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The gentrification of progressive red-light districts and new moral geographies: the case of Amsterdam and Zurich

Ilse van Liempt^a and Milena Chimienti^b

^aDepartment of Human Geography, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands; ^bHES: Haute école de travail social, Geneve, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

Even though there is a long tradition of red-light districts (RLD) being concentrated within the city centre, gentrification policies in many European cities now aim at spatially dispersing the sex market (and its workers) to the fringes of the city. Moving RLDs out of the city centre (or transforming them into more-upscale entertainment provision) calls into question the physical place allotted to sex work in our cities, as well as the moral geography behind these decisions. This article examines urban regeneration processes in two particular European cities – Amsterdam and Zurich – both cities with a long history of progressive drug and sex-work policies where sex work has been part of the visible urban fabric. In the article we look at urban policies and the legal framework, as well as at moral reasoning and discourses around the legitimacy of moving sex-workers away from city centres. We argue that in both cities moral arguments play an important role in the legitimization of the transformation of the RLD which contributes to a new race and gender order that stigmatises sex-workers as a group as if they were *all* victims of trafficking.

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Introduction

Since the nineteenth century, prostitution districts – often described as vice districts – have been features of cities. And sociologists have written about such districts in the past (*inter alia*, Booth from 1889). Park and Burgess for example included a vice zone in their description of Chicago and, in Burgess (1925) famous map of the ecological structure of the city, vice areas are shown as important districts within it. In 1926, Walter Reckless, also a Chicago School sociologist, published an article on the distribution of vice in the city. Based on his own empirical research in Chicago, he concluded that Burgess' location of the vice area was too

CONTACT Ilse van Liempt  i.c.vanliempt@uu.nl

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narrow. He found it to exist not only in the transition zone of the CBD but also in more-distant residential districts. In addition he observed the existence of sex work in certain peripheral areas near city government boundaries, where police control was less rigorous (Reckless 1926). He also pointed out that areas of commercial sex did not always correspond to the areas associated with criminal activity but could also be related to other entertainment areas in the city (Ashworth, White, and Winchester 1988). As such, Reckless (1926) importantly nuanced the fixed relationship between red-light districts (RLDs) and areas of the city that were defined as dangerous before. Research on RLDs has advanced since the Chicago studies, with greater emphasis on various dimensions which *explain* where sex work occurs in cities (Ashworth, White, and Winchester 1988; Hubbard 1999; Reynolds 1986; Ryder 2010; Weitzer 2014). Ashworth, White, and Winchester (1988), for example, provided a structural analysis that identified three determinants of sex-work locations – accessibility, opportunity and constraint. In terms of *accessibility*, they argued that it is not surprising that transport nodes in the city are attractive locations for sex work. The services of sex-workers have always been in particular demand by travellers – around major railway and bus stations and, before that, near the docks and harbour basins for the seafaring trade. In terms of *opportunity* it is important to stress that centrality is crucial in terms of a high throughput of people – a high number of potential customers – but that high levels of anonymity for both customers and sex-workers are also vital.

It is equally important to realise that there are also *constraints* (legal, social and moral) that explain why sex work is located where it is. The recent redevelopment of inner cities adds an important new level of constraint in Ashworth's model of the geography of sex work. For example, the rising value of land is today threatening many RLDs all over the world (Aalbers and Deinema 2012; Hubbard 2004; Loopmans and van den Broeck 2011; Ryder 2004). In line with Smith (2000), we also engage with the literature on moral geographies and look into interactions and variations within morality, place and space to understand why sex work is located where it is. Feminist geographers have conceptualised the urban as an important social and spatial context, attaching cultural and political meaning to corporeal, material bodies and affirming that there is a relationship between bodies and cities (Kern 2015; Longhurst 2001). This literature also offers an interesting new perspective on gentrification and fits very well with the gentrification of RLDs in which sex-workers have been targeted for removal by urban renewal campaigns (see also Hubbard 2004; Papayanis 2000). Although gentrification does not have homogenous outcomes, we argue that, within the legitimisation of the removal, moral arguments often play a prominent role.

Since the early 1990s, many European RLDs (Aalbers and Deinema 2012; Künkel 2012; Loopmans and van den Broeck 2011; Sanders-McDonagh, Peyrefitte, and Ryalls 2016; Weitzer 2014) started to gentrify. Even though gentrification can be seen as a global urban phenomenon, there are important local differences and temporal rhythms in the way in which this process evolves and the different

outcomes it may have (van Gent 2013; Lees 2000; Smith 2002). In this article we specifically look at the case of gentrification in Amsterdam's and Zurich's red-light districts. Both cities are known for their progressive position on legalising prostitution and harm-reduction measurements for drug addicts in the past (see Bless, Korf, and Freeman 1995; Jahnsen and Wagenaar 2017). We question why and how two of the most progressive cities (when it comes to past drug and sex-work policies) develop policies to make RLDs less visible and displace sex-workers and how these policies are legitimised. Certain bodies and embodied practices like sex work apparently cannot (or not easily) be mobilised as an asset for gentrification and are considered 'dirty' or not 'fit' (see also Kern 2015). Along the same lines, Hubbard (2016) shows how retail gentrification is a form of moral regulation because it promotes particular modes of consumption over others. The spread of fancy restaurants, health-food stores, galleries, ice-cream parlors and hipster bars in RLDs goes hand-in-hand with the exclusion of certain other bodies and activities.

