Self sufficient working-living environments

Prospects for office areas with structural vacancy: Plaspoelpolder (Rijswijk, Zuid Holland)

Graduation Poster Arnold vd Berg Jeths 1282727

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Problem statement

In the Netherlands, business and office areas face the increasing problem of becoming and remaining empty. Vacancy causes deterioration and a further decline in overall quality of an area. It is therefore only regarded possible to transform these areas when supported by an area wide approach (Remoy, 2010) It is estimated that there is over 8 million m² vacant office space in the Netherlands. Many of these areas are organized according to a grid layout, which should theoretically offer most flexibility (Ballon, 2011). It is therefore contradictory that these areas face these kind of problems.

Location

Vacancy map

Analysis

The very strategically positioned Plaspoelpolder (Rijswijk, ZH) is the research location on how structural trends in office vacancy could be tackled by various means of intervention. The area is characterized by its mono functional 60s-70s volumes, that were planned in the modernist tradition. The location is well connected to the public transport system as well as the existing infrastructure like the adjacent highway A4. Together with its central positioning in de Randstad, the future of the area has big potentials for regeneration, adding to the quality of the surrounding city, whilst tackling a major national problem. The municipality faces shortages in allotments, offering a great opportunity to develop a strategy in which urban farming functions as an organizing element.

Design

The basic starting point for the design is to envision a future where the mono functionalist layout of the area is radically broken by transforming existing office stock, and creating new dwellings. This comes down to a vision of an area that is the future of the area has big potentials for regeneration, adding to the quality of the surrounding city, whilst tackling a major national problem. The municipality faces shortages in allotments, offering a great opportunity to develop a strategy in which urban farming functions as an organizing element.

This functional restructuring comes in twofold.

(1) The transformation of suitable vacant office buildings should be prioritized, this will create dynamics and will be benefitting for the whole area.

(2) On the other hand it involves a clear vision on the demolition of the lower scale industrial buildings that face tremendous vacancy rates as well, and are not suitable for transformation. By flexible redistribution of plots with urban farming allowed, a perspective is created for both current and future owners, who get an option for buying and building their own house in the future. This last point also helps the transformation of the office buildings, since the surrounding area will get more attractive.

Finally, this functional breakthrough is supported by a bicycle highway, crossing the area, as a generator for dynamics and supporting the urban farming economy. Adding to this, an energy-roof could be constructed over the highway in order to reduce noise and air pollution, making the surrounding a more attractive environment for living.

These intervention proposals should be embraced by the municipality and adopted into a broad and flexible land-use plan. This could create long term dynamics in the area and diminish the value destruction by vacancy a lot.