ARTICLE

Red light gentrification in Soho, London and De Wallen, Amsterdam

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Abstract

Many European city centres have seen increasing investment in the last decades, and policies have targeted centrally-located red light districts in particular for regeneration and clean-up. The literature tends to discuss these interventions and the associated social changes in terms of state-led gentrification. While such a classification may serve critical inquiry, we argue that the use of the concept may also entail certain assumptions regarding the future of these areas: their eventual demise as diverse areas with sex-related economic activities. Through a qualitative study of long-term residents, visitors and entrepreneurs in Soho, London and De Wallen, Amsterdam, we highlight how different changes are experienced depending on a person's positioning. We also identify how locals exert some control over how these processes play out. The outcome, for the time being, has been a continuation of red light activities, albeit modified and adapted to the preferences of new residents, visitors, large investors and the state. For these reasons, we argue that the process and its outcomes should be understood as a distinct mode of neighbourhood change, namely 'red light gentrification'. Our conceptualisation of gentrification as a locally embedded process demonstrates that the outcomes of state and market pressures are more contingent on local context than ideal-typical or policy-based understandings allow.

Keywords Amsterdam · Displacement · Gentrification · London · Prostitution · Red light district · Urban policy

Red light districts (RLDs) have always been paradoxical urban areas; they have been marginalised and romanticised, avoided and frequented, opposed and cherished. They are spaces of banal consumption, but also 'exalted spaces' and 'landscapes of excitement and ecstasy' (Burgers 2000, p.151). In recent decades, however, their existence has progressively come under threat. As cities have increasingly become centres of capital accumulation (Smith 1996; Zukin et al. 2016), RLDs, which are often associated with sexual

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exploitation, immorality and criminality, represent an eyesore for municipalities. Cities such as Hong Kong, Taipei, Montreal and Antwerp have instituted policies aimed at transforming their RLDs by, among other things, limiting the number of sexually-oriented businesses and investing in real estate (Cheng 2016). These policies have been criticised as attempts to 'clean up' RLDs, removing 'undesirables' to make way for new investments, middle class residents and new consumption spaces (Hubbard 2004; Sanders-McDonagh et al. 2016).

Multiple reports have conceptualised these policies and their effects as (state-led) gentrification (e.g. Aalbers and Deinema 2012; Sasajima 2013; Neuts et al. 2014; Weitzer and Boels 2015; Van Liempt and Chimienti 2017). Such a framework allows for a critical analysis of *state policy*. However, the use of gentrification as a concept for neighbourhood change may also bring a set of assumptions about how the process plays out: as long-term, lower-income residents, shops and amenities are displaced and more affluent residents and businesses come in, the neighbourhood will eventually lose its character. In our case, neighbourhoods will cease to be 'red light'. While such complete transformations have been observed (e.g. Sasajima 2013; Cheng 2016), this paper questions whether the demise of RLDs as sites of sex-related activities and businesses is a foregone conclusion (cf. Ashworth et al. 1988; Hubbard and Whowell 2008). We conceptualise gentrification as a process, rather than as a state strategy, to gain insight into how changes actually play out locally.

To understand neighbourhood changes in centrally-located RLDs, our research focuses on two European cities: Amsterdam and London. Through a qualitative study of local experiences, this research shows how neighbourhood changes related to state and housing market pressures are interpreted differently by different local actors. Depending on their 'stake', they may express feelings of loss and displacement, but might also resist or adapt to changing circumstances. A key assumption in this paper is that local actors are positioned, or position themselves, in relation to two different types of change: the transformation of urban space for more affluent users (gentrification, or in the case of attracting visitors, 'tourism gentrification'; Cocola Gant 2018), and the eradication and displacement of sexually-oriented businesses and activities ('normalisation'). For various locals, these processes may be materially and symbolically different.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The literature section further conceptualises the changes in RLDs and discusses displacement and responses. Following the methods section, we present our empirical work on experiences of loss of place, and how some local actors are resisting or adapting. These change-dependent practices are discussed in the penultimate section. Our conclusion argues that the processes in both areas may be understood as 'red light gentrification'.

1 Changing red light districts

Aalbers and Deinema (2012) define an RLD as a district where 'prostitution is heavily concentrated and somewhat visible in a specific area of a city' (p.129). Despite the increasing offer of escorts, online chatrooms and other types of services 'which can be purchased at a distance' (Hubbard and Whowell 2008, p.1744), RLDs still retain their function as places where sexual services are bought and sold. Yet, these areas are undergoing change. Many western cities have implemented policies that restrict the number of sexually-oriented businesses in city centres (Aalbers and Deinema 2012; Hubbard and Whowell 2008;

Cheng 2016; Künkel 2017; Sanders-McDonagh et al. 2016). Policy efforts tend to stress the immorality, crime and danger of RLDs (Sanders-McDonagh et al. 2016), effectively striving towards a 'normalisation' of such neighbourhoods. Because such efforts are combined with initiatives designed to transform these areas to accommodate more 'affluent users' (Hackworth 2002), i.e. new residents and tourists, they have been discussed in terms of state-led gentrification. Yet, given the fact that selling sex is highly profitable and RLDs have been acknowledged as successful urban entertainment economies, it has also been argued that the policy rationales for displacing the sex-related industry are not solely related to economic concerns (Hubbard 2004). Rather, the sex industry is seen as an immoral business with criminal associations, thus it needs to be 'eliminated from the sight of the affluent' whom municipalities are trying to attract (ibid., p.1698). Policy efforts in RLDs thus often aim to attract more 'desirable' residents and businesses to replace the less desirable. This state-led normalisation is often related to the process of gentrification, but given the means and the intended outcomes, we view these efforts as a distinct process.

