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REVIEW ARTICLES

Paul STOUTEN*

URBAN DESIGN AND THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF URBAN REGENERATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

Abstract. Urban design schemes accompanied by avant-garde design of space have been an outcome of economic growth of cities and countries in many periods of time. At the beginning of the 21st century, Nieuw Crooswijk in Rotterdam was the largest area involved in nationally launched policies. Many times the conflicts surrounding the plan were in the news, particularly concerning the aim to attract higher incomes. Gentrification, with displacement of present and original residents forms a central issue and the discussions in Nieuw Crooswijk fit within the more general urban landscape and language of urban regeneration in Europe.
Key words: urban design, collaborative planning, urