Changing Contexts in Urban Regeneration

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The need to combat decay of obsolete housing and services in urban renewal areas has been recognized by every major country in Western Europe, including the Netherlands (Couch et al., 2003). Urban regeneration in general can be considered as developing an approach in a complex urban context that includes a variety of spatial scales, sectors, actors and disciplines. Urban regeneration needs to respond to changing contexts with new economic concentrations in cities that are accompanied by new markets for new population groups within the current urban population (Sassen, 1991). This situation is sometimes in conflict with the living conditions of specific groups in the urban population trapped in economic difficulties, excluded from opportunities and rights. The other side of the same coin and with as the common underlying factor a change in economic structure caused by global competition and technological innovation (Drewe et al. 2008). Urban regeneration needs to respond to new conditions and can therefore not be a static phenomenon. Two basic concerns have become part of the agenda in all new strategies for urban regeneration, namely the search for lasting solutions and an integrated approach to physical, environmental, social and economic programs.

Urban renewal was and is an important issue in the Netherlands and particularly renewal of the city of Rotterdam was an interesting example nationally and internationally in the period 1975-1993 (Stouten, 2010). Due to large investments from financial and social capital, large parts of old neighborhoods have been modernized. Fundamental changes on the labour and housing market put the housing question of the constructed buildings, environments and living conditions on the agenda again. Since mid 1990s approaches led to a degree of integration of social, economic and building policies. Most of these programs of social renewal, subsequent Big City policies (Grote Stedenbeleid) and neighborhood approaches started in Rotterdam and were later adopted by the central government. Against this background, an evaluation of the results is very worthwhile, particularly because urban renewal policy has to deal with a new context in the last decades, in which privatization and being market driven are the main topics.

Urban renewal, urban regeneration and sustainable development

The 1970s saw a fundamental change in policy on urban renewal. Besides placing a greater emphasis on rehabilitation and improvement rather than demolition of existing building stock, the approach called for participation of present residents in the renewal process and decentralized control. The approach involved the decentralized direction of the entire process by local authorities and tenant groups working in cooperation. The fact that priority access to new or modernized housing was given to the lower paid made the aims of building-for-the-neighborhood (bouwen voor de buurt) unique in the history of social housing. Building-for-the-neighborhood meant that the then present tenants got priority with regard to the improvement of their housing and living conditions.

By the end of the 1980s a market oriented approach and the recognition of new sets of problems and challenges had become dominant in much of Europe. What was new in this approach was the acceptance of the need to take into account environmental objectives related to sustainable development. In the Netherlands urban renewal became more or less part of a more comprehensive form of urban regeneration of a city or region. One of its core activities relates to the functional obsolescence of buildings and the changing requirements of their users. Roberts (2000) summarized the essential features of urban regeneration by defining it as: "comprehensive and integrated vision and action aimed at the resolution of urban problems and seeking to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subjected to change". The main components put forward as relevant to the regeneration of cities are essentially a strategic activity, including economic regeneration and funding, physical and environmental aspects, social and community issues, employment and education (including training), and housing.

In 1987 the report of the Brundtland Committee (WCED, 1987) introduced sustainable development in a worldwide policy guideline. The committee pleaded for sustainable development 'to ensure that development meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet

their own needs'. The point here is that besides its consequences for the here and now, the way of developing affects the long-term prospects of the earth and its inhabitants. In this tradition sustainable development involves reaching a new balance between rich and poor, today and tomorrow, mankind and nature.

For our research into sustainable urban regeneration we have chosen a dynamic concept directed at the integration of physical, economic and social factors (Stouten, 2010). Sustainability will therefore be interpreted here as the quality of a residential situation and human urban environment which is suitable for continued use by its residents and permits improvement in their physical, social and economic conditions including an overall strategic framework for city-wide development.

Urban renewal and urban regeneration in Rotterdam: 1974-1993

In the course of the 1970s, residents in urban renewal areas of Rotterdam, like residents in such areas in other cities, became actively involved in actions pressing for the improvement of their housing situation. The post-war policies with their mass model of housing provision were no longer able to meet the special needs and requirements of tenants in old city areas. Their poor housing conditions were an important reason for the change in policy that took place in 1974. Apart from the poor quality of housing and the residential environment, other important factors included the possibility (or impossibility) of improving the housing situation and reducing social and economic deprivation. A cooperative planning and housing model was developed to manage this improvement.

The special attention for the lowest paid meant for example providing affordable new housing for residents of the old areas including brown field areas. The purchase of private properties was an important instrument in the urban renewal strategy. It meant that almost 69% of all private properties became social rented properties.

The principles underlying the urban renewal strategy were:
- 'Building for the neighborhood', i.e. working in line with the needs and requirements of the population of the areas subject to urban renewal, thus avoiding forced removal and displacement.
- Decentralization and democratization, meaning that decisions about renewal measures should not simply be taken centrally by municipal departments, but should take account of input from and participation by the residents of the area involved.
- Socialization of the housing provision, resulting from the city council's view that private landlords were responsible for much of the deterioration. Because these owners had made no investment or too little investment to maintain their properties, an attempt was made to bring their properties into the social sector by the use of compulsory or voluntary purchase.

At the end of the 1980s greater emphasis was put on the status of the urban renewal areas in the city as a whole. Preparation of urban development plans started considering the functioning of the city's housing market and the relationships with adjacent areas and boroughs. Future production should match the heterogeneity of the population in a better way by increasing the differentiation within the housing stock by more variation in housing typology, housing size, price class and type of financing. Developing new types of human environment including residential environments e.g. on the former harbor areas became a great challenge.

Reflections on the 'building for the neighborhood' period
Nearly 72.000 dwellings (60% of the total housing stock in the old areas) were radically improved by new housing and the modernization of pre-war housing estates. Additionally, 45 primary schools and a large number of new welfare provisions (community centers, medical aid centers and so on) were built in the old areas. Moreover, urban renewal included the realization of 220,000m2 of retail and commercial space. In 1976, 54% of the housing stock was structurally in a poor quality, whereas after urban renewal this proportion fell to no more than 8%. After 1993 poor quality dwellings were mainly concentrated in the housing stock supplied by private landlords. The findings of urban renewal in other Dutch cities revealed the same poor conditions in the private rental sector (ABF research, 2002).

For reflections on the 'building for the neighborhood' period, a distinction should be made between changes in conditions for urban renewal brought about through external developments and those which could be traced back more or less directly to the urban renewal policy itself, i.e. the building of social housing for the neighborhood population and purchasing housing from private landlords by the local government.

External developments are implemented to include the economic recession, long-term unemployment and changes in the structure of employment, the affordability of housing costs, changing ratios of immigrants to natives, social and cultural changes and new relationships between central government, municipalities, housing associations and residential groups.

Economic developments in the 1980s – including an economic recession – had a radical effect on urban renewal.

Area-based activities declined in the wake of national developments. A number of large industries and service companies moved to the edge of the city or beyond. About 18% of the loss of employment can be ascribed to external developments, i.e. the economic recession, and not to urban renewal itself with its priority on housing.

The second point regards the affordability of housing costs, particularly for tenants. Unemployment in the urban renewal areas led to a large proportion of the residents suffering a severe reduction in income. The affordability of urban renewal for tenants on low incomes was threatened.

Another point of reflection arises if the changes in composition of the population led to changes in the social infrastructure and social networks. New urban lifestyles, not based on the traditional family, clashed with more traditional lifestyles. Many urban renewal areas had formerly occupied a position on the housing market as part of a transitional zone, in which accommodation was partly occupied by recently arrived house-seekers such as students and immigrants. In the meantime a highly heterogeneous area, but nonetheless an area where moving house became less frequent, was coming into being. In these areas 'residents of old' and 'new urbanites' – several of which practiced new forms of cohabitation, were better educated and lived a more luxurious life – were housed and lived next to one another. With regard to the participation of residents: by and large participation had worked well for native residents of the area, but not so well for immigrants. The new situation, which could be classed as one of stable heterogeneity, required those involved to reshape social relationships.

From the 1990s onwards: Urban regeneration
Between 1975 and 1993, urban renewal and social housing had a major effect on urban planning in the Netherlands, particularly in its major cities. In this respect it should be noted that the Netherlands has the highest proportion of social housing in the EU, about 33% of the housing stock, and in the current large Dutch cities this percentage can be as high as 50%. From the mid 1980s onwards the policies of different ministries defined objectives creating a real patchwork of urban policies and problems. Social measures were brought under the 'problem accumulation areas' policy. This policy was concerned with social renewal and urban problems. Furthermore it is characterized by an increase of the opportunities available to the long-term unemployed and poorly educated, by improving quality of life and social security and by measures to stimulate the integration of minorities.

The beginning of the 1990s saw an increase in socio-economic problems in the larger cities. Policy however was mainly concerned with privatization. Urban housing policy was characterized by a decrease in the resources made available by government and a greater dependence on private initiatives. The combination of urban renewal and decreased priority for inner-city regeneration led to increased pressure on economic aspects. At the beginning of this millennium the integral approach returned to the scene in the former urban renewal areas through the reintroduction of the area approach, the designation of priority areas and the designation of 'prize areas' (prachtwijken) in 2007.