With changes in the institutional and urban context, RLDs are also undergoing a transformation in themselves. Strategically situated in city centres, they attract visitors and tourists from home and abroad, turning sex and 'immorality' into a commodified entertainment good for mass consumption (Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Chapuis 2017). Having recognised the potential to capitalise on urban growth and tourism, sexually-oriented businesses themselves have also played a role in local change. The majority of 'sleazy' strip clubs, cheap peep shows and seedy sex shops have been turned into professionally-run companies that offer 'adult entertainment' for mass consumption (Crewe and Martin 2017; Hubbard and Whowell 2008). The shift from 'traditional', small-scale RLDs catering to a local clientele towards entertainment and tourist economies has made such areas attractive for investment.

Based on various pressures, we may draw an analytical distinction between two sets of tendencies, leading to four ideal-typical processes.[1] First, processes that seek to eradicate sexually-oriented businesses are often related to suppressive state actions and policies, though local residents and entrepreneurs may also call for suppression and policing (Hubbard and Sanders 2003). These efforts constitute a normalisation of urban space, i.e. transformation into an area that conforms to social norms. The transformation of urban space to accommodate more affluent users may contribute to the displacement of (lower-end) sexually-oriented businesses and unwanted residents. Such a process is close to ideal-typical gentrification. Yet, there may also be a retention of sexually-oriented businesses, as entrepreneurs adapt to changing circumstances. This is what we conceptualise as red light gentrification. Lastly, there may also be active efforts to secure the preservation of the social ecology, meaning opposition to both the suppression of sexually-oriented activities and the displacement of lower income residents and businesses (see below).

2 Displacement

Our typology of changes in RLDs serves to analyse how various local actors are positioned, or how they position themselves, in view of the eradication of sexually-oriented activities and the transformations that aim to accommodate more affluent users. Concerning

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[1] While these are often integrated in policy actions, RLDs may also be confronted with just one.

the latter, there is literature that deals with the displacement effects of gentrification (e.g. Marcuse 1985; Davidson and Lees 2010; Van Criekingen 2008; Hochstenbach and Van Gent 2015). In addition to physical relocation and housing market exclusion, displacement may be conceptualised as the dispossession experienced by the remaining residents. As an area changes, the remaining locals may experience *displacement pressure* (Marcuse, 1985). Residents may feel pressured to leave as the amenities and social networks they used to rely on disappear, while new amenities and retail catering to households with different consumption patterns appear (ibid., p.207; see also Davidson and Lees 2010; Hubbard 2018). Put differently, when residents experience a mismatch between their own identity and that of the area, their sense of neighbourhood belonging, defined as 'the degree to which residents feel at home in and identify with a neighbourhood', decreases (Pinkster 2016, p.873).

State actions that target sex work and sexually-oriented businesses may have a separate and additional impact on locals' sense of belonging in RLDs. Sex workers often struggle with social stigmatisation in policy (see Weitzer 2018), which can have a spatial element. By labelling a neighbourhood an exceptional territory of immorality, crime and danger, authorities are able to legitimise special measures, such as area-based interventions that differentiate between deserving and undeserving residents (Wacquant 2007). Sakizlioglu and Uitermark (2014) view such strategies as part of the symbolic politics of gentrification, whereby the state uses its performative powers to impose stigma onto a deprived neighbourhood (p.1370), which may lead to displacement pressure on 'undesirable' locals (Sanders-McDonagh et al. 2016).

Both change tendencies (Table 1) may lead to physical displacement as well as displacement pressure. Yet, when evaluating changes in an area's commercial and public space, long-time residents and locals may also appreciate new amenities and investments (Freeman 2006; Doucet 2009). Some locals may also feel pressured by sexually-oriented activities in their neighbourhood. Their presence may be related to drug- and crime-related nuisances and public disturbances (Smith 1996), and the sex workers and their customers may be characterised as deviant 'others' (Kingston 2009). Indeed, some communities have organised against such activities, calling for policy action and regulation (Hubbard and Sanders 2003).

3 Control, resistance and preservation

Neighbourhood change may exert pressure on locals. Yet, such pressures are not necessarily pre-structured by class or ethnicity. Paton (2013) maintains that despite varying social positions, most people share similar neighbourhood preferences, values and enjoyments, and may welcome new amenities and investments equally. Feelings of loss are not necessarily caused by the new facilities or physical changes in view of social class, but should be understood in terms of power, agency and control (ibid.; also Tissot 2014; Pinkster 2016). Lower classes have less 'control' over their own movement and are therefore less able to secure activities that ensure social reproduction outside of the neighbourhood (Paton 2013). The focus on control implies that anxieties over neighbourhood change are not inherent to any class position. For instance, recent research on the effects of gentrification and tourism in Amsterdam's city centre has shown that affluent long-term residents may also experience loss of belonging as a consequence of the influx of new residents and visitors (Pinkster and Boterman 2017). The extent to which residents and other locals are spatially 'fixed' therefore influences how they relate to neighbourhood change. Financial resources, social networks and property rights allow locals to engage with or oppose

Table 1 Typology of neighbourhood change in Red Light Districts

	Eradication of sexually-oriented businesses and activities	Retention of sexually-oriented businesses and activities
Similar 'users' (residents, businesses, visitors)	Normalisation of neighbourhood	Continuation or preservation of social ecology and commercial activities
Transformation to accommodate more affluent 'users'	Ideal-typical gentrification in terms of commercial and residential change	Red-light gentrification; upscaling of sexually-oriented activities in addition to broader commercial and residential change

changes. Hence, affluent long-time residents in Amsterdam are able to mount opposition by mobilising local politicians (Couzy 2017).

More generally, resisting displacement is often contingent on high levels of social organising, where coalition-building and inter-class solidarity lead to new political spaces (Annunziata and Lees 2016). Such resistance may come from long-time residents and entrepreneurs, though some newcomers, including gentrifiers themselves, may also actively oppose changes. Brown-Saracino (2007) characterises this last group as 'social preservationists'. They value the strong ties of long-time residents and businesses among each other and with the locale, as well as the shared traditions, as expressed in customary trades and cultural events. As such, these affluent newcomers position themselves outside of an imagined community of authentic and 'virtuous' marginality. While they actively defend the interests of long-term residents, they also make selections regarding who belongs in that community, often remaining unaware of alternative long-term residents or even opposing their interests (Brown-Saracino 2007; see also Tissot 2014). Lastly, in RLDs we may also see opposition from sex workers. They may organise to fight the state-led suppression and stigmatisation of sex work (Mathieu 2003; Weitze, 2018). Owners and managers in the sexually-oriented business may join such resistance when their interests overlap (Weitzer 2012).

4 Studying two red light districts

To study neighbourhood change in RLDs in Western European cities, we conducted a qualitative study in Soho, London and De Wallen, Amsterdam. As RLDs are also sites of business and entertainment, our study does not only include (former) residents but also individuals who frequent the area often and are intimately familiar with it. Some visitors, employees or entrepreneurs may have 'resided' in a neighbourhood for such a long time and with such intensity that they feel like it is 'theirs' (Lofland 1973). They can be locals, such as a regular at a neighbourhood café, or a café owner who has a financial stake but who also spends the majority of his time in his bar, interacting with colleagues, customers and residents. What these actors have in common is that they have social ties in the neighbourhood that make them 'fixed to place'. Typically, they are place-based stakeholders with a sense of belonging, who may be affected by processes of gentrification and normalisation.

Fieldwork was conducted between September 2016 and April 2017. The first author paid regular visits to both neighbourhoods. In addition to observation, the fieldwork

Table 2 Amsterdam respondents

	Pseudonym	Relation to neighbourhood
1	Eva	Resident (owner) and activist
2	Sterre	Resident (owner)
3	Romy	Resident (owner)
4	Rob	Resident (tenant) and gallery owner
5	Mieke	Café owner
6	Jaap	Sex show owner
7	Maartje	Brothel owner
8	Michel	Resident (tenant) and bar employee
9	Simon	Resident (owner)
10	Jasper	Brothel owner
11	Cedric	Local tour guide, former police officer in the area
12	Joop	Regular visitor, former police officer in the area
13	Jeanette	Property investor in the area
14	Linda	Resident (tenant)
15	Simone	Chair of the business owners association

Table 3 London respondents

	Pseudonym	Relation to neighbourhood
1	Lili	Café owner
2	Lydia	Locally-based artist, former store-owner and resident
3	Paulo	Sex shop owner
4	Bert	Resident (tenant) and locally-based artist
5	Tracy	Café owner
6	Brian	Resident of adjacent neighbourhood, locally-active activist, employed in Soho in 1970s
7	Leon	Resident (owner) and Soho activist
8	Peter	Property investor
9	Graham	Locally-based artist
10	Joseph	Café regular (40 years)
11	Robbie	Market stall holder
12	Sophie	Resident (tenant) and Soho activist
13	Sam	Film-maker based in Soho
14	Elio	Café owner

consisted of informal conversations with various residents, shop employees, café owners and regular visitors. These encounters were used to ask about neighbourhood attachment and views on changes in the area. Based on these conversations and encounters, several locals who had been 'residing' in the neighbourhoods for at least ten years were invited to semi-structured, sit-down interviews. Several local investors and entrepreneurs were also contacted for interviews. In general, we attempted to interview a mix of respondents with different stakes and roles in the neighbourhood.

In total, we collected 27 interviews with 29 locals; 15 in Amsterdam and 14 in London. Tables 2 and 3 provide an overview of respondents and their relation to the

neighbourhoods. The interviews focused on their relationship and attachment to the area, and to what extent, and how, change in the RLDs was perceived. Respondents were also asked how they practically engaged with change. The data, complemented by newspaper articles and policy documents, were analysed by coding recurring themes. Additionally, interviews were held with an Amsterdam municipal policymaker and one expert on sex work and regulation in Soho.

5 (Re-)Development of Soho and De Wallen

During the period of urban disinvestment in the 1960s and 1970s (and before), both Soho and De Wallen were known for their vibrant communities of migrants, artists and others in search of opportunities and drawn by cheap housing prices. Both neighbourhoods had already become well-visited entertainment districts, offering a wide variety of sexually-oriented businesses as well as other forms of entertainment (theatre, gambling and bars). Respondents remember their RLDs as closely-knit informal economies, where many residents and entrepreneurs profited from the presence of sex-oriented businesses. While running a brothel was illegal in both countries at the time, the businesses operated on the condition of the authorities 'looking the other way' (Hubbard 2004, p.1963). In a way, the sex-related industry was already transforming both neighbourhoods by turning them into spaces of consumption for visitors. As economic recession and urban decline set in in the 1970s, and continued up to the 1990s, Soho and De Wallen saw disinvestment and faced an increasing presence of drug dealers and users (Parker1986; Clark 2015). During the 1980s and 1990s, a growth in illegal activities such as drug dealing, human trafficking and money laundering made both districts infamous as 'no-go areas'.

More recent decades, however, have seen increasing market and tourist pressures on both city centres, making them more popular spaces for living and consumption. As the cities 'resurged', their RLDs were subjected to urban policies seeking to 'regenerate' them (Smith, 1996). Around 2000, both municipalities started to actively 'regenerate' the RLDs by limiting the number of sexually-oriented businesses and seeking private developers to invest in the neighbourhoods (Aalbers and Sabat 2012; Hubbard 2004; Sanders-McDonagh et al. 2016; Van Liempt and Chimienti 2017).

Soho transformed more rapidly than De Wallen, where sex-related activities have remained more conspicuous. This difference is arguably related to urban context and legal frameworks. In London, processes of gentrification had already been observed in the 1960s, and the city's economic restructuring has accelerated the demand for housing considerably since the 1980s (Hamnett 2003). Meanwhile, the effects of gentrification remained relatively modest in Amsterdam until the 2000s, when the municipality started to actively implement housing market restructuring (Van Gent 2013). Furthermore, operating a brothel is illegal in the UK, while the Dutch ban on brothels was lifted in 2000, which legalised part of the policy-maligned activities in De Wallen.

In Soho, regeneration efforts are the outcome of a collaboration between the local city council and a number of private investors. Previously run-down properties have been converted into luxury apartments, while seedy sex show theatres have transformed into exclusive erotic nightclubs (Fig. 1). Furthermore, the city council has aimed to attract more affluent residents by privatising social housing (Sanders-McDonagh et al. 2016) and actively monitoring undesirable activities such as rough sleeping and drug dealing (Westminster

Fig. 1 The former cabaret and burlesque night club Madame Jojo's is being renovated to accommodate a more affluent clientele (photo by R. Stam)

City Council 2016). As rent prices have risen, many of the smaller shops and bars that catered to the former Soho community have struggled to make ends meet.

Amsterdam's RLD has seen similar interventions, although prostitution is still a highly visible commercial activity. In 2007, the municipality launched *Project 1012*, named after the area's postal code. The project focused on dismantling the criminal infrastructure, reducing the clustering of 'criminogenic and low quality enterprises', and creating a more qualitative and diverse area (City of Amsterdam 2016). At the time of study,

the project aimed to close down 38 of the 83 window brothels and 31 of the 74 coffee-shops by 2018. In doing so, the municipality hopes to contribute to the 'liveability' of the neighbourhood and to rebrand Amsterdam's image as a city of cheap pleasures. Through a combination of public and private investments, brothels, sex shops and coffeeshops have been replaced by gourmet restaurants, fashion boutiques and artisanal coffee shops. Next to investments, both municipalities have used licensing as a tool to limit prostitution and attract more affluent users of the neighbourhoods (Hubbard et al. 2009), which has led to the displacement of sexually-oriented businesses. Yet, some remain.

6 Experiencing neighbourhood changes

6.1 The influx of more affluent users

When asked about neighbourhood change, different views became apparent. Some respondents were positive about the changing commercial composition, as they felt that the neighbourhood had more to offer them. One resident who had lived in De Wallen for 33 years and had owned a gallery for five years said:

> I think it is getting better and better in terms of what the neighbourhood has to offer. In the beginning they weren't sure what to do, so they were just buying brothels and putting fashion designers in there. That didn't make any sense. But now some nice stores have moved in… a book club, the Topnotch coffee place, those kinds of things. (Rob, De Wallen)

The owner of a popular bar which has been operating in Soho since 1891 said:

> Soho was very different around that time [1970s], there were a lot of nasty clubs called clip joints that would steal your money. They were just a cover-up for invol-untary prostitution. I was happy when they were all closed down. (Lili, Soho)

Yet, Rob and Lili, like many interviewees, also had their reservations. When discussing concerns over neighbourhood change, many respondents mentioned the loss of an 'authentic' character. These respondents portrayed the 'red light character' as a unique feature of their neighbourhood. Two important features of this were the 'live and let live' mentality of the neighbourhood and the strong sense of community. Allowing activities which were unlikely to be tolerated elsewhere was often discussed as a condition *sine qua non* for an RLD. For a time, these areas were home to bohemians and mar-ginalised groups, notably LGBTQH + people.

> You know, people were attracted to Soho because they could find acceptance here. No matter who you were or where you came from, you could become a part of the Soho community. It was just the most exciting place to be on earth. Now, it's just loud and boring. (Lydia, Soho)

The inclusive character was mentioned frequently by respondents. Many referred to the 1970s, when the RLDs were known simultaneously as no-go areas and places of excitement and freedom. Back then, these areas attracted young creative people in search of low housing prices, as well as smart entrepreneurs (in the sex industry) who appre-ciated the area's commercial potential. These newcomers integrated quickly into the existing composition of residents and entrepreneurs which represented the 'authentic'

character of the neighbourhood. Many residents expressed nostalgia and would remember times when neighbours knew each other and there were always 'eyes on the street'. Contrary to policy discourse, they saw the RLD as 'one of the safest places in the city to walk around at night'. A resident of De Wallen said:

> When a bartender moved to work at another place within the neighbourhood, the neighbours would create a path of tea lights from the one place to the other. Can you imagine this happening now? It would be impossible. No one knows each other anymore… the streets are too crowded with strangers. (Linda, De Wallen)

Such reminiscing may be rose-tinted and nostalgic, but it is also a testament to these respondents' fixity to place. Interestingly, these characterisations (strong local social ties, economic activities and the red light identity) are very similar to what is deemed 'authentic' in the social preservation ideology commonly found among affluent gentrifiers (Brown-Saracino 2007), but here they are held by long-time locals. Such nostalgic reflections highlight how their belonging is threatened by the influx of more affluent newcomers in the present. These newcomers include the usual suspects like middle class professionals and entrepreneurs starting art galleries and cafés. In Amsterdam, such establishments include the coffee bar *Quartier Putain* and the popular bar *Mata Hari*. Despite the references in their names to the red light character, these businesses (and others) were seen as catering to a new and more affluent clientele. Other incoming businesses, such as souvenir stores, ice cream and waffle shops, and chain franchises, were criticised for being 'only for tourists'. As many residents saw their familiar shops and cafés disappear to make place for fashion boutiques or tourist-oriented shops, many of them felt like their neighbourhood was being transformed, to the detriment of its character.

While interviewees were ambivalent about commercial changes, 'corporate developers' and investors were generally seen as a major threat to the social life of the neighbourhood. Individuals or organisations buy up dwellings as an investment, often leaving them uninhabited or renting them out for short-term use (e.g. through Airbnb) (see Cocola Gant 2018). The owner of a local Soho café noted:

> People buying these flats do not actually live in there, it doesn't do any good for the community. […] We have always had a thriving community here, where everyone would watch each other. It's kind of sad that it's just being destroyed, that it doesn't seem to matter at all. (Lili, Soho)

While some mentioned worrying about physical displacement (see Tracy below), the main concern for interviewees who were secure in their tenure or did not live in the RLDs was about how new residents, tourists and commerce would undermine the authentic red light character.

6.2 Eradication of sexually-oriented activities

In addition to the influx of more affluent newcomers and visitors, the changing policies with regard to sexually-oriented businesses were perceived as a threat. Particularly locals who earned their income in the sex-related industry felt that stricter regulations were detrimental to the neighbourhood's character of tolerance. In Amsterdam, brothel owners and other entrepreneurs have been targeted by the *bibob* law from 2002, which restricted operating licenses for enterprises found to be maintaining any financial connections with 'criminal parties'. Brothels were also regulated more intensively. A brothel owner explained:

> The municipality has accused me of being a criminal, while I am just renting out rooms to women who work independently. I have to go and check on them three times a day. That is just ridiculous. I am paying thousands of Euros to fit [the municipality's] stupid rules. It is just a way for the municipality to get rid of us… no one seems to care that we have been here for generations. (Jan, De Wallen)

In Soho, workspaces suspected of functioning as illegal brothels, such as massage salons and houses offering 'model girls', have been raided by the police 'as part of an ongoing operation to tackle human trafficking, prostitution, firearms, immigration offences and money laundering' (Westminster City Council representative, quoted in Gillett 2016). As a consequence, the remaining sex workers, who see the brothels as the safest spaces in which to perform their work, live in fear of eviction (Topping 2013). Licensed sex shows have been targeted by stricter regulations, such as a minimum age for visitors, minimum clothing requirements, a maximum proximity to schools and security measures (Hubbard et al. 2009, p.193). Several sex shops selling pornographic films have been closed down and those that are still running are under strict surveillance. One resident who used to work in a sex shop said:

> There used to be so many unlicensed shops selling illegal porn from continental Europe. It used to be such good money, you know? I could leave work after three days with 3000 Pounds of wages. But now they have started to fine everyone… After a 5000 Pound fine, I decided to quit, it's not worth it anymore… (Paulo, Soho)

Locals who were not active in the sexually-oriented businesses and activities were not necessarily sympathetic to them, believing that problems such as human trafficking and involuntary prostitution had to be addressed. They were relieved to see problems in the sex industry being dealt with, as it made their neighbourhood a safer place. At the same time, a number were critical about the evictions of sex workers. They believed that the problems surrounding the sex-related industry had been caused by the disappearance of small-scale, family-owned businesses, and their replacement by large firms and the presence of international organised crime. Sex workers previously formed close communities, which provided a certain form of protection. As more small-scale brothels and sex shows were taken over by larger corporations and organisations, residents and entrepreneurs feared that the safe and friendly character of the sex industry would be replaced by anonymity, mass consumption and more involuntary prostitution. For this reason, many residents could see the need for policy and policing to address such issues. Still, many were critical about the negative effects:

> They are just sinning those girls, they are giving them a tough time. Well, if it doesn't go on in Soho, it will probably move somewhere else. It goes on in the suburbs, out of the eyes of politicians, who are supposed to keep up the morals or ethics of society… (Bert, Soho)

Similarly, an Amsterdam resident stated:

> I think closing brothels is not a solution to the problems with prostitution. I think it's safer for them to work behind a window than to be on the streets. (Sterre, De Wallen)

Not only were they critical about the evictions because of the stigmatisation and safety of sex workers, but they were also concerned that if the sex industry disappeared, the neighbourhood would no longer be the same and would cease to be an RLD. A long-term resident of De Wallen noted:

[…] the municipality promotes new businesses like Red Light Radio and Topnotch. I know someone who started a little shop in a former brothel and has been looked at by sex workers like, 'You are taking away our windows'.(Romy, De Wallen)

The changes in the sex-related industry, much like the influx of more affluent users, were seen by respondents as contributing to the vanishing of the area's tolerant character. In both neighbourhoods, several residents indicated that they would rather have a neighbourhood which was 'somewhat seedy but edgy' than one which was just 'busy and boring'. Yet, at the same time, multiple interviewees outside the sex-related industry were ambivalent towards such activities. While some forms of marginality were seen as inherent to the neighbourhood's character (prostitution in both RLDs, lower-end sex shops in Soho), there was also a preference for state control over these and other forms of marginality (cf. Tissot 2014).

7 Dealing with neighbourhood change

Residents and other local actors in Soho and De Wallen dealt differently with the changes. While some succumbed to the displacement pressure, others were able to resist or adapt.

7.1 Displacement

Some residents—often those who lacked a sense of control over what was happening—would express feelings of resignation over the changes. This group of residents was generally pessimistic about the future, and in some cases had given up. A café owner in Soho stated:

There is no use in fighting. The government has given property developers carte blanche to destroy the neighbourhood. (Lili, Soho)

These residents not only felt powerless, but were also considering leaving the neighbourhood. A resident who had been a tenant on the Zeedijk in De Wallen for over 20 years said:

It is getting worse and worse. At some point this neighbourhood will turn into some kind of Kalverstraat [a busy shopping street in Amsterdam], but then with tourists eating at large restaurant chains selling lousy food. Once this happens, I will be out of here. (Linda, Wallen)

Whereas some connected their feeling of being pushed out to the influx of newcomers (displacement pressure), others related it to more direct forms of displacement, such as rent increases. Tracy, the owner of a small private Italian club, stated that 'once the rent prices go up again we're gone. It's over, Soho is over'. Others saw change as a natural given, something that could not be fought, and would frame the changes in terms of 'progress'. One locally active artist and regular bar patron rejected nostalgic accounts:

Things change, you know? Soho will take on a completely different character. Where I live used to be a very smoky part of Soho, full of prostitutes and vaga-

bonds, now it has become such a fancy place. Things will move on, and there is a danger about being too nostalgic. That's why I'm saying the Save Soho campaign thing is nonsense, because what they are trying to save doesn't exist. And it hasn't existed for a long time. (Bert, Soho)

These feelings of resignation resonate with expressions of place-based displacement in the gentrification literature. Yet, such sentiments were not wholesale; some have been able to resist and adapt.

7.2 Resistance

Interestingly, in the two neighbourhoods, we saw that resistance often involved workers and business owners from the sex-related industry. Since 2013, the English Collective of Prostitutes has organised several protests against the evictions of workspaces. Likewise, the sex workers' organisation PROUD in Amsterdam organised demonstrations in 2015. Through these actions, workers and their managers stood up against state policy. As municipal politicians and policymakers repeatedly cite the protection of victims of human trafficking and fighting criminal gangs as the main reasons for evicting and banning brothels, protestors felt that they were being stigmatised as inherently immoral and criminal. They stated that rather than protection, the discourse around the closures merely provided the state with a cover to push the transformation of the neighbourhood.

In addition to protests, brothel owners and sex workers in Amsterdam also collaborated to start legal proceedings against *Project 1012*. One brothel owner stated in a local newspaper:

I am the first one to start procedures against these bizarre regulations, in the name of the Wallen Prostitution Entrepreneurs Association. The girls agree with me, yes, and they will come to court as well. (Quoted in Vugts 2015)

In Soho, where brothel owners and sex workers are operating on the edge of illegality, there is no judicial recourse. Despite their fears of eviction, many sex workers continue to sell their services, though they try to hide their presence as much as possible. For those who know where to look, the stickers promoting 'models' reveal that there are still numerous brothels in operation. While not overtly oppositional or spectacular, such covert and informal collective action is also a form of resistance to neighbourhood change (Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso 2018).

While most resistance in Amsterdam has come from the sex-related industry in response to state efforts to eradicate its businesses and livelihoods, Soho residents have extended their protests to the disappearance of local services for daily shopping due to retail gentrification. One Soho resident and activist stated:

I won't stop until the municipality realises that the market is important for so many people in the neighbourhood. For one of the old ladies I know, this market is the reason to get out of her house… to go out and have a small chat with someone. (Brian, Soho)

Furthermore, the *Save Soho* action group has been active in protecting Soho's music venues, and a campaign has been launched to prevent the demolishing of a local arthouse cinema in favour of the construction of a new metro line (Fig. 2). In Amsterdam, such protests were not observed in the RLD during the study period. State-led gentrification is being implemented at a slower pace, and historical buildings are legally protected against

Fig. 2 In Soho, sex workers use subtle promotion techniques to reveal their workspaces as a way to resist and adapt (photo by R. Stam)

Fig. 3 Wall graffiti in a public passageway to window brothels. The #nofuckingphotos campaign was designed by a collaboration of sex workers and local entrepreneurs of De Wallen to show their opposition to the influx of visitors (photo by M. Singelenberg)

demolition, thus protests (in the form of petitions) have mainly focused on the changes to the commercial landscape resulting from tourism. Figure 3 shows the #nofuckingphotos campaign against the rude behaviour of visitors, an example of how these protests sometimes collaborate with the sex-related industry.

7.3 Adaptation

Finally, some residents and entrepreneurs had adapted to the neighbourhood changes, either because they were positive about them, because they saw opportunities to strengthen their financial position, or because they feared eviction or bankruptcy. This strategy was mostly adopted by entrepreneurs who had the financial means to adjust to the new consumption patterns, but there were also residents who saw possibilities to earn money from the influx of more affluent users. As one resident stated:

> It has two sides, you know? On the one hand, we complain about the crowdedness. On the other hand, we can ask high prices for our apartment on Airbnb. We used to have high and low seasons, but now we are almost always fully booked. (Romy, De Wallen)

In both districts, existing local stores, markets and cafés have adapted their products, services and prices to a gentrifying clientele. Mieke explained how her family had always managed to adjust its business to the changes in the neighbourhood. Once a small grocery store, her business had transformed into a sandwich shop, a snack bar, and now finally a café. She explained that 'you have to keep up with the times' and that the area will always keep its 'charm'.

In the sex-related industry, entrepreneurs with capital have invested to attract a new type of customer and to adapt to new regulations. De Wallen's *Casa Rosso*, known for its live sex shows aimed at tourists, business events and stag parties, has gained a large stake in the area. According to the owner, the shows have become more commercial as a response to customers' needs:

> People want less extreme things these days, you know? For us Amsterdammers, it is not a big deal what is happening onstage, but for the tourists.[…] It's more groups nowadays, buses full of groups, and we can fit 184 people. On Saturdays we even have to make a line, sometimes people have to wait for two-and-a-half hours. (Jan, De Wallen)

Since Jan took over *Casa Rosso* in 1996, he has used the profit from the sex shows to buy up properties around the main venue, 'one each year'. Now, his establishments extend all over the neighbourhood, with several bars, sex shops and smaller shows employing around 286 people. Still, *Casa Rosso* is not the only sexually-oriented business with a strong financial position in the neighbourhood. A large share of the real estate of De Wallen is owned by entrepreneurs whose families have been involved in the sex-related industry for generations. This turned out to be a big obstacle to the municipality's intentions to close down the brothels, as many of these entrepreneurs were too rich to buy out (Hensink and Husken 2009).

The change within the sex-related industry in Soho is perhaps best exemplified by a sex show business owned by an entrepreneur who had settled in the neighbourhood in the 1960s. Known as 'the King of Soho', he is considered personally responsible for the success of Soho's sex industry. After his death in 2008, his company *Soho Estates* started to redevelop the traditional sex shows into expensive clubs, offering erotic entertainment to Soho's richest consumers. While many smaller, 'seedy' businesses had to close down, new expensive sex clubs such as *The Box* have been opened in recent years. At these high-end clubs, table prices start at £1000 per evening and entrance is only available to a selected clientele. Interestingly, the interviewee from *Soho Estates* lamented the rise of crime in the

area, but also asserted that it is the investments leading to the appearance of retail chains in Carnaby Street that have 'really ruined Soho'.

8 Two tendencies with different responses

State actions have sought both to eradicate (or severely diminish) the sex-related industry as well as to transform urban space to accommodate more affluent users. Both goals have been integrated into area-based initiatives and regulations, particularly in Amsterdam. Furthermore, rising property values and new consumers (gentrifiers and visitors) have changed the areas' commercial landscapes, leading to a dwindling number of lower-end sex-related businesses, as well as resident-oriented shopping venues. As such, we could speak of (state-led) gentrification here when understanding the drivers of neighbourhood change (Aalbers and Deinema 2012; Sasajima 2013; Neuts et al. 2014; Van Liempt and Chimienti 2017). Rather than a state strategy, however, we forefront how the different processes of change have played out, taking into account how various actors have responded to the state's efforts and material changes. Our analysis reveals several tensions among and between residents, entrepreneurs, investors and those working in the sex-related industries.

