



INTRO

Once enthusiastically greeted as progressive and emancipatory, the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood of Europe is nowadays, more often than not, the despised cheap dormitory compound of the city it was supposed to reinvent. The only positive issue mentioned about it is the low rent/buy price there. The negative news is on the other hand abundant, showing a variety of social, economical and spatial problems. There seem to be a whole range of reasons for the fall out of grace of the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood: it would be unsuitable for the lifestyle of the contemporary individual, it would have passed beyond its technical expiry date, it is a case of unsettled property legislation, there is a chronic lack of maintenance resources or it would simply be ugly. Still these areas, known popularly as council flats, panelni kvartali, quartieri popolari, banlieue, plattenbausiedlung constitute a substantial amount of the housing stock of the contemporary European city. So substantial that in many cases close to half of the population calls them 'home'.

THE CASE

Crabbehof is a very good example of the failure of the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood. Built in the 1960's in the southern Dutch city of Dordrecht, it was greeted very enthusiastically by both the municipality and its new inhabitants. After gradually losing its attractiveness to the row- or detached housing neighbourhoods of the 80's it became in the 90's even the place where drug dealing and prostitution would not be unusual. Even though criminality has been steadily decreasing, Crabbehof is nowadays still the least desired area of Dordrecht. The neighbourhood consists of a mix of row houses and apartment buildings with no elevators. There are also a shopping centre, couple of schools, an elderly centre and a few former churches. Dwelling is by far the predominant 'activity' in Crabbehof.

Still the variety of housing types is extremely limited: practically three apartments types and two types of row houses. Around 75% of the housing stock is owned by two housing corporations, municipal companies required to work according to the market principles.

THE INITIAL PLAN

As part of a government-led national programme for renovation, the two housing corporations (Woonbron and Trivire), together with the Dordrecht municipality, put up in 2006 a plan for Crabbehof. It was based on a very sound study on the area, carried out by Urban Fabric. The plan aimed at tackling all aspects of Crabbehof's bad image: the economic segregation, the monotonous housing typologies, the technical state of the buildings, the management of public and private space, as well as the functioning of the neighbourhood as a whole. In fact the plan suggested, without explicitly describing it, the demolition of most of the nearly 4.000 housing units and their substitution with what seems to be the contemporary equivalent of the Modern dream: the single-family (row) house with a 'garden'. This policy was based on the presumption that the then still booming housing market would easily absorb the amount of new housing units or refurbished old ones. In the Netherlands this had been the recipe for dealing with the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood already from the mid 90's. An important part of the plan was the desire to bring new inhabitants in Crabbehof, people with higher incomes. The urban environment described in the 2006 document was tailored predominantly to these newcomers. With the 2006 document the first step had been made towards a proper marketing research, in which the word 'citizen' would get substituted with the word 'client/consumer'.

OUR OBJECTIONS

It is obvious to all that the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood is in crisis. The original urban planning idea, upon which it was built, has lost its relevance. On the one hand it required a system, which does not exist anymore or is ceasing to exist: an extensive municipality or state apparatus and financing. On the other, Modernism propagated the equality of all inhabitants, a notion that is morally unpopular in contemporary society. But even if the Modern dream and urban planning have become unpopular, the practised alternative is even less convincing. Rows of private houses divided by fences and linked only by the necessary circulation space-the street. An urban realm where private action is the only valid one and social relations overlap almost completely with commercial behaviour does not speak of an open-minded, tolerant and progressive society. Our objection to the 2006 Crabbehof plan was that it was making the same mistake as the 1960's plan: ignoring the existing situation and trying to substitute it with a new one.

Instead of starting anew and thus committing the same Modernist mistake, we think that the right effort to do is to build upon the existing. In our view the reality of the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood already provides a good basis for developing it further. When thinking of efficiently renovating such a neighbourhood it can be of great convenience to consider the forces already active there. It appears that the Modernist suburb itself offers social and economic potentials for regeneration. Such potentials are unfortunately not being explored or even worse, they are being wiped out. Various cases show that the needs, desires, economic and social capabilities of the residents, investors or users of these areas do provide the possibility for building upon the existing urban fabric, without the need of starting anew. And on top of the socio-economic issue comes also the spatial one. The Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood represents an infrastructure, rather than a living condition. Modernists managed to implement a large scale housing programme, which provided only the skeleton of a true urban environment though. This true urban environment was never allowed or stimulated to take shape and until today most Modernist mass-housing neighbourhoods are characterised by a centrally managed, clinical, empty, passive urban environment. No wonder

that they are not very popular.

OUR INVOLVEMENT

The economic crisis had made the 2006 plan impossible to sell and the housing corporations were looking for an alternative. Seeing the weaknesses of the 2006 approach we sought involvement in the planning process for Crabbehof. Triggered by our view on the subject, the two housing corporations included us in few of the activities, which were meant to give birth to a revised plan for Crabbehof. There were few work-groups formed to give suggestions on possible alterations to the old plan. Ljubo Georgiev participated in three of the work-groups: on urban planning, on the housing stock and the one involving the current inhabitants. Each group had a different working method, but they all were supposed to come up with a document containing proposals. This process lasted from January till August 2011. In order to stimulate the process, as well to guide in the direction we considered the good one, we prepared a document called the Crabbehof Manifest.

THE CRABBEHOF MANIFEST

Currently most, if not all, interventions directed towards the Modernist mass-housing neighbourhood fall short into recognising the possibility of an urban evolution taking place there. The chance to build upon the existing spatial and social infrastructure gets usually ignored. Very unfortunately, because the potential for citizen and small to middle investors' participation can be explored by making a spatial, administrative, economical and a technical frame, which can stimulate private action. Instead of trying to solve the problem top-down, with the use of huge resources and with an unsustainable effect, the very inhabitant/user can be placed at the centre of the regeneration machine.

In the case of Crabbehof we formulated this standpoint in what we called the 'Crabbehof manifest'. The base of the document was the idea that a neighbourhood such as Crabbehof was the spatial translation of a social-economic vision. With the Manifest we were suggesting what type of spatial translation should be given to the current social-economic context. When searching for such a translation we stated that we must not omit the same mistake as the planners in the 60's did by choosing for static, completely planned and predictable urban environment.

In the document we state that the current state of affairs in Crabbehof is characterised by the relation between the neighbourhood's users (the software) and the physical state of the area (the hardware). In this sense we list a number of software (economic status of the residents, the elderly, immigrants) and hardware (public space, property management, the Modernist infrastructure, the transport system), as well as external to the area factors (young people in search of a new dwelling, the real estate market, investment in services, commuters), which have to be considered.

The first step we propose to be taken is linking the case of the financially weak inhabitants to the spatial arrangement of the neighbourhood. We see Crabbehof as a case where steps can be done towards a more flexible use of the buildings, the possibility of working on/with the buildings and introducing diverse systems of common or public space management. In this way the possibility is given for the inhabitants (or external users of the area) to work on their economic situation and on the other a stronger bond is made between people and their context.

In the Crabbehof manifest we also argue for allowing an incremental, evolutionary development of the area, instead of the planned revolutionary big-scale actions. This would mean introducing more agents into the formula, which is to change the situation, leaving

behind the idea that municipality and housing corporations should do it all by themselves. It would be economically and socially more effective if these organisations create a frame, inside which other factors can be responsible for change to take place.

In the case of Crabbehof we propose three focus points, which we believe have the potential of bringing change to the area:

- + attracting young newcomers, who want to physically create their own environment
- + redesigning public space and circulation in order to allow the creation of communities
- + transforming the existing building stock in a way, which would allow the appearance of different dwelling and working environments.

With the Crabbehof manifest we point on reuse, evolution and multifunctionality as core principles for the renovation of the area. In our view, such an approach to renovation will be effective in two ways: an economic and a political one. In the first case the renovation will be carried out in much smaller, financially diverse steps, with the participation of a variety of small and middle economic factors. The burden on municipal or state budgets would be much smaller too. The enrichment of economic life and activity in a Modernist neighbourhood would be a way to create a true and sustainable urban environment. In the case of the political gain, we think that it is very important that people grow again from consumers into citizens and become active in shaping their environment. Architecture and urban planning should provide for the possibility of private or communal intervention, appropriation and action. Positive and responsible citizen behaviour can be cultivated only through the inclusion of citizens into the act of making the city.

THE FINAL OUTCOME

The whole process of plan making resulted in three booklets, which represent the different views on how change should be brought to Crabbehof. One booklet describes the vision of the urban planners of the Dordrecht municipality, the second one sums up the views expressed by the inhabitants and the third one presents an idea of how the other two booklets, combined with the work of other groups, can form an integral whole. The plan is still to be approved by the boards of the housing corporations and the municipality (December 2011).

FACTS

location:	Wijk Crabbehof, Dordrecht, Zuid Holland, the Netherlands
status:	study 2011
site:	plot ±72ha, total ±4.000 housing units, ±6.500 inhabitants
programme:	renovation strategy formulation
client:	Sociaal Programma Crabbehof (Dordrecht municipality, Woonbron, Trivire)
in cooperation with:	Simon de Jong, Anita Stamatoiu
when:	December 2010 – June 2011