

Crabbehof, like many other post-war neighbourhoods in the Netherlands was created as the urban embodiment of a social-economic idea. It is crucial to be aware of what kind of social-economic idea we are giving shape to with the current plans for the renovation of Crabbehof. Directly linked to this question is realising in what way the current assets of the neighbourhood can be used for this purpose.

A NEW VISION FOR CRABBEHOF

The welfare state does not exist anymore, for sure not in the form that was possible in the 60's or 70's. An area such as Crabbehof fitted well in the then strong social, economic and cultural model. This model can be called outdated or maybe even failed. Would that also mean that urban structures tailored specifically to that model are also failures? In the case of Crabbehof it is often said that this is exactly the case and that Crabbehof is due to be transformed in order to suit better contemporary society. Still, considering the current renovation plans there is the danger of making the same mistake as the one made in the 60's: choosing for a static form of urbanism, which fits to the state of contemporary society only. Such a way of planning also implies that the life of an urban structure is only a succession of big-scale centrally controlled interventions. But utopias are temporary and always subject to the Zeitgeist. That is why when making plans for Crabbehof's transformation it has to be worked with flexible social, and thus urban and architectonic, structures in order to make the plans suitable not only for present-day society, but also for the one of tomorrow.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

In order to secure a sustainable social and economic development the plan for Crabbehof should discuss both the hardware (urban planning and buildings), as well as the software (the inhabitants and their social-economic relations) of the neighbourhood. When talking about future interventions we must take into account the physical condition of Crabbehof in relation to the lifestyle of its inhabitants and users. Besides that there are also other factors, which have to be considered, such as trends in the real estate market, local infrastructure and economy.

Social factors, which need to be considered:

- people in a disadvantaged economic situation (Crabbehof is the least popular area of Dordrecht)
- elderly people who often feel isolated in their own apartments. They find it often difficult to accept newcomers (immigrants) and desire a calm and predictable environment
- a growing group of immigrants, who find it difficult to integrate in Dutch society. They are also often people who have financial problems.

Physical factors, which need to be considered:

- public space. Inhabitants and users of Crabbehof can and should make more use of public space.
- allowing the possibility of appropriation of public space by groups or individuals
- the well-kept skeletons of the Modernist apartment blocks, which can serve as a basis for offering a larger choice of dwellings, working and open spaces
- a well functioning infrastructure

External factors:

- young people, who are in search of a home/environment, with which they could identify themselves
- the current real estate market, which does not tolerate repetitive housing typologies anymore

- private investments in the service sector: sports, shopping, entertainment, education
- commuters, who can make use of the good rail and car connections

STRATEGY

One of the most direct connections, which can be made in the current state of affairs in Crabbehof, is linking the improvement of the position of the financially weak to the urban planning and rules regulating the neighbourhood. We argue that allowing small-scale interventions on buildings and urban space, as well as allowing mixed use will open a series of opportunities to the local inhabitants/users, which can lead to small-scale economic growth. A side effect in this case will be a stronger participation and identification of the inhabitants/users with their neighbourhood, as well as the creation of attractive conditions for newcomers. The current state of Crabbehof presents a good basis for such an approach. Such type of interventions will create a flexible urban condition, which is capable of adapting itself to changing social and economic requirements.

In a time of crisis of our economic model, bottom-up ideas are becoming increasingly popular. Phenomena such as open source, creative commons and pirated copyright, as well as Facebook, Hyves and Wikileaks show that change can take place by incremental developments and common, complementary actions. Incremental, additive development ensures a more flexible and sustainable development and is an important correcting factor to top-down planning. That does not mean that top-down planning is unnecessary, rather the opposite. Large scale planning should not be concerned with total design, but it should also not leave all ends open. Incremental development could easily end up in the dead-end street of chaos, unless guided. In this sense housing corporations and municipalities could rather exercise their policy by creating and maintaining a framework, in which certain spatial and social development would be stimulated, instead of trying to do all the work by themselves.

A framework for Crabbehof would consist of a set of rules, which regulate and stimulate the renovation process. They should treat both public space and the buildings. The urban plan ought to stimulate architecture, which adds to Crabbehof's identity and on its own term the architecture of the buildings should be a stimulus for the development of certain lifestyles. Following this logic we think that there are three focal points, working on which will ensure the successful renovation of Crabbehof:

- attracting active young people, who are keen on transforming their environment to their own desires and needs. "TRANSFORMERS"
- redesigning public space and routing in order to allow communities to get formed. "COMMUNITIES"
- spatial interventions for the reuse of the existing buildings in a manner, which allows different models of dwelling and working to take place. "ECONOMY"

TRANSFORMERS – current inhabitants and newcomers.