The strongest resistance has come from the sex-related industry, primarily to fight stigmatisation and evictions through protests by sex workers and, in Amsterdam, legal action (cf. Mathieu 2003). These protests were generally supported by other neighbourhood dwellers, whose sense of belonging has been tied to the area's 'authentic' red light character. While some were critical of the sex-related industry, expressing their concerns about involuntary prostitution and money laundering, none of the respondents actively opposed sexually-oriented businesses and activities, whose presence was often part of local oral histories that also accentuated the loss of a sense of community and place-specific identity. Local residents' support for the sex-related industry was, however, conditional. While expressing nostalgia for the period following the 1960s, respondents also cited various social and drug-related problems of the 1980s and 1990s. For this reason, they also welcomed public order and preferred a level of control, effectively making a distinction between virtuous and unwanted marginality. Such conflicting attitudes have also been found in the gentrification literature (Brown-Saracino 2007; Tissot 2014; Pinkster and Boterman 2017). Indeed, a similar tension was found in how residents related to commercial change and rising property prices; they appreciated new amenities, and some even profited from them, but at the same time they feared a loss of community and belonging, or, depending on their position, could experience displacement pressure or an anxiety over physical displacement. For many locals, the state-led eradication of sexually-oriented activities added to displacement pressure, as it undermined the authentic red light character.

These two tendencies both exert displacement pressure, yet they do so differently, and sometimes also independently; some actors may only relate to one. We did not interview long-term residents who opposed the sex-related industry outright, but such residents may exist (Hubbard and Sanders 2003). Furthermore, the owners of sexually-oriented businesses did not necessarily protest the influx of more affluent users or the expansion of tourism. In Amsterdam, they did oppose area-based initiatives, but their goals were only moderately related to the displacement of less affluent businesses and residents. Entrepreneurs in the sex-related industry had a clear rationale, as their

investments were spatially fixed; hence, we observed that red light entrepreneurs were actually accommodating more affluent consumers.

9 Red light gentrification

Our paper sought to contribute to understandings of neighbourhood change in Red Light Districts and to gentrification in general. In many cities, centrally-located districts are atolls of underinvestment in seas of gentrification. For a time, the presence of prostitution, lower-end commerce, and the public spectacle of 'sleaze' has effectively protected these areas from market-led redevelopment. With crime, public moral and economic disinvestment as rationales, many local authorities have sought to actively transform the area, trying to pave the way for new investments in housing, amenities and commerce. Such policies have been analysed in accounts of state-led gentrification. Yet, state and capital do not operate in a social void, but are modulated by local context over time, possibly leading to different outcomes. We used a process-oriented conceptualisation to assess the symbolic and material effects of external pressures. By analytically separating the state-led drive to eradicate sexually-oriented businesses from the pressures of capitalist investment, we could reveal complexities and contradictions in how neighbourhood change plays out. As our study shows, various capital interests, entrepreneurs, residents, activists, artists and workers may resist or subscribe to one or both directions of change, depending on their interpretations and their economic, social and emotional interests. Local adaptation and resistance can mean that the state-envisioned scenario of 'typical' gentrification may not materialise according to plan, and that we may see other outcomes like normalisation or preservation (see Table 1). Yet, our study has shown a process of 'red light gentrification' whereby the logic of capital -and to a lesser degree labour- trump morality and crime-related objectives. Despite pressures, both Soho and De Wallen have remained Red Light Districts. Even in Soho, where the transformation has been most persuasive, the red light character has not been entirely cast out. While sex-related activities remain present, policies and new investments continue to remake RLDs. Despite resistance to retail change (in both neighbourhoods), tourist overcrowding (De Wallen) and the dismantling of cultural venues (Soho), the ongoing influx of more affluent users will continue to undermine the position of less affluent residents and businesses. Rather than the sex-related industry as a whole, the lower end, associated with crime and immorality, is mostly being displaced. Likewise, housing is becoming less affordable, leading to direct and exclusionary displacement.

Our conceptualisation of gentrification as a process and, more specifically for our cases, as red light gentrification serves to underline that the outcomes of state and market pressures are more contingent than an ideal-typical or policy-focused understanding of gentrification typically allows. Herein lies our intended contribution to understandings of Red Light Districts and of gentrification processes. Yet, while we hold that RLDs constitute a meaningful and unique context, there are parallels to what has been put forward in other gentrification studies. The changes in the commercial landscape, and how they affect long-term residents, are very similar to what is observed in research on retail gentrification (see Hubbard 2018, Zukin et al. 2016), albeit that RLDs serve a specific demand. Furthermore, more than serving new residents, a major driving factor in commercial change has been catering to the demand of visitors. RLDs have always attracted outsiders, yet mass tourism in recent years has dramatically affected real estate prices, amenities and public space. Such impacts have also been conceptualised as 'tourist gentrification' (see Pinkster and

Boterman 2017; Cocola Gant 2018). Relatedly, the phenomenon of local and new entrepreneurs investing in a neighbourhood's symbolic value (i.e. the 'Red Light' character) to accommodate more affluent users and visitors has also been observed in studies on changing 'gaybourhoods' (e.g. Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015) and ethnic neighbourhoods (e.g. Hackworth and Rekers 2005; Lin Pang and Rath 2007). Here too, the commodification of 'diverse' urban space comes at the expense of the marginality that once made them 'landscapes of excitement and ecstasy'. As these processes keep unfolding in RLDs, it remains to be seen how long this paradox can last.

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