Urban area redevelopment in vulnerable neighbourhoods

unravelling the collaborative process between public and private parties <<

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Master thesis **I** Management in the Built Environment **I** Delft University of Technology **I** Liesbeth van Walsum

1. REFLECTION

This final chapter provides a reflection on the relevance of the research, the applied research methods and the research process.

1.1. Research relevance

This section reflects on the societal and scientific relevance, as related to the preceding principles that were shared in the first chapter of this research.

Societal relevance

The problem definition empathetically departed from a societal issue. Following from concerns about increasing concentrations of vulnerable target groups and the negative impact on liveability, the goal was to contribute to a place-based approach by means of which the related issues might be combatted. Since housing stock diversification is considered to be the most appropriate long-term strategy for coping with liveability problems in vulnerable neighbourhoods, the research goal became to tackle the related barriers by means of lessons for effective collaboration between public and private parties.

Apart from the effectiveness aim, however, the lessons also had to be based on ways to truly add value on a societal level. In the unravelled collaborative process behind three relevant urban area redevelopment project, the existing social context was barely taken into account. From the viewpoint of effectiveness, the standardised relocation processes and resident consultations were efficient in the sense that social influences rarely prohibit a redevelopment from taking place. From the viewpoint of enhancing social value, however, it is sensible to avoid social tension as much as possible by means of resident involvement and an actively stimulated sense of belonging for both new and existing residents. This has resulted in a set of guiding lessons for urban area redevelopment that specifically aim to enable an active contribution to the social value.

More generally speaking, these lessons aspire to contribute to the realisation of liveable, attractive, resilient neighbourhoods by supporting local governments, housing associations and commercial parties in their search for a new balance of forces.

Scientific relevance

Over the past decades, Dutch urban planning policies have been analysed and evaluated continuously and the consequences of the changed force field around vulnerable neighbourhoods have been assessed quite extensively. Comprehensive research has moreover indicated that urban area redevelopment in the Netherlands is characterized by a growing sense of ineffectiveness and inefficiency (e.g. Daamen, 2010; Heurkens, 2012; Kort & Klijn, 2013; ten Have et al., 2017). As stated by ten Have (2017), one is cooperating at most, but does not make use of a collaboration method that can lead to the desired quality and enduring value. Whereas policymakers and researchers assume that a more intensive cooperation between public and developing parties adds value by producing better and more efficient policy outcomes (Kort & Klijn, 2013, p. 90), the requisite knowledge on how to actually achieve that is often lacking.

Especially with regard to the changed force field around vulnerable neighbourhoods, a knowledge gap can be recognised. This study therefore aimed to fill that gap by generating explicit theoretical knowledge on what forms of cooperation and management instruments are effective in that context, allowing actors to make use of a collaboration method that can lead to the desired quality and enduring value.

1.2. Research methods

This section will briefly reflect on the applied theoretical and empirical research methods.

Literature study

The goal of the literature study was to understand the organisation and management of urban area redevelopment. That understanding was translated into a conceptual steering model, which functioned as the basis for an analytical case study model: a framework that provided the ability to explain mechanisms in projects and could thus be used for

the case-analysis and comparison. When collecting the data by means of interviews, however, it proved rather difficult to make optimal use of this framework, as it became apparent that actors do not look at a project in such a fixed and somewhat inflexible way. They surely recognised the categories and variables, but the information was still shared in a qualitative manner, whereas the analytical case study model almost suggests a quantitative approach.

After the interviews were conducted, the theoretical model did function well as a framework for the processing of the data. By means of the four categories and associated variables, the gathered data could be unravelled, packaged and compared in a structured manner. Eventually, the inter-organisational arrangements were categorised a little differently, as it was not possible to receive the actual contracts with the stipulated legal rules and requirements, financial risks and revenues and organisational tasks and responsibilities. Instead, the formal cooperation was assessed with regard to the degree to which legal and financial agreements were formally stipulated, as related to the applied form of cooperation. Thereby, the close link to the process management activities became apparent, since it proved impossible to completely separate those from the inter-organisational arrangements. In that sense, a lesson learned was to view the application of such an analytical framework mostly as a tool for the understanding and structuring of a case-analysis, optimally enabling the ability to compare results. Simultaneously, it is important not to cling on to it too strictly, since that could stand in the way of additional findings that do not at first sight "fit" within any of the categories.

