

## **NL2010: An assessment of urban renewal and sustainable development in the Netherlands**

Many Dutch cities have an experience of more than a decade in the restructuring on a large scale of both post-war residential districts and strategic parts of city centres. In the last years it has become clear that lessons can be learned from consultations with housing associations, care establishments, neighbourhood committees and real estate developers. Restructuring residential districts and strategic parts of city centres is primarily a matter of zealously working on contextual visioning, community building and community concepts. The phase of building in bricks comes much later.

The decade of experience is an achievement, but also a risk. A critical assessment or review of the past objectives and attained results could help to understand and to rephrase today's and future objectives of the next strategic projects in our fast changing society. In order to make the assessment 20 professionals and scientists in the field of policy making, urban planning and real estate development have been and will be interviewed between February and September 2007. These interviews are focussed at the main question "what should be achieved or done differently in the year 2010 to benefit from these efforts in 2020 and 2030?". The interviews showed clearly that, without delay, a different approach on urban renewal and development should be taken. Urban projects should be better connected and better safeguarded against futures changes and more flexible to enhance sustainable development. More efforts should be made to direct and control the quality and sustainability of the urban renewal processes. More energy should be put in the involvement and participation of inhabitants. The fast changes in society demand a regular evaluation of target groups and the way the plans for urban renewal and strategic projects are visioned and communicated with stakeholders and future users.

### **1 Provisional results**

Sustainable Urban Design is urban design that focuses on people and the environment; one that can be used for a long time, continuing to meet requirements that occur throughout that time. The book 'Sustainable Urban Design, perspectives and examples' describes sustainable urban design as it is practiced at the present time in The Netherlands. By means of an essay that describes the past, present and future of sustainable urban design and five outstanding examples of present-day projects in The Netherlands, the book describes a form of urban design that is gaining an ever more unquestioned position within the discipline. Three of the five examples are urban renewal projects. The book is compiled by the BNSP|NVTL Working Group for Sustainable Urban Development; a broadly constituted group of experts from professional societies for urban designers and planners and landscape architects.

The book 'Sustainable Urban Design' is sold worldwide. The first print of 2.000 copies was sold out within 18 months. The authors are preparing a second and renewed edition. This paper for the 43<sup>rd</sup> ISoCaRP Planning Congress 'Urban Triologues' presents the provisional results of the 20 interviews with professionals and scientists in the field of policy making, urban planning and real estate development. Three interviews are scheduled in August 2007 with representatives of housing associations. With reference to the 43<sup>rd</sup> ISoCaRP Planning Congress 'Urban Triologues', this paper will be the basis of the essay in the second edition of

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the book 'Sustainable Urban Design, perspectives and examples', which will be published in the second half of 2007.

Almost every city in The Netherlands has made a strategic vision for future development. The year 2030 quite often taken as a point of reference: "... in 2030 the city will have so many houses of this or that quality for these or those communities." The Dutch government also has set goals and objectives for the social quality of residential areas and cities. Presenting these goals and objectives, national and local governments react on the permanent interest of society on problem areas in cities. What is missing, however, is a translation of these goals for the future into present and practical activities and interventions. At this moment, it is important to take the right activities and interventions in order to reach the goals and objectives and to avoid missing chances, especially when concerns the sustainable development of the city as a whole.

The 20 professionals on the fields of urban development, planning and design hold different positions in the public and private sector at local governments, consultancies, universities and real estate developers in The Netherlands and Germany. In the interviews, the focus was directed on the urban region Arnhem and Nijmegen. The question on what should exactly be done right now, until 2010, to make our cities ready for the future in the field of strategic urban development aroused quite interesting propositions. The consensus between the experts on the topic of radical and urgent change in attitude is remarkable. Which activities and interventions should be taken also were similar, although contradictions were to be expected considering the variety of backgrounds of the experts. In the many conversations, most experts are primary but mildly critical on their own profession and professional backgrounds. The contributions and reactions of the three German experts provide interesting perspectives on urban development in The Netherlands. In the interviews with the experts several subjects were discussed among which the absence of coherence in urban development, strategic visioning, sustainable development and leadership in urban development.

## **2 The absence of coherence in urban development**

Coherence in urban planning is mentioned in the interviews as the first necessity for the nearby future. Developments in cities have to be considered in mutual coherence and connectivity in order to realise sustainable and liveable cities. Jos Verweij, urban planner for Arnhem expresses this as follows. "As the larger urban renewal projects in Arnhem affect each other, it is more than reasonable that these projects are connected with each other. In this, public urban space and public domain are key factors for the public support for these urban renewal projects. The situation and positioning of services and retail in the future urban fabric is essential in the negotiations with the private sector". On a regional scale developments has to be geared up to one another as well, according to Jos Verweij. "Urban development is, both by the public and the private sector, primary aimed at the influence on city itself, and not on the influences in the region. In the case of the situation and positioning of services and retail, the best location for the city does not always coincides with the best interests of the region. In the future, the situation services and retail on these locations will not be sustainable. Therefore, the region itself must control and direct the positioning of larger developments". Real estate developer Chretien van Essen of Rabo Vastgoedontwikkeling is quite concerned about this. "At this moment quite a number of urban renewal projects are developed next to each other in Arnhem. As a comprehensive vision concerning these urban renewal projects is missing, nobody has a clear overview on the housing market. This results in a situation that managing and addressing specific target groups within the urban renewal projects is almost impossible. In this case, the private sector is not able to specify the planned supply of houses on the location and the target groups. This creates a possible and dangerous circumstance that in the various projects too many

houses are developed for one particular target group. The public sector is in need of coherent visions and a clear framework of strategies on the future developments on urban and regional scale”.

The need of the public sector for coherent visions is obvious. They want to avoid the risk that the new houses are not in demand. For urban planner Max van den Berg coherent visions are a necessity for the preservation of the rural areas between the towns and cities. “The cause of the deterioration of the urban and rural areas lies in the slow pace of planning processes. A complete and current overview on the claims and developments is missing. When plans and projects are build, rural areas and historical landscapes are lost or spoiled forever. An authority that can explain the problems and challenges concerning urban and rural planning is more than welcome.” Nearly everything that is being built in The Netherlands, the spatial chaos in some parts of the country included, is the result of democratic decision processes. The public has no overview on these decision processes. Barrie Needham, of the Radboud Universiteit in Nijmegen addresses this problem as well. “It is a pity that there is no current overview and insight in spatial developments in The Netherlands ,because we simply need to know how projects and developments are connected and how these connections work. Most municipalities are focussed on themselves and give little attention to cooperation with their neighbours. Municipalities think and work on the basis of competition and don’t consider the dependence of influences on a larger scale. This is why a more centralised approach is needed that focuses on coherent visions and regional developments. Subsidies for urban renewal should be joined together in order to have an decisive effect on developments that go beyond the local interests.”

Detlef Kurth of the Hochschule für Technik in Stuttgart adds a second argument to the combined enhancement of subsidies. “Present goals and programmes of subsidies for urban renewal differ in specific means and targets for which they are addressed. Some programmes are directed at social aspects alone and some at physical aspects. This is not very efficient. The ultimate goal of urban renewal is an integral and sustainable redevelopment of parts of cities.” Detlev Kurth also sees the interests of coherent urban planning. “Urban renewal in The Netherlands gives little attention to transitions between the existing urban fabric and the added new developments. Spatial connections are rare. This results in strong differences in heights and densities. The cause of this all is a combination of the absence of strong master planning, maximalisation of profit and speculation.” The economical pressure on urban renewal has a large influence on the development of a city. When every development has to be profitable, it is quite likely that unsalable houses and services will be realised on inadequate locations. A coherent vision for urban (re)development can successfully operated with the help of the new law on land development. This new law makes it possible to balance public investments with private profits.

Urban development goes hand in hand with regional and rural development. Hein Struben of Hein Struben Advies expresses this in a striking one-liner. “I’m in favour of the countryside because I love the city.” Hein Struben explains: “The countryside right outside the Dutch cities is loosing the function of food production. Nowadays, it is regarded as an investment that can yield large profits in a short period of time. Real estate developers persuade farmers to sell their lands for the development of functions like retail, leisure en pleasure. As the result of high investments these functions tend to leave the cities for the rural areas between the cities. As the municipalities are not able to acquire strategic locations, they have ample means and possibilities tot influence and manage these developments. In this way the economical pressure on the countryside is rising and the cities fail to attract new investments.” This observation leads to the conclusion that a more centralised and strategic land use policy by the municipalities is necessary and that municipalities have to join forces in order to make strategic and coherent visions for future regional and urban developments.



*Figure 1. Two examples of urban renewal in The Netherlands. In this project, “De Hutten” in the small industrial town Ulft, east of Arnhem, urban renewal, monumental and cultural preservation, coincides with the construction of an ecological corridor and sustainable development. It is one of the five good practices and instructive projects described in the book *Sustainable Urban Design, perspectives and examples*, page 150 to 173.*

### **3 Urban development needs analysis and vision**

The absence of coherence in urban planning cannot be tackled without strong visions for the future development of space and society of The Netherlands. What do we really want to achieve, what ambitions do we have, what are the effects of climate change or sea level rising ? On the field of traffic, transport and mobility, a much debated and hot issue in The Netherlands, the lack of strong visioning is strongly apparent. Frank Aalbers, traffic and transport consultant at Goudappel Coffeng, explains. “In the last 30 years, The Netherlands has been developed into a mobility based society. Nevertheless, there is no comprehensive and accepted vision on the future of traffic, transport and mobility. When a problem or a project on traffic and transport arises, we tend to solve the problem quite pragmatic, the engineering way of thinking rules. Our focus is not directed at breathtaking new visions and ideas. Our society probably seems to accept traffic jams and pollution as an obvious result of our mobility based society. It takes far too much time to work out real innovations. New techniques and coherent plans are insufficiently or inappropriately implemented. Structural solutions, such as pay per the mile, are constantly postponed and a clever public transport system that works better than travelling by car is not yet in sight.” It is quite clear that a different approach is needed. “We really have to develop new and comprehensive visions on traffic and transport for the next 50 years. This is not an issue for The Netherlands alone, it has international aspects as well. We have to make choices, like a fair taxation of fuel for airplanes and promoting high speed trains and bulk transports on rails. And without a comprehensive vision, we cannot make choices.”

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John van de Zand, urban planner at SAB Amsterdam, has a keen eye for the dimension of time in urban planning. The many empty office buildings are good examples of outdated policies. "The projects that are in development at this moment are not in line with today's reality. The decisions to plan, develop and built new office buildings were taken many years ago in other economical circumstances. Without exception, decisions were made without coherent planning or the consultation of other municipalities in the region. This results in a cannibalising effect on well respected and good functioning office districts." John van de Zand mentions the Zuidas in Amsterdam as an example. "The Zuidas pulls companies away from the renowned areas close to the city of Amsterdam. In five years time these areas will deteriorate. In this way we create our own problems. Municipalities lack the knowledge and the experience to assess the consequences of their planning and developments." For Detlev Kurth comprehensive visions are essential parts of master plans for urban development. "In urban renewal projects in the southern parts of Germany far too little attention is given to visioning beyond the present and expected use. We have learned from urban renewal projects in The Netherlands that it is necessary to make strategic visions for existing residential areas. In this way we can anticipate on emerging trends, estimate which problems will be eminent and act preventive with urban renewal. We can only achieve this when we see urban renewal as an essential part of the permanent development and subsequent master planning of the city."