"It is an illusion that with design one can change the urban fabric over 10-15 years."

Sustainable urban regeneration requires more than traditional land use plans have to offer. There was a need to improve planning and develop new methods to deal with new problems. Strategic planning was no longer only concerned with so-called flagship projects, but helped to give shape to the renewal. The general strategies were based on the use of specific features of the city, such as the river, the harbors, the canals and so on. These strategies concentrated on the intensification of the existing urban area in combination with high-quality public transport and services. Residential environments were developed for specific lifestyles, taking into account an increase in the flexibility of labour and the consequences of internationalization and migration. All this under the expectation that phenomena as the home as workplace (teleworking), as school (tele-education) and as shop (tele-shopping) were still capable of spectacular growth. The content of the area-based strategy was different for the centre than for other urban areas. To increase the vitality and attractiveness of the centre the aim was to increase the number of residents to achieve a ratio of 1:1 between jobs and dwellings. At the time only 28,000 people lived in the Rotterdam's city centre, while the number of jobs was 80,000. According to central government, a great deal of investment will be necessary in coming years to make cities attractive to middle-income and higher-income groups by increasing the number of owner-occupied properties. This objective – attracting higher-income groups – could to a considerable extent already be found in the policy of the city of Rotterdam.

Till 2008, the central government expected an increase of the demand for the owner-occupied sector. As it was argued in a period of economic growth but also during the current crisis policies are driven on stimulating this tenure at the expense of the social sector. Since mid 1990s the construction of 100.000 dwellings per year were forecasted but this number was never reached. At the same time the waiting lists for tenants looking for new homes were not cleared and prices in the owner-occupied sector increased. Due to new European regulations, in the near future, middle class households will run into trouble in finding a decent home. They get sandwiched between the social and owner-occupied sector. When they earn more than 33.000 euro a year, they become excluded from the social sector and will have hardly any chance in getting a mortgage. Moreover a lack of training and a low level of education mean that a number of young people entering the housing market as starters will be in no position to buy.

Sustainable Urban Regeneration
Last decade there have been a lot of critics on urban regeneration about failing measurement against social deterioration e.g. social safety and criminality. The positive results of urban renewal were mostly ignored while policies contributed to vast improvements of the building stock, services and amenities (see also ABF research, 2002). According to my research (Stouten, 2010) floor plans of newly built housing were highly appreciated by the residents. The appreciation of tenants and professionals of modernization of old housing is sometimes less positive. The current residents rated houses flexible in use of the floor plan and specific dwellings for elderly highly.

Solving structural problems, e.g. unemployment and income division, goes beyond the area level. In the period 1975-1993 urban renewal was part of welfare strategies with opportunities for low-income groups and minority ethnic groups to improve their living conditions. Due to urban renewal strategies including a broad societal orientation of housing associations the development of ghettos was avoided. One of the important aims that were reached is to prevent displacement. Residents of the Oude Noorden area did not want to move house from their newly-built or modernized housing (Stouten, 2010). Also, middle class households did want to continue their housing career in this urban renewal area. The quality of the services and facilities is well appreciated but concerning social safety, drugs and crime the balance is still shaky. Despite these negative experiences most of the tenants wanted to stay living in the area and a small majority said that 'people live together in a pleasant way' though 'they hardly know each other'. Urban renewal areas have a het-

erogeneous social fabric. This situation could be threatened due to the development of a more homogeneous vulnerable social fabric. This development is caused by an increase of households becoming dependent on social benefits, decrease of purchasing power and new European regulations on limited access to social housing for only incomes below 33.000 euro per year.

Conclusions
The approaches of urban renewal areas fluctuate between inward and outward looking strategies. The first is more driven by an area-based strategy while the second is driven by developments beyond this level of scale e.g. changes on the housing and labour market of the city or region. It is important to develop strategies that connect these inward and outward looking approaches as seen complementary. The determining condition for strategic planning in urban renewal areas is the heterogeneous character of the social fabric. This presumes to take account of the strong mix-use of housing, shops, amenities and services that is connected with the multi-cultural characteristics of the population. Strategies based on the so-called social climbers are recommended. That means to take a middle class including different minority ethnic groups seriously in development of planning strategies. It is an illusion that with design one can change the urban fabric over 10-15 years. The population and her requirements will change. Flexibility in use of the urban fabric is an instrument to adapt to eventual new requirements.

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