In order to give a strong impulse to the renovation process we need to involve in it young pro-active people. People that are interested and capable in changing their own environment. We talk rather of acupuncture intervention instead of transforming the whole neighbourhood in a DIY experiment. Such a group of active people will clearly be a minority, but still a minority can set the tone for change and contribute to the transformation of Crabbehof. Besides for these active inhabitants, the area should allow for a whole range of variety of lifestyles: from the passive consumer to the people with less money to commuters. The ideal situation would be if a number of these inhabitants decides to take the initiative to transform their own environs and in this way become a catalyser for the future development of the area. Such a TRANSFORMERS group can consist of partly newcomers and partly the current

Crabbehof inhabitants. There are already handful examples in the neighbourhood of house owners renovating and extending their own houses.

For this reason we consider aged building stock not a good enough reason for demolishing a building or an area. One has only to think of the historical city cores, which would never have been attractive to the contemporary citizen in their original state. But due to gradual transformations through time they represent a very desired dwelling environment nowadays. This same logic is applicable to areas such as Crabbehof too. There are various possibilities for a transforming the existing if one considers, for example, the concrete skeleton of a building as the basis for a cooperative building scheme. For that reason we think that the problem of Crabbehof is not so much the age of the building stock, but rather its monotony. If inhabitants and investors are allowed to transform their property, then this will cause a great variety of building types in a very pragmatic, intelligent manner. We could go even a step further and imagine that Crabbehof will get famous exactly due to the initiativeness of its users and due to the fact that certain things are possible only in Crabbehof.

COMMUNITIES

The possibility to form groups must be on of the bases of the renovation strategy. It is important to unlock an urban life, which is not constantly dependent on institutional interventions. People should be able to create a clear functional and psychological relation with their surroundings. And in case that they decide to change something in their surroundings (taking care of a plant, place a bench, etc.) then this change must be sustainable (the one taking care should be able to exercise control). For this reason it is important to stimulate the creation of communities. There could be a variety of communities, each one characterised by a different level of engagement between its members. Sometimes the binding factor can be just a similar lifestyle (so a rather visual and psychological similarity) and sometimes they can be based on functional inter-dependencies between the inhabitants. This would mean that we would have to concentrate on the development of domains of different spatial and functional potentials, which attract different kind of people.

Such communities can develop not only with a different level of internal commitment, but also on different locations (between single apartments, around a common staircase, alongside the streets or gardens, etc.). Their working should also include the management of public space. We should move away from the current situation of private units grouped in clusters and placed in no-man's land. It must become clear where the border between private, public and common lies. Even most importantly it must become clear who is taking care of which space. Such an approach will stimulate the sensation of belonging to a group (our street, our park, there play our children). People desire an environment, which fits to their lifestyle. Scale is important and the creation of a critical mass of people of similar lifestyle is crucial to the success of a community. The socialist idea of mixing different lifestyles has proven dysfunctional and the time has come to leave behind the idea that people can dwell happily next to each other, never mind what the differences between them are. On the other hand a certain community must not engulf a whole neighbourhood, but rather bind a street or a building together. Other projects in Crabbehof, such as the Vorrinklaan, where preparations are at their final stage, are also showcases of the mechanical adding of mass.

The proposed communities are an alternative to some of the suggestions made in the 2006 plan for Crabbehof. As described there the neighbourhood is composed of zones of different potentials. It is then suggested to develop these potentials into themes, which would determine the working logic of each zone. While we agree that the characteristics of the different zones must be explored we suggest that these potentials form rather a guiding line

instead of an end result. We could define the rules of the game, without needing to play it. In this sense we need to initiate a process, in which the neighbourhood, together with its society, can evolve and develop.

This would mean that owners (of houses, shops and offices) would be able to develop their own property. At present private property in Crabbehof lacks one of its most basic characteristics, the possibility to exploit it.

ECONOMY

Crabbehof can be activated by stimulating the economic needs and interests of its inhabitants. Within this logic the role of the housing corporations becomes similar to the one of local authorities. Namely distributing subsidies and other stimulus, which help the development of a local economy. There are examples from outside the Netherlands, which illustrate such a private-public partnership. The “Development trusts” in the UK for example, in which case the inhabitants/users and the municipality make a contract concerning the functioning of an area. At the same time small and middle scale private capital can play an important role in area regeneration. Examples for this can be found in Eastern Europe, where after the fall of communism private capital transformed substantially neighbourhoods similar to Crabbehof.

Economic interests can also have an important role for the creation of communities. For example shared property in projects for geothermal energy or smart energy grids, like in the case of Hoogkerk near Groningen in the Netherlands.

The current practice of functionally allocating the building stock in Crabbehof for either working or dwelling is a notion that has long lost its practical relevance. There is a growing request for combinations of dwelling and working and Crabbehof has the space to realise them. Such an approach leads to a livelier neighbourhood and better distributed services.

CONCLUSION

When talking about Crabbehof’s renovation we consider reuse, evolution and multifunctionality not just as temporary measures but also as the best principles to follow. We suggest that the process is one of directing, rather than making. We think the best scenario for Crabbehof is a framework (physical, administrative and economic), which allows investors and inhabitants to give shape to their own neighbourhood.

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This Manifest was written at the beginning of 2011 with the assistance of Simon de Jong.