Gerrit Sluiskes and Koos Oegema, senior retail experts at the MKB Groep, recognise the changes and difficulties in developing retail spaces for small businesses. "Until recently, developing retail spaces was a natural result of the development or redevelopment of residential areas and city centres. Although inhabitants of villages, residential areas and cities like to have services and retail nearby their houses, they don't make use of them well enough anymore. There seems to emerge a new hierarchy in retail and services. City centres are changing themselves into hotspots for leisure, restaurants, fun shopping and a mixture of fast and slow foods. Supermarkets and outlets for fashion and consumer goods tend to grow bigger and bigger, this to the disadvantage of smaller shops. The internet is an important factor that we cannot foresee completely. The combination of this all probably will have a dramatic effect on the way cities are functioning and if and how retail and services will be a part of the urban fabric. This need to be analysed and assessed". On the topic of liveable cities urban planner Wim Lavooij of SAB Strategie en Ontwerp claims that the situation and positioning of services and retail is essential for a sustainable and healthy society in cities. "We have to consider the complete scope of services and retail, supermarkets in all sizes and formulas on all locations and especially the small and specialised businesses, shops, cafés and restaurants. In new residential and urban renewal areas services and retail are underdeveloped and not diverse enough. This is a result of the high costs of retail spaces. As diversity in services and retail is an important quality, the idea arises that housing should contribute considerably to the development of retail spaces. In the end, houses in the direct vicinity of small and specialised businesses, shops, cafés and restaurants are more in demand".

In The Netherlands are quite a few examples of sustainable urban planning and design in which sustainable development coincides with urban renewal. Femke Adriaens, consultant on sustainable planning, on the difficult practice and the daring ambitions of sustainable urban planning. "Added to the efforts to redevelop urban residential areas or industrial sites, about every aspect and detail is being thought of. It often is a combination of the implementation of an integral vision for energy and water, preservation and re-use industrial heritage, sanitation of the polluted soils, open planning processes with the local population, planning and design of ecological corridors, et cetera, et cetera. The point is, these all are singular important and equally relevant issues. In the last ten years we have made quite some progress, but after the recent reports of the UN and the EU about issues as climate change and sea level rising the question arises if it is enough to meet present and future needs?. The Dutch examples sustainable urban planning of are a benchmark for good

practice. With this in mind, it is not enough to meet future needs. What we, additionally, need for future generations are not only higher ambitions and standards in integral energy planning and water management, but new visions or paradigm shifts in sustainable urban planning and development. Instead of energy-saving constructions of single houses and buildings, we are in need of revolutionary ideas of how residential areas and business parks will be able to contribute to energy production. Instead of water management in the traditional approach (living next to water) we are in need of new visions and ideas about living in, on and from water as a result of climate change and sea level rising. Climate change and sea level rising will also effect the higher parts of the Netherlands, especially areas in the vicinity of the rivers. Furthermore, it is most essential that we are in need of new visions and ideas of sustainable land management in combination with paradigm shifts for infrastructure and transport. We have to plan and use land much more efficient, flexible, multiple and with the future in mind. With every new (re)development, regardless of the scale and location, we have to ask ourselves again and again what will be the future use, can it be used again, will it be effected by the effects of climate change and sea level rising and can it contribute to energy production?”.



*Figure 2. A second example of urban renewal in The Netherlands. The restructuring of the centre of Ulfth was a direct result of the two urban renewal projects as shown in Figure 1. Source: Sustainable Urban Design, perspectives and examples, page 150 to 173.*

#### **4 Leadership and continuity are essential for quality and sustainability**

Real estate development companies are adjusting themselves to the needs and demands of society. They are more and more dependant from the results and references of their realised projects. The key factors are quality, flexibility and sustainability, even in economical difficult years. Local governments have an important task in the visioning and managing of those key factors. Real estate developer Marcel Schipper of Planoform Vastgoedontwikkeling explains. “We simply have no choice. We have to focus more on quality rather than on quantity. Between the initiative and realisation often lies five to twelve years preparation. From start to

finish these projects are our references, we cannot allow ourselves one single failure. Our references mean everything for us. They are important in the acquisitions of new projects, now and in the future. Architectural quality, flexibility, sustainability and the way we work together with municipalities and its inhabitants are indicators for our attitude and reliability.” Chretien van Essen of Rabo Vastgoed fully agrees with this. “Real estate development has been changed from mathematic routine into a social economic process. We work with corporate identities, lifestyles and target groups. This process reacts on the individualisation of the public and society. Our clients don’t want to be restrained by their house, they want to express themselves. Different lifestyles demand different housing projects. This does not stop at the layout and the architecture of the houses, the housing market and our clients expect a specific and matching environment. In this way we develop housing projects for different target groups.”

There is nothing wrong with making profits out of the development of housing projects, according to Dirk Engelke of Universität Karlsruhe. “Unlike in Germany, in The Netherlands making profits is taken for granted and a natural part of almost every housing project. This is because “making money” is generally accepted in The Netherlands and besides, the economical growth is higher than in Germany.” In comparison to the German practice Dirk Engelke noticed that the cooperation between consultants and private and public sector in The Netherlands is open minded and transparent. “Plans and objectives for urban renewal projects are openly discussed and documented. They work on the basis of shared visions and formal public private partnerships and both are taken very seriously. The advantage of this way of working is that there is trust and mutual understanding. The disadvantage is that it requires an enormous amount of negotiations and debates and that it takes a lot of precious time and money.” According to Dirk Engelke the expertise in urban planning processes of municipalities in The Netherlands is quite high. “This is essential to play a decisive role in the negotiations and debates. It means that the municipalities are able to operate independently and to make their own decisions.” Municipalities, and preferably in close cooperation with each other, have to take the initiative and claim leadership for coherent and integral urban and regional planning. A strong staff and guaranteed continuity are essential for success. Marcel Schipper: “A municipality that has a strong vision on urban planning and has an open mind for future developments is a great help at the starting point of a new project. During the planning processes we often notice that for different reasons project leaders leave for another job and are replaced. In this way specific en precious knowledge, expertise and personal contacts disappear. In the end we have to invest a lot of time to ensure the continuity of the planning and development processes.”

For Max Van den Berg continuity and a proper organisation are essential for success. “Too many visions and strategies have planning horizons which are way ahead of us. Local and regional governments should formulate practical objectives for the near future, say the next three to five years. In this way you can make public and private organisations really responsible for progress. Society and the public sector need to know what will happen in the near future in order to make the right decisions. They will have to work closely together and share ambitions and responsibilities in order to produce satisfactory results in a short period of time. In this process you cannot afford too many changes in the objectives and in the compounding of your team.” Gerrit Sluiskes is in favour of decisive local governments with powerful visions. “Local governments should take a leading role in development processes, but only if they are able ask the right questions to their consultants and if they are willing to listen to them. In the last few years the local governments have listened too much to the real estate developers. This has resulted in many empty office buildings and retail spaces.”

The need for coherence in planning has to become an important issue in the future education and training of urban planners and designers, many experts said. Wim Lavooij explains. “Planners are trained to design and to look at the city in a conceptual way. Working together in multidisciplinary teams is not a part of the curriculum. In complex and sustainable urban

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renewal projects planners and designers have to work closely together with all sorts of professionals and experts, like researchers, civil engineers, water managers, energy and business consultants. No cooperation, no results." Detlev Kurth has similar ideas about the curriculum of planners and designers. "Urban planning is seen as a competence close to architecture. This is not the case, the two professions are quite different. Urban renewal and sustainable design are very important topics of next decades. The social and economic aspects are insufficiently addressed in the education and training of urban planners and designers".

## 5 References

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