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Features of Sustainable Urban Renewal and Neighbourhood Development

8.1 Introduction

In the 1990s in Western European countries and so in the Netherlands as well, the key issues of urban renewal changed. A more comprehensive and integrated vision on the renewal of cities came into existence, directed at sustainable improvement (see also Roberts, 2000). In England though, for instance, a few years into the Sustainable Communities program, it is difficult to see exactly which impact these programmes have, in particular on socio-economic development. The criteria devised for that English program have their value in the analysis of important features of urban renewal in Rotterdam and the case of the Oude Noorden area.

Sustainable area development is dependant on dynamics created by economic, political, and social changes and changes in the housing provision. In this context the housing market and arrangements for providing housing are certainly not perfect; in this context weaknesses exist such as the immovability of dwellings, i.e. tied to a particular location, the durability of dwellings as products, and the degree of sustainability in respect to housing norms and values and neighbourhood area development. Also the high level of durability of housing in comparison with other products means that relatively high long-term investments are required. This long-term character imposes limitations on the flexibility of what has been achieved. This is why after urban renewal it is always questionable whether the quality achieved keeps satisfying the demands. This question hits the social dimension of sustainability. Social sustainability has been analysed in the Oude Noorden area based on the characteristics and on the value of the dwellings and the living environment assigned to them by the residents in 2001. The actual use and value rated by the residents at that time will be analysed referring to the type of housing, to provide an important addition to other analyses of the living conditions achieved.

The results of analysing the discrepancy between the qualities achieved and the use of housing and residential environments at a later point in time will be compared with the prospects for sustainability. Acknowledgement of plural identities and bridging them, avoiding social exclusion including social polarisation, and the ability to cooperate, are important subdimensions in a process towards a sustainable city (see also Castells, 2000).

The economic dimension will be limited to the capability of urban renewal to create added exchange value combined with modernisation and increase in their use value.

Changes in the structure of housing provision and a more facilitating role given to the local government have not removed the need for strategic planning and renewed citizen participation, according to Castells (2004) and Raco (2007) (See also Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005). Governmental 'withdrawal' radically changed the economic position of the housing associations in the Netherlands. The thought behind this was that the considerable capital housing associations had at their disposal should be used to benefit social housing. The issue was not so much one of achieving profitability as of guaranteeing financial continuity and being able to apply such resources as became available. This to create more scope for policy making by the associations themselves, for example to introduce social objectives such as maintaining a housing stock sufficiently accessible to lower-income groups.

8.2 Criteria for sustainable urban renewal

Establishing the criteria for sustainable urban renewal and community development requires combining ideas developed by theorists such as Castells (2000) and Krueger and Gibbs (2007), and ideas based on studies of actual practice and the implementation of sustainable urban renewal including community policies (Raco, 2007). The criteria need to take account of the use of the dwelling and the residential environment and the rating put on their qualities by residents (see Table 8.1). Moreover, avoiding the displacement of low-income groups was a central feature of Rotterdam's approach to urban renewal. That people move house in itself is not the problem that drives new agendas; it is, however, if this moving enlarges inequalities between different social groups.

The changes in physical quality as result of urban renewal were analysed in a broad context in Chapter 6 and the impact on the social structure of these modernisation processes in Chapter 7. Governance focusing on community activation during the urban renewal process in the period 1975-1993, and policy changes in the 1990s were the main issue in Chapter 5. This leaves the design aspects (Section 8.3), the social aspects (Section 8.4), the economic ones (Sections 8.5 and 8.6) and the urban planning (Section 8.7) to be evaluated.

Functional ageing of housing will be assessed by reference to recent norms, the most important variables being total floor area and the sizes of individual rooms. Quality will then be rated for the opportunities provided for flexible use. If there is to be any prospect for sustainability it is important that flexibility does not require radical structural adjustment. For this reason various aspects of use (as developed in Section 6.4) will be analysed in relation to housing typology, such as the presence of multiple living areas, the possibility and application of multiple domains, flexibility within the dwelling and the possibility of working at home.

Changes in household categories and the increasing diversity of such categories influence the assessment of the quality of housing and the residential environment. Changes in the composition of the population are partly influenced by radical and sizeable urban renewal measures. Some developments, however, are less the consequence of

these programmes than a component of general social developments (see Sections 7.5 and 7.6). About half of the population is made up of people who fall in one or more of the categories unemployed, single-parent families, elderly people on low incomes and ethnic groups. New types of household, such as singles, have taken over the dominant position previously occupied by families.