If we look more in detail at who, exactly, is targeted under urban regeneration in RLDs it becomes clear that illegal immigrants and drug-addicted sex-workers are the categories that has been displaced from most visible RLDs all over Europe (Kern 2015; Künkel 2012). And that the process of gentrification also coincides with greater criminalisation of migrant sex-workers in general (Andrijasevic 2004; Chimienti and Bugnion 2017). As also argued by Parker (2008), such processes of gentrification tend to 'naturalise' a raced and gendered order in which privileged men have more access and power in the city whilst the less-privileged can be pushed away (see also Lieber 2008). Although parts of the rationale behind the urban regeneration of RLDs and the outcomes are similar in Amsterdam and in Zurich, their differences show the importance of taking into account the specificities of the context in order to fully grasp the conditions that lead to the removal of sex-workers from the urban context. Finally exploring the process of RLD regeneration in Amsterdam and Zurich also provides insights into the reasons for the shift from progressive, labour-based discourse and practice regarding sex work to more-punitive policy models that align with regeneration regimes.

This article is based on an analysis of policy documents, observations in both RLDs and 16 interviews – conducted in 2015 – with stakeholders who either support the gentrification or not, but who were all concerned by it. They include members of associations for the defence of sex-workers' rights, police officers, city government representatives, residents, entrepreneurs in the area and a fellow researcher in the field.

The paradox between the visibility and the invisibility of RLDs

Park (1952) explained the locations of vice areas in terms of 'tolerance zones' and 'moral districts' – regions in which people and activities otherwise seen as anti-social and a-moral are more or less accepted. This moral aspect has since been taken up by many researchers. Ward (1975), for example, argues that RLDs might not

necessarily cluster because of a demand in services at that particular location but, rather, in response to the high tolerance threshold; a related concept is 'skid row' – what is not allowed elsewhere is allowed here. RLDs are thus important settings for people who want to transcend the dis/respectable sexual-behaviour binary and traditional gender roles more generally (see also Hekma 2007). Sex work and the places that house it have always been seen as a kind of secret space for profane thoughts and actions that could not take place in 'proper', 'respectable' society (Aalbers and Sabat 2012, 112). However, at the same time, RLDs have to be visible in order to be seen by clients.

It is important, nevertheless, to distinguish between the different sectors within the sex industry. For escort services, bars, clubs and private residencies involved in sex sales, a lesser degree of visibility is not as problematic. In our current digital age, increasing numbers of people also work from home, and escort services and other agencies may work from any location as long as the people employed by them are located close enough to their potential clients. With an increase in online sex work, the need for centrality is thus undergoing change (see, for example, Sanders, Connelly, and Jarvis-King 2017). Aalbers and Sabat (2012) argue, however, that, even though the Internet offers increased (online) visibility and accessibility, it has not decreased the importance of visibility and clustering in actual geographic places. Walking or driving in, or past, RLDs offers a certain thrill and excitement. The advantages of 'proximity to other entertainment facilities', the stimulating atmosphere of the night out, and the spectator function thus also remain important for RLDs which, all over the world, have increasingly taken on 'theme-park' qualities. A visit to a RLD might be motivated by a drive to see the place rather than to purchase sex. The connections between sex and tourist industries also add to the continued importance and popularity of visible RLDs because they often merge spatially and reinforce each other's growth (Brents and Hausbeck 2009; Rojek 2000).

Amsterdam's RLD: visible sex work under threat

Amsterdam's RLD, locally known as 'De Wallen' (embankment), is very central and dates back to the origins of Amsterdam as a port city. Since 2000 it has been legal to run a brothel in the Netherlands; however, even before being fully legalised, the Amsterdam RLD of the 1980s and 1990s was, in a sense, regulated. Back then it was not prohibited to make use of, or to offer services as, a sex worker but the legal status of the district was also never clearly defined (Brants 1998, 624). In the 1980s the RLD was a no-go area, with junkies and visible drug-dealing creating a feeling of insecurity. At the time, this area was referred to as Amsterdam Endstation and the open drugs scene attracted junkies from all over Europe.

With the start of the *NV Zeedijk* in 1984, a public-private partnership between the local government and entrepreneurs from the area, drug-dealing and drug-users were, to a great extent, displaced. This was an important first phase of the urban regeneration that took place in the area. In the same period, sex-workers

in the Netherlands demanded recognition and government protection because ambiguous laws negatively affected their safety and continued to marginalise them. A sex-workers' advocacy group called *De Rode Draad* (The Red Thread) protested against the hypocrisies they saw in the Dutch system. Sex-workers wanted their work to be recognised as a service – a type of work – and themselves seen as legal workers and not as 'fallen women' or victims (Altink et al. [forthcoming](#)).

Due to this unique moral and legal climate in the Netherlands, the Amsterdam RLD is tied to notions of tolerance, excitement and freedom, making it one of Amsterdam's major tourist attractions (Aalbers and Sabat [2012](#), 113). The area currently attracts 2.5 million tourists a year (Arnoldussen et al. [2016](#), 358). The narrow canals with typical three-storey brick houses on each side, the cobbled streets and the picturesque bridges all make up the perfect scene for a tourist's image of Amsterdam. The visible commodification of sex in the form of large glass enclosures in which sex-workers offer their services is quite unique. Additionally, the area is filled with cafés, night clubs, sex shops and coffee shops which results in varied usage and makes Amsterdam's RLD no isolated space, but one which is intertwined with its surroundings. Weitzer ([2014](#)) makes an important distinction in his work between single-use and multi-use RLDs. Local residents of Amsterdam's RLD are, however, today increasingly complaining about this multi-usage of the RLD in a relatively small historical part of town.

Amsterdam's RLD in transition: Project 1012

Since the early 2000s, urban regeneration in Amsterdam's RLD has entered a new phase. The city council has now become itself an active player in the buying out of owners of buildings with window prostitution in it (Aalbers and Deinema [2012](#)). In 2007, Project 1012 was officially launched by Lodewijk Asscher, alderman and then-local labour-party leader. This project announced that the total number of windows in Amsterdam would have to decrease from 476 to 284 (a 40 per cent reduction). 2007 was also the year in which the famous sex entrepreneur Charles Geerts sold 20 buildings (50 prostitution windows) to *NV Stadsgoed*, a subsidiary of housing association *Het Oosten* (currently known as *Stadgenoot*). With this action alone almost 10 per cent of the windows in the area changed hands. By 2009 the city and its official coalition partners already owned more buildings in De Wallen than all the brothel-owners combined. This state-led gentrification (Uitermark, Duyvendak, and Kleinhans [2007](#)) resulted in 130 brothel closures (at the time of writing).

Project 1012 tries to remove visible sex work from the area for a number of reasons. First, it is stated that Amsterdam's city authorities are interested in a re-appreciation of the value of the historic city centre (and sex-workers are apparently not considered part of this re-appreciation). Second, both in national as well as in local debate and in the design and implementation of regulations, measures against trafficking are emphasised as a reason for the closure of brothels. Fighting

the excesses within the business such as coercion, exploitation and trafficking are often mentioned as a reason for closure (Rekenkamer Amsterdam 2011, 12). Assessment of these claims has, however, concluded that they are exaggerated and that no cases of trafficking have been found so far (Aalbers and Deinema 2012). A researcher in the area whom we interviewed also confirmed this analysis:

In none of the windows that have been closed so far has trafficking been proven. The reason for closing down these windows was because project developers wanted to open a restaurant or a club in that particular place.

The rhetoric is that this part of town should be regained from 'criminogenic' companies – companies that are thought to be built on black money and to attract more crime. Project 1012 has not been very successful in the reduction of criminogenic businesses in the area, the number of which has, in fact, increased (Rekenkamer Amsterdam 2011). Despite all the emphasis that is put on combatting trafficking, it is also striking that very little attention is paid to *how* concretely trafficking and organised crime are, or should be, fought in the area.

What changes *have* taken place through Plan 1012?

If we look at the policy documents it is clear that most attention is given to strategies to buy out building-owners and to the question of what to replace them with. Many words are spent on how to 'restore the balance' in the area and how to create – in cooperation with real-estate developers – a 'high-quality' entrance zone with shops, galleries, workshops and high-end restaurants. The creative industry plays an important role in this strategy, as it is thought to constitute the main engine for growth in the knowledge economy. The promotion of 'soft location factors', of 'quality of life' for elites and of a prestigious blend of cultural amenities and offerings for luxury consumption is today part of the standard policy repertoire for attracting capital investment. Creative enterprises are believed to be attracted mainly to historical city centres and, when reading city policy documents, it would seem that Amsterdam's RLD is now their preferred space. A senior policy-maker from Amsterdam's city council noted, however, during an interview with us, that there is actually a diverse range of entrepreneurs willing to start up a business in the area, but that high property value is making it impossible for the majority of the entrepreneurs to step in:

Instead of the cheese shops, and other tourist franchises, there are more entrepreneurs waiting to start a business. But they often cannot afford the rent. There is a lot of money to be made in the tourism industry in the Red Light District at the moment and that is tough competition.

A special policy has been introduced to stimulate certain creative activities in the area and some of the artists and designers who occupy buildings in the area pay reduced rents, especially in the start-up phase. Walking around in the area, it also becomes clear, however, that many of the buildings that have been bought out have not yet been redeveloped. It is obviously not that easy to convert the

small, dark workspaces into 'high-end' businesses. The former office of the famous brothel-owner Charles Geerts (who owned *ca.* 60 windows in the area and sold most of them) has been turned into a museum (a fake brothel), partly funded by the local government. (Misleading) information is provided in this museum on the number of women trafficked in the area. In another of Charles Geerts' former brothels an NGO called *Not for Sale* runs a store where they sell soup and inform people about the fight against trafficking. In their advertisements they refer to the fact that women have been forced to sell sex in this particular building. These new initiatives in the area produce a single and narrow story around sex work and create a new gender order that classifies *all* sex-workers as victims of trafficking. Paradoxically, it is surprisingly empty in and around all the newly acquired businesses, whereas the streets where women still work in the windows are filled with people. The same goes for MyRedLight, a recently opened brothel initiated by the city council with the aim of offering an 'exploitation-free' workspace to sex-workers and to contribute to the 'normalisation' of sex work (<https://myredlight.nl/nl>). It is an interesting exception where an attempt is made to integrate sex work in the new 'clean' urban landscape. However, thus far, very few sex-workers are willing to work there, mainly because of restrictions in working hours, the same or even higher rents than in other brothels, and because of the discourse that is created around sex work by 'very important people' who do not tend to know much about the topic (<https://behindtheredlightdistrict.blogspot.nl/>).

The board of 'experts' and the council of supervision consist of a politician, two people from aid organisations (HVO Querido and SOA Aids Fund), a public prosecutor and a bar/restaurant-owner. No sex-workers are part of the board, whereas it is promoted as a brothel run by sex-workers themselves (<https://myredlight.nl/nl>). This example shows that gentrification is context-specific and, in the case of Amsterdam, clearly embedded in a history of struggles around the legalisation and normalisation of sex work in an institutional rich context (van Gent 2013). With the institutional context, we do not so much refer to Amsterdam's specific housing-market history here, but more to its prostitution policy context and the active role of the municipality in bringing about the transformation in the area. The paradoxical interplay of hypervisibility (through MyRedLight) and invisibility of sex work in the area can partly be explained by this specific history. Hubbard and Whowell (2008, 1750) also argue that there is a lack of research on the selective inclusion of sex work. They suggest that policy-makers, far from trying to eradicate commercial sex, are seeking to render it more palatable and less 'sleazy' by encouraging corporate venues that can be marketed as part of a diverse package of urban entertainment. The corporatisation of gay-sex venues (or adult entertainment shows like Casa Rosso in Amsterdam) can for example be read as the expression of an urban neoliberal capitalism that commodifies particular sexualities (Bassi 2006). Some of the new 'creative' entrepreneurs also explicitly embrace the identity of the Red Light District and, for example, refer to sex work in their

branding – like Red Light Radio, or the café Quartier Putain in Amsterdam – even though no sex work takes place there.

When it comes to residents' concerns over noise and litter, it should also be noted that the social geography of the city is changing and that RLDs that were formerly located in 'working-class' neighborhoods are now increasingly confronted with new populations who generally show less tolerance to non-normative sexual activities (Pitcher et al. 2006) and might insist on a 'revanchist' kind of cleansing of public space from all sorts of 'nuisance-producing' activities (Hubbard 2004; Papayanis 2000; Smith 1996). Residents' associations play an increasingly important role in the debate on the urban regeneration of RLDs. *Vereniging Vrienden van de Amsterdamse Binnenstad* is a professional residents' association in the RLD which argues for restoring the cultural heritage of the inner city of Amsterdam and limiting the noise and disturbance associated with the sex industry and – most of all – with tourists. Many residents feel that they are losing their neighbourhood to the tourists. One male resident in his 50s illustrated this feeling: 'I feel like a guest in my own neighbourhood; it is *their* area now. It is an entertainment area where I happen to live. That does not feel right.' Residents are also divided on the issue of sex work, as they split sex-workers into 'our girls' who belong to the neighbourhood and the migrant women who are often assumed to be trafficked and strongly pitied, again creating a new race and gender order.

How will the changes in the RLD affect sex-workers?

By restricting visible sex work to a smaller area and emphasising the exploitation that is going on in the industry, Project 1012 goes against national intentions to class sex work as a 'normal job'. This is, ironically, happening less than a decade after the formal acceptance of sex work in the Netherlands. Project 1012 has continually stressed that prostitutes in Amsterdam's RLD tend to be in precarious and dangerous situations but it is very likely that the plan will contribute to a decline in the sex-workers' working conditions. As has been argued before, removing sex work from the public space will not reduce the demand for sexual services or prevent the exploitation of sex-workers (Hubbard 2004). The fact that tourists make up (or used to make up) roughly half of the sex-workers' clientele and, as such, contribute significantly to the profitability of the RLD (Flight and Hulshof 2009) is not talked about – even though, in the 2000s, the yearly profit from the RLD was estimated to be around 80 million euros (Arnoldussen et al. 2016, 362). Opening one brothel (with 14 windows) where women can work 'without the fear of being exploited' (MyRedLight) is not going to be enough to replace all the windows that are being closed in the area.

Paradoxically we now see a situation where too much visibility is also damaging the sex business. The increasing number of visitors in the RLD – again something very specific for this area – sometimes creates a situation whereby clients feel *too* visible and not anonymous enough to make use of the services

offered by sex-workers. Tourists taking pictures are contributing to these constraints. Moreover, working in a theme park is also creating a new moral hierarchy where sex-workers tend to be more commodified and less respected by visitors. Sex-worker organisations have recently been started up in order to fight against this shift in the imaginary of sex work. PROUD, a lobby and advocacy organisation which serves to defend the interests of sex-workers in the workplace, in policies, the media and the wider society, object to the stereotypical portraying of sex-workers as victims and call for workers' rights, including decent rents and access to financial services (such as loans, mortgages and the possession of a credit card). In April 2015 more than 200 sex workers led by PROUD marched through Amsterdam's city centre to protest against the closure of their workspaces and the demonization of the sex industry.

Zurich's RLD: semi-visible sex work

The spatial form of the sex market in Zurich is different from that in Amsterdam in the sense that it is less visible. In fact, as early as the 1990s the city had taken a repressive stance in order to avoid the risk of 'Amsterdamisation': an RLD that was considered too explicit and visible as the result of legalisation. This counter move was achieved through the closure of the open drug scene and the limitation of outdoor sex work to 14 authorised street portions. Although sex work has been legal in Switzerland since 1992, providing that the person concerned has reached the age of consent (18 years), is acting of her/his own free will and offers the services independently, the Swiss political system allowed the cantons and cities to develop a more restrictive legal framework than the federal one. This is the case in Zurich, where the city formulated a law on sex work, whilst the canton of Zurich only draws on the Federal Penal Code to regulate the sex market (Chimienti and Bugnion 2017).

The municipal law defines where and when sex work can take place. This space-time limitation concerns both indoor and outdoor sex work. In 1991, the city authorities issued a '*Strichplan*' that identified 14 streets, dedicated to street-walkers, where they were allowed to propose sexual services from 7 pm to 5 am. Outside these areas and times, the penalties for street prostitution could be as high as 460 euros. These areas were situated mostly in the centre of the city. Legal indoor prostitution faced fewer limitations and was spread throughout the whole city, with large concentrations on the periphery.

The regeneration plan in Langstrasse (1995–2015): the struggle against open drug scenes, sex work and the entertainment businesses

Although *Kreis 4* (District 4) was not included in the *Strichplan* and street prostitution was prohibited in this central area, different forms of sex work have developed in Zurich's Langstrasse and Sihlquai districts. The area was, and still is, known for its

variety of businesses (sex work, restaurants, clubs, banks) mixed with residential functions and a higher number of foreigners with lower socio-economic means (39.8 per cent in 2001; see Statistik Stadt Zürich 2013). The area is also known for its open drug policy. During the 1980s and 1990s, the city tolerated illicit 'open drug scenes' near the railway station and in Letten and Limmatplatz (also part of Districts 4 and 5). Between 1980 and 1995 the number of drug users increased, as they came from all over Switzerland to Zurich – 30 per cent were estimated to come from outside the canton of Zurich and 15 per cent from outside Switzerland (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2011, 11). This situation led the authorities to prohibit the open scenes, first in 1991 at Platzspitz and then in 1995 at Letten (2011, 12). As a consequence of closing down the activity of drug-dealing, sex work also displaced itself a bit further out towards Langstrasse/Silhqai. In 1995, Zurich's city authorities estimated that there were 90 massage parlours in District 4 and that street prostitution was visibly increasing (2011, 55). This development was framed by the authorities as an unwanted consequence of the 'Amsterdamisation' of the neighbourhood and it became the basis for a regeneration plan for the Langstrasse (2011, 55):

The 'noise, carbon emissions due to the high levels of traffic and industry, the lack of green or open spaces and play areas, high speculative pressure with correspondingly high rents and, in the last decade or so, the increase of the drugs scene and sex work' in this neighbourhood resulted in a lack of 'integration and increasing anonymity' among the population, 'decreasing social control and therefore increasing (illegal) trade – irregular prostitution or sex shops and clubs, bars, drug-dealing, etc. – and a high crime rate' (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2011, 12).

Unlike the Wallen area, the RLD in District 4 was seen neither as a tourist attraction nor as a profitable market but as a social risk, making the gentrification process evolve very differently. The closure of the drug scene was followed by the repression of sex work in the area and, more recently, debate has focused on the night-time economy. In order to stop this punitive trend, the city of Zurich developed, between 1995 and 1998, an initial project in the neighbourhood entitled *Project Pro Langstrasse Quartier*; this was followed in 2001 by a second project which lasted ten years and was finally transformed into a new law on sex work in 2012.

Pro Langstrasse Quartier and Langstrasse Plus: repression of the open drug scene and street prostitution

The aim of the project *Pro Langstrasse Quartier* is to improve the 'quality' of life and work in this neighbourhood. Two of the measures evaluated positively after the three first years were to limit the traffic and to implement night-driving restrictions (e.g. a lowered speed limit and barriers preventing 'access to cars at night in some streets'). The other measures concerned the repression of drug-dealing and consumption as well as illegal sex work. This did not succeed as hoped, despite the intensification of police interventions (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich

2011, 13). According to the police, the *Langstrasse* neighbourhood would soon have become yet another open drug scene without the constant control of the police (2011, 12). When asked about the reasons for banning street prostitution, a city state representative made it clear that:

The conditions of prostitution in Zurich were in part unbearable: the street prostitution was associated with drug-addicted prostitutes in the *Silhquai* area. Between them, street prostitution and the open drug scene had become an intolerable burden for the neighbourhood. The prostitutes were often exposed to violence and rape was common. There was no infrastructure and the working conditions were insanitary, unsafe and very dangerous, because the women have to follow their clients and practice in uncontrolled places.

While there was some consensus between the city government, residents of the neighbourhood and the associations for the defence of sex-workers' rights about the worsening of sanitary conditions, these latter associations regret that the only solution has been to ban street prostitution from this area. This has resulted in sex-workers becoming less visible and more at risk of violence and exploitation, as explained below by Rebecca Angelini from the FIZ, an association providing advocacy and support to migrant women and victims of trafficking in Zurich:

It would have been possible instead, for instance, to increase social work offers and implement more cleaning measures in order to limit the problems... Instead the authorities were watching the situation and let it worsen. [...] Street prostitution is not problematic per se; for instance I am not aware of any problems in the old town where street prostitution still takes place [...] *Silquai* was a good place for street prostitution because it was very central and part of the all-night life, there was social control and sex-workers were close to their rooms; it was very practical, it was reachable on foot and by bus [...] It was much easier to investigate for trafficking cases. Now they say that trafficking has decreased but it is because it is less visible than before.

For the FIZ the banning of sex work was less related to the risk of violence faced by sex-workers or nuisances than to the fact that the sex market was seen as less profitable for both the residents of the neighbourhood and the city government. In other words, for Rebecca Angelini, the ban was less about preventing crime than about increasing the real-estate value of this area.

In fact, the driver for the prohibition of street prostitution in the neighbourhood came from the residents, who complained, via a petition in 1999 concerning street prostitution and illicit drug activities, that there was now a strong risk of devaluation of their flats. As in the De Wallen case, we see that the residents were crucial to the activation of the regeneration plan (Hubbard 2004; Papayanis 2000; Smith 1996). This coincides with revanchist arguments made by a new population (including fewer foreigners than before and a more-creative class; see Statistik Stadt Zürich 2013) in a (former) deprived neighbourhood that tends to reject a less-privileged way of living and, among others, street prostitution (Pitcher et al. 2006).

As a response the municipal authorities implemented another project to 'regenerate' the neighbourhood – *Langstrasse PLUS*. The aim of this project was

to change the image of the neighbourhood and provide it with a 'new identity' (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2011, 16). The city wanted, initially, to increase police controls, but this proved impossible as the police forces were already outnumbered at that time. Instead the city cut back on sex-trade establishments by buying up real estate and redeveloping it into standard flats, offices or so-called 'unproblematic entertainment industry' outlets such as trendy bars. To achieve this, the City of Zurich implemented zoning regulations in 2001 which limited the implementation of brothels, and led to a closure of 50 of them and their reallocation as residential flats.

Evaluation of Project *Langstrasse PLUS* highlights the successful realisation of its initial aims in all areas except sex work. The report mentions that intervention by the police was not enough to control street prostitution and that a change in the law and a more general intervention beyond the level of the neighbourhood was needed (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2011, 30–31). As a result the city set up, in 2006, a specific project focused on the sex market: the *Projekt Rotlicht* or 'red-light district'.