Finally, the findings were assessed against the effectiveness aim. In accordance with relevant management literature, effectiveness was viewed in two ways: in relation to the realisation of objectives and in relation to efficacy. Precisely the difference between these two viewpoints has proven to be rather interesting to emphasise, since the surplus value of effective collaboration seemed to be mostly reflected in the efficacy of the process.

Empirical study
In the empirical part of the study, three cases were analysed and compared. These cases were selected on the basis of the principle that it should concern vulnerable neighbourhoods where the housing stock was successfully diversified as a result of an urban area redevelopment project. The scale of the redevelopment, in terms of the amount of dwellings that were realised, and the time-period during which it took place, should correspond as well. In addition, both a housing association as well as at least one market party must have been involved in the process. In order to draw a comparison while attaining a rather general overview at the same time, another criterion is for the study areas to each be part of a different large Dutch city (G4).

Thereby, the idea was for all three cases to actually be examples of "best practices": of networks typified by dense interdependent relations and goals wherein effective forms of cooperation and management instruments optimally contributed to both the efficacy of the redevelopment process as well as to the project outcome. However, despite the fact that all three cases ticked the criteria boxes, they did turn out to be a little different than originally expected. A difficulty that was not well envisaged beforehand, is that the case information that was needed to truly comprehend its context in terms of objectives, time period, scale, involved actors, and so on, could only be made available after the contact was established and the interviews were scheduled. Therefore, the case assessments as provided by the (limited) information that was found online did not always entirely correspond with the actual project details, wherefore other case studies might have been more suitable in regard to the best practices goal. Not all relational connections were as strong as intended, for which reason the actors did not all speak of a collaborative process.

That being said, however, the cross-case method in itself provided very valuable data for the answering of the research question, hence foreseeing in the research goal. Moreover, the fact that the cases were not entirely flawless examples of effective urban area redevelopment projects did allow for discoveries that might not have been possible with "perfect" patterns. This namely allowed for the surfacing of lessons that possibly would not have been shared if it regarded projects the involved actors only had positive memories of.

To sum up, a lesson would be to henceforth spend more time on the case selection, by gathering more extensive background information on the basis of which a more sophisticated choice of case studies can be made. But the method in itself allowed for a broad, valuable overview of how urban area redevelopment aimed at diversifying the housing stock in vulnerable neighbourhoods is organised and managed in practice.

1.3. Research process

This section reflects on the research process and is therefore written from a personal point of view.

Looking back on the research proposal that was presented around this time last year (June 2018), this process started off with high (societal) ambitions. Departing from the belief that there is a great need for a society in which everyone is given an equal chance – a city in which everyone is included – the research goal was to contribute to the achieving on an inclusive urban regeneration process. Inclusive both in the sense of combatting spatial inequality as well as in relation to more effective, efficient, integrated urban redevelopment partnerships and collaboration models. In short, it was stated that an inclusive area-based regeneration policy and practice includes effective partnership working, an integrated approach towards problem solving and a strong participative element with emphasises on the involvement of local communities in the strategy and implementation process (Schlappa, 2012). Since this interpretation was still quite vague, the first sub-goal was to define what exactly is meant by an inclusive urban regeneration process.

That was precisely the question that followed from the research proposal: what exactly would I be researching? And more importantly: what exactly would this research contribute to existing theories and practices? What followed was a lengthy quest for specification. Both related to my naivety regarding what could be achieved with a graduation research as well as to the wide ranging, social complexity of "the inclusive city", in retrospect, this phase was the most challenging part of the research process.