Table 8.1 Aspects of sustainable urban renewal and sustainable communities

Features of sustainability	Criteria for sustainability
Physical quality of housing	Flexibility referring to different lifestyles, use value of the dwelling.
Housing provision	Accessibility, availability, affordability for all social groups.
Urban design	Good-quality - easily maintainable - housing and residential environment. Flexibility referring to multifunctionality, e.g. reuse of office buildings for housing, reuse of brownfields, minimisation of transport journeys, spatial conditions for high-quality public transport.
Social structure	Avoiding social exclusion, displacement of disadvantaged groups, reducing social inequalities; attractive environment, strong pull for a range of social groups, mixture of socio-economic and ethnic groups; respecting plural identities and bridging them; ability to reduce violence and crime.
Economic structure	Flourishing economic base built on long-term commitments; a broad range of workers; being in the network or ability to link up; creating added value.
Governance	Decentralisation of power; flexibility in the process; active and institutionalised forms of partnerships including housing associations, organisations of local residents of tenants and owner-occupiers, local entrepreneurs, schools etc.; new forms of citizen participation and interactive democracy with help of the Internet and new media; top down visionary and bottom-up emphasis on inclusion.
Urban Planning	Strategic planning including community-led development; accessible public spaces, compact city, provision of a wide range of amenities including a strong mixture with housing.

Social sustainability will be analysed in terms of assessing housing, use value and urban qualities achieved, including the rating given to the residential situation, by tenants in 2001. Social exclusion including polarisation versus confidence in the neighbourhood is based on indicators like length of residence and reasons for moving. Other topics considered will include the composition of the population, the rating given to each section of the Oude Noorden area, the relationship between the degree of stability and mobility of the neighbourhood and developments in the housing market. The value put by residents on social aspects of living conditions, such as quality of life and public safety, will also be examined. For the socio-economic prospects of developing sustainable communities indicators are needed like a general deprivation score, and a number of specific indicators such as the availability of a personal computer, dependence on rent allowances and social security benefits, and rent arrears.

Two indicators used for future financial developments include a revaluation based on value as a going concern, local property values and the projected income and expenditure of housing associations as landlords.

8.3 Assessment of the urban fabric and urban design

Since the 1990s the guiding principle in the Oude Noorden area was the need to achieve a strengthening of the economic and social structure, the main objective of the Big City Policy. The core projects concerned the central shopping area (see Illustration 6.4) and plans for increasing public safety within the area; both had also come to the fore during the neighbourhood approach. The high degree of heterogeneity in the population and among low-income groups led to a wide variety of policy measures. Apart from the core projects the Big City Policy contributed to a variety of other area-related projects, such as rearranging courtyards, laying out a children's playground and setting up a health-care network.

Quality of the residential environment

In the Oude Noorden area, as in other Big City Policy areas, features being repeatedly rated by residents as highly or very highly important were accessibility and social safety of public transport, shops for routine shopping, and primary education. The location of the area, close to the city centre, had a significant effect on the rating. As already mentioned in Section 6.4 and 6.5, the shopping streets provided a large and varied supply, the diversity of the supply being partly due to the presence of ethnic businesses from all sorts of cultures. There were many amenities and activities particularly aimed at women and the elderly. Residents found the area lively, and the schools in the neighbourhood were nearby and reasonably widely spread.

Residents reported that one of the worst problems was the dirty and degraded environment (Vink and Van Wensveen, 2000). Despite the positive rating given to facilities, both residents and entrepreneurs thought that the shopping streets were deteriorating. Constant steps needed to be taken to reverse this development. In 2001 the average overall rating (on a scale of 1 to 10) given to the quality of green space and play facilities, paving, lighting, parking facilities, public space and the general appearance of buildings, was 6.0. 39% gave the neighbourhood's facilities generally a rating of 7 or higher. However,



Integration of new and modernised social housing

a significant number of individual facilities were rated as poor or very poor. The facilities in question were the provision of green space (rated as poor or very poor by 50% of respondents), facilities for young people (by 47%), parking facilities (by 43%) and places for children to play (by 37%). From 2000 onwards new plans were put into effect to extend and refurbish the facilities.

Courtyards and squares

After the demolition of what were mainly industrial buildings, an important factor in the improvement of the residential environment and urban fabric was the creation of green space on vacated courtyards, reducing the shortage of green space and play facilities. Some of these plots were created by the amalgamation of separate blocks. After urban renewal a number of courtyards were still closed or were only accessible by day. Moreover, since the 1990s high priority has been given to refurbishing the squares. By 2000, 15 courtyards and four squares had been improved.

In 2001 residents in the first project were generally more satisfied with the layout of the areas inside the building blocks. The inside areas were respectably sized and provided room for green space and play facilities. Initially they were freely accessible, but some years later were only accessible from the street during the day. The decision to make this change resulted mainly from a change in policy in 2002 initiated by the right wing politician Pim Fortuyn, which led to public safety being given high priority by the municipality and