Project Rotlicht: the repression of all forms of sex work in the area and their displacement to the periphery

As in the Wallen area, the trafficking rhetoric was used to justify the repression of sex work in Zurich. The first target of the *Projekt Rotlicht* was to tackle trafficking, which was presumed to have increased based on the increase in the number of sex-workers from Hungary in the area. The authorities clearly associated this type of sex work with trafficking (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2011, 30–31). This led to investigations by, among others, the association responsible at the time for social work in the sex boxes redistributed to the periphery of the city but no convincing evidence was forthcoming (Flora Dora et al. 2012). For associations in defence of sex-workers' rights – such as FIZ, Aspasia or Xenia – the number of trafficking cases was linked to the earlier visibility of sex work and to their subsequent decrease in number due to their now lack of visibility. According to the city authorities, the expansion in the number of sex-workers was seen to be the cause of a deterioration in living and working conditions in the neighbourhood (Stadt Zürich 2012). The authorities also feared that the increase in the number of sex-workers would lead to a price war which would increase the risk of exploitation, violence and health issues (Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2011). Based on this rationale, the City Council decided to displace street prostitution to the periphery (Altstetten) and create a controlled space for outdoor sex work. Semi-indoor parking lots in the periphery of the city in the case of sex work and legal-injection premises in the case of drug consumption were implemented with the idea of managing the market in a delimited and therefore more controllable area.

As the displacement of sex work to the periphery cost more than 2 million euros – and around 100,000 euros per year to maintain – the City Council

needed the approbation of the population, in accordance with the Swiss federal and direct democracy system. In March 2012, a new law on sex work (Prostitutionsgewerbeverordnung, PGVO 2012) was put to the vote, and the population of the city of Zurich adopted it by 52.6 per cent. Twenty years of urban regeneration in the area had clearly changed the population's tolerance levels for sex work, and they demanded the ban of its more visible element – street prostitution. The success of the implementation of the regeneration plan in Zurich can be explained by the involvement of the residents of the neighbourhood – which obviously included a minority of sex-workers who were thus able to defend their views. The plan's democratic acceptance via a vote by the population meant that the displacement of the RLD to the periphery could not be fought by sex-workers or their allies. Unlike in the Wallen area, no mobilisation took place against the dismantling of the RLD in the urban centre.

Since the new law has been introduced, some street prostitution has been moved to the periphery of the city, with the aim of gentrifying the RLD – including its massage parlours and champagne bars. Since then, only three areas of outdoor sex work are allowed in the city. Someone suspected of soliciting in the street outside the authorised zones has to leave the RLD for 14 days. The police controls have increased and the number of evictions of sex-workers (*Wegweisung*) from the RLD went up from 7 in 2010 to 828 cases in 2011 (see Polizeidepartement der Stadt Zürich 2013). The police also reintroduced a former law which prohibited sex-workers from establishing massage parlours in neighbourhoods with more than 50 per cent residential occupation. This decreases the sex market and restricts small massage parlours run by one or two people in favour of bigger ones, where sex-workers might be less independent (FIZ et al. 2013).

Today the regeneration plan of the *Langstrasse* has taken a step further. While complaints over the past 20 years have focused on problems related to the open drug scene and street sex work, they are now concerned with the entertainment business – as if the neighbourhood could not afford any more diversity at a time of economic crisis and housing inflation. For the urban sociologist and geographer Christian Schmid, the regeneration plan becomes a foolish quest for urban 'domestication' where opposite economic interests come to the fore:

They are (...) two different economic interests: behind the residents are home-owners. You want a neighbourhood that is attractive for wealthy tenants. And behind the party-goers are the interests of the club-owners. You want an attractive nightlife area. However, what we see today is only the latest version of a dispute that has lasted for decades (Interview with Schmid, NZZ, 26 May 2015, our translation).

The risk is that the regeneration plan will lead not to affordable flats but to expensive ones and to more profitable offices, whilst activities that do not fit with the conservative and puritanical Zurich image or that benefit poorer minorities are encouraged to disappear or are displaced to the periphery. In this process of 'commodification of the urban', urbanity is seen as a 'consumer good' instead of a right for all (see Schmid 2012).

Conclusion

If we look at how Amsterdam and Zurich are regenerating their RLDs, there are both similarities and also interesting differences to be noted. In Zurich, sex work has now been limited to a few zones in a somewhat deprived area, District 4 (*Kreis*). This peripheral location makes sex work less visible, but still controllable. Amsterdam's RLD is situated in the touristic part of the city. Its existence and extreme visibility represents for many people all over the world the liberal context of the Netherlands. However Amsterdam's RLD is now in the process of becoming less visible as the City of Amsterdam is currently closing down a large number of prostitution windows and is in the process of upgrading and transforming empty brothels into 'more highbrow' entertainment venues. There are no legal alternatives offered to sex-workers from the area who are losing their workspaces.

