritak.
- Huyse, L. (1996). *De lange weg naar Neufchâteau*. Leuven: Van Halewijck.
- Kockx, F. & M. Olivier (2009). Samenwerking VLEM en VVH. *Fundamenten* 21 (1) 11-14.
- Lanjri, N. (1998). *Zonder omwegen. De stem van een nieuwe generatie*. Antwerpen: Icarus.
- Lees, L. (2004). Urban Geography: Discourse Analysis and Urban Research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(1), 101-107.
- Liga voor de rechten van de mens, (2005). *Nederlands als voorwaarde voor een sociale woning?* www.mensenrechten.be

- Loopmans, M. (2007) From SIF to City Fund: a new direction for urban policy in Flanders, Belgium. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 22(2): 215-225.
- Loopmans, M., De Decker, P. & C. Kesteloot (forthoming). Social mix and passive revolution. A neo-Gramscian analysis of the resilient marginality of the social mix rhetoric in Flanders, Belgium. *Housing Studies*.
- Macleod, C. (2002). Deconstructive Discourse Analysis: Extending the Methodological Conversation. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 32(1), 17-25.
- Meeus, B. (2004) *Een geografie van attitudes tegenover sociale huurwoningen. Een case-study in Aarschot*. Ongepubliceerde licentiaatsverhandeling, K.U. Leuven.
- Mougenot, C. (1988). Promoting the single-family house in Belgium: the social construction of model housing. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 12(4), 531-547.
- Pannecoucke, I., Geurts, V., Van Dam, R., De Decker, P., Goossens, L. & B. Cantillon (2001). *Profiel van de sociale huurder en subjectieve beleving van de realisaties van de sociale huisvesting*, Antwerpen: OASeS/CSB, UFSIA.
- Peleman, K. (2002). *De rol van de buurt: De maatschappelijke participatie van Marokkaanse vrouwen in een ruimtelijk perspectief*. Unpublished PhD, K.U. Leuven, Leuven.
- RISO Antwerpen, Team Hoogbouw (2005). *Nederlands als sleutel voor leefbare sociale woonwijken*. Antwerpen: RISO Antwerpen.
- Rogiers, F. (2001). Eigen schuld eerst. Wat we niet willen horen over extreem-rechts in Vlaanderen. Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar.
- Schmidt, V.A. (2002). Does discourse matter in the politics of welfare state adjustment? *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (2) 168-193.
- Smets, M. (1977). *De ontwikkeling van de tuinwijkgedachte in België. Een overzicht van de Belgische volkswoningbouw 1830-1930*. Brussel/Liege: Mardaga.
- Smets, M. (1985, ed.). *Resurgam. De Belgische Wederopbouw na 1914*, Brussel: Gemeentekrediet.
- Somers, B. (2003). *Iedereen burgemeester*. Leuven: Van Halewyck.
- Stoop, R. & M. Albertijn (2003). *Beter een goede buurt dan een verre vriend. Bewoners van Antwerpse sociale woningen over de leefbaarheid van hun omgeving*. Antwerpen: SOMA – Databank Sociale Planning.
- Thora, E. (2002). *Uiteenzetting door de heer Erik Thora, zaakvoerder van de SHM Dijledal te Leuven*. Vlaams Parlement, Zitting 2002-2003, 16 december 2002, Stuk 1498 (2002-2003) – Nr 1, 43-81 - p. 11-14.
- UN-CERD (2008). *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 9 of the convention Concluding observations of the BELGIUM, UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. New York: U.N.
- Vandenbergh, J. & R. Claeys (2008). Hoezo onzichtbaar? Introduction to the conference *Onzichtbaar Aanwezig. Sociale huisvesting in Vlaanderen, vandaag*, Antwerpen, 29 april.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1988). *News as discourse*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Van Poucke, W. (2008). *Langs bergen van werk*. Roeselare: Globe.
- Van Reybrouck, D. (2008). Pleidooi voor populisme. Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Querido Pamflet.
- Vlaamse Huurdersbonden (2005). *Jaarrapport Werkingsjaar 2005*, Berchem: VOB.
- Vlaamse Overheid (2008). *Wegwijs in het nieuwe sociale huurbesluit*. www.vlaanderen.be
- Vlaamse Regering (2009). *Een daadkrachtig Vlaanderen in beslissende tijden. Voor een vernieuwende, duurzame en warme samenleving, Vlaams regeerakkoord 2009-2014*. www.vlaanderen.be
- VOB /Vlaams Overleg Bewonersbelangen (2006). *De nieuwe Vlaamse Wooncode dreigt het recht op wonen uit te hollen*. *VOB-nieuwsbrief*, Extra Katern.
- Winters, S. & P. De Decker (2009). Wonen in Vlaanderen: over kwaliteit, betaalbaarheid en woonzekerheid. In L. Vanderleyden, M. Callens, & J. Noppe (eds) *De Staat van Vlaanderen 2009* (p. 199-234). Brussel: Studiedienst van de Vlaamse regering.