Eventually, the presented policy categorisation for issues related to urban inequality provided the necessary step that was needed to climb out of the inclusive city debate. Thereby, namely, the distinction between people-based and place-based policies was highlighted. Following from these categories, it became possible to place this study within that existing policy framework, as a result of which it was seen as a small puzzle piece of a much larger whole. In addition, RIGO had published a research on the resilience of social housing properties around that same time (October 2018). In that report, the necessity of resilient place-based policies was stressed by stating that housing stock diversification is considered to be the most appropriate long-term strategy for coping with liveability problems that arise in vulnerable neighbourhoods. The listed barriers largely relate to the force field around such urban area redevelopment approaches. Consequently, it was assumed that barriers to urban area redevelopment aimed at diversifying the housing stock in vulnerable neighbourhoods can largely be tackled by means of effective collaboration between public and private parties. This then (finally) enabled the formulation of a clear research goal, being *"to provide an understanding of how public and private parties effectively cooperate on and manage urban area redevelopment aimed at diversifying the housing stock in vulnerable neighbourhoods".*

Once that research goal was formulated, it suddenly all seemed very logical and obvious. The research process was structured by means of a set of clear sub-goals, which naturally led to a range of sub-questions. The first two questions were to be answered by means of a literature study into the organisation and management of urban area redevelopment. By determining what actors can be identified and how they relate to each other, what types of cooperation can be distinguished, and what management instruments can be defined, a better understanding of the urban area redevelopment field was established. This information ultimately resulted in a theoretical framework that could be applied to the empirical stage of this research.

During that trajectory, the research relevance was constantly highlighted by means of media attention. As following from the RIGO research, several newspapers have devoted an article to the conclusion that the liveability in vulnerable neighbourhoods is drastically declining, simultaneously stressing the need for long-term solutions.

The third research question was answered by means of empirical research, by analysing what course of action is administered in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Thereby, I did struggle with the case selection quite a bit. The idea namely was to select urban area redevelopment projects by means of which the housing stock was not only successfully diversified, but which could also be seen as best practice examples of effective networks, typified by dense interdependent relations and goals. The latter, however, is not a criteria one can easily Google. Details regarding the collaborative process thus only became available during the interviews, which meant that parts of the cases turned out to be a little different than expected.

On the other hand, nearly all contacted interviewees responded positively to my request for an interview, as they all clearly recognised the substantiated research goal. Very interesting conversations have taken place, by means of which the required data was collected and the relevance was reinforced. Only the commercial developer of the Fruitbuurt North case was unwilling to schedule an interview, as he did not perceive that redevelopment as a collaborative process. He did answer some questions via email, and although the sense of collectiveness was limited, the inclusion of that case did allow for a broader reflection on the added value of strong relational connections.

Furthermore reflecting on the results, the interviews also resulted in the conclusion that not everything can be solved by means of effective forms of cooperation and management instruments. It was never claimed that it can, but the research does largely deviate from the assumption that barriers related to urban area redevelopment aimed at diversifying the housing stock in vulnerable neighbourhoods can be tackled by means of effective collaboration between public and private parties. Effective collaboration surely contributes to the tackling of barriers and can moreover lead to enduring (social) value. It is difficult to judge, however, to what extent the guiding lessons offer a solution for obstacles related to housing associations firmly holding on to their existing plots, strict programmatic regulations and performance agreements between housing associations and local governments for example. The guiding lessons did aim to stress the added value of thinking outside of one's own, personal objectives, but the implementation thus depends on the degree to which actors truly take these lessons to heart.

In addition, the focus of the results strongly lies on *what* forms of cooperation and management instruments are effective in urban area redevelopment aimed at diversifying the housing stock in vulnerable neighbourhoods. The *how* of it was only concisely mentioned, since the data did not provide sufficient footing for a more extensive elaboration on the application possibilities. That detail level was not attained when conducting the interviews, which can therefore be seen as a limitation of this research.

Despite the fact that the results are less explicit than I would have liked, the set of guiding lessons provide an understanding of how public and private parties effectively cooperate on and manage urban area redevelopment aimed at diversifying the housing stock in vulnerable neighbourhoods. In that sense, the research goal has been achieved.

Lastly, I would like to add that the graduation track of the degree course in Management in the Built Environment has been a valuable trajectory from the viewpoint of personal development. It has been a very interesting process. A process whereby I was given the opportunity to become an expert on the topic of my choosing. That academic freedom has both made it enjoyable as well as challenging. I would not say that I am a born researcher, but I have certainly learned what it takes to become one. The research process and findings have moreover contributed to my fascination for urban area redevelopment projects: a fascination that I will hereafter put into practice. In my work, I now plan to contribute to the realisation of liveable, attractive, resilient neighbourhoods myself.

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