
Inclusion and Exclusion in Amsterdam's Changing Red Light District

Ilse Van Liempt*¹

¹Utrecht University – Utrecht University Padualaan 8, 3584 CH Utrecht, Netherlands

Abstract

Inclusion and Exclusion in Amsterdam's Changing Red Light District

The Red Light District of Amsterdam is a popular destination for a growing number of young people, increasingly tourists, who like to party, have sex and take drugs. This paper examines how the recent urban regeneration process in the Red Light District of Amsterdam that aims to 'restore the balance between entertainment and liveability' contributes to various processes of inclusion/exclusion in a popular nightlife district. The discourses used to legitimize the regeneration policy is a story around fighting crime and excesses of prostitution such as coercion, exploitation and human trafficking. Migration plays a dominant role in this process of exclusion and sex workers are now being excluded from the area by closing down their workspaces. Our research, based on interviews with residents and entrepreneurs in the Red Light District, shows that residents' complaints are however most of all related to noise and nuisance produced by tourists (and not so much by sex workers) who are blamed for 'having taken over the area' and for misbehaving. Local residents increasingly avoid the area as they do not feel they belong there anymore. Within these complaints class-based preferences for certain types of entertainment figure widely. Paradoxically the high-end creative industries that are financially stimulated by the city council to start a business in the area are not able to compete with the tourist aimed 'Nutella' and cheese shops being opened in the area adding to the 'cheaper' atmosphere the area had to get rid of.

Keywords: nightlife, gentrification, red light districts, inclusion, exclusion

*Speaker