In terms of timing, there are also differences between the cities under study. The regeneration plan of the Zurich RLDs started 20 years earlier than in Amsterdam and it took quite some time before the dispersal was realised. What is more, there is hardly any mobilisation by sex-workers. In Amsterdam sex-workers have protested against the recent urban regeneration. The cleansing here started with the abolishing of visible drug consumption already in the 1980s and slowly moved towards the removal of sex-workers in the mid-2000s. Both cases however show that the urban regeneration of RLDs is a delicate process. The paradox involved in cleansing popular RLDs in the city centre is that the area also needs to remain 'sparkling' and offer a certain 'thrill' to keep its attraction. Mariska Majoor, from the Prostitution Information Centre (PIC), who used to work in Amsterdam's RLD as a sex-worker herself illustrates this by saying:

The Wallen area (RLD) is one of the most special places on earth, just because sex work is integrated into ordinary life. Everything goes together here. I think it is important to keep this in place as an example for the rest of the world. The idea of upgrading and turning the area into a yuppie paradise is to me like turning the area into a one-of-a-kind neighbourhood, just like anywhere else.

Another effect of closing down visible RLDs that is not widely discussed is that the division between moral and amoral spaces enables and upholds the distinction between respectable and disrespectable women, deviants and mainstream society. In current discourse, sex work is increasingly perceived as amoral and criminogenic whereas, up until recently, regulated sex work was often associated in both cities with labour emancipation and progressive liberal values. The city governments' attempts to clean up both RLDs is a clear example of how the city symbolically tries to impose its moral authority. This reassertion of moral order and the cleaning up of public space fits the wider discussion on the revanchist city (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008).

New problems may arise for sex-workers when their workspaces are closed down and they are forced to work in other, less visible, areas. Being removed to less-accessible spaces might result in a loss of income. Moreover, the loss of

visibility around sex work might decrease the level of acceptance of and tolerance towards sex-workers because of a lack of everyday interaction with others in the area. The cities of Amsterdam and Zurich talk about re-appreciating the historic value of the area but argue that sex-workers do not, or no longer, fit that image. This is worrying because sex workers have always been part of the urban landscape. In the current urban regeneration we see that certain types of sex work are commodified and translated into marketing campaigns in everyday and normal ways, which indicates that there is an increasing acceptance of sex and sex work. At the same time, however, there is another discourse in which sex work is considered as a serious 'problem'. In this particular discourse we see the re-introduction of old gender stereotypes around sex work. When the workspaces of sex-workers in Amsterdam's RLDs, for example, are replaced by fake brothels which function as museums to inform tourists about the (wrongdoings of the) sex industry, it is clear that the area is no longer accessible to sex-workers but is, primarily, aimed at 'decent' visitors and their 'bourgeois gender orders', defined as moral and normal (Ruhne 2014). Here the former pragmatic position that existed before in the two cities has largely been replaced by a more normative approach and moral arguments dominate the new discourse on sex work (again) (see also Huisman and Nelen 2014).

The new race and gender order that is created as the result of these spatial practices is increasing inequalities between sex-workers as well as stigmatising them as a group as if they were all the victims of ruthless criminals who exploit their sexual services. In this sense the right to the city may be redefined as the right to urban space – that is, the right to participate in the transformation of space, to control investment there and also to impose one's own unique moral order and fight back against gender stereotypes.

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Notes on contributors

Ilse van Liempt is an assistant professor in Urban Geography and Qualitative Research at the University of Utrecht in the Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning. Her research is centred around irregular migration, smuggling, trafficking, and in/exclusion in public space. Her publications include: *'From Regulated Tolerance to Control: Prostitution Policy in the Netherlands'* with Sietske Altink and Marjan Wijers in Jahnsen, S and Wagenaar, H. (eds) *Assessing European Prostitution Policies*, London: Routledge, forthcoming, *Human Rights and Migration: Trafficking for Forced Labour* edited together with Christien van den Anker, Palgrave MacMillan (2012), and 'Different geographies and experiences of 'assisted' types of migration. A gendered critique on the distinction between trafficking and smuggling, *Gender, Place and Culture*, 18 (2): 179–193).

Milena Chimienti is professor of sociology at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, School of Social Work Geneva. She has researched and written on the sociology of migration and sex work since the late 1990s. Her latest publications include: 'A continuum of sexual economic exchanges' or 'weak agency'? Female migrant sex work in Switzerland' with M. Lieber (In Skilbrei M-L., Spanger M., *Unpacking the Meaning of Sex for Sale*, London: Routledge, forthcoming); 'Swiss policy on prostitution: a regulation system close to the ground' with G. Bugnion (In Jahnsen, S and Wagenaar, H. (eds) *Assessing European Prostitution Policies*, London: Routledge, forthcoming); 'How do international human rights influence national healthcare provisions for irregular migrants? A case study in France and the UK' with John Solomos (*Journal of Human Rights*, 2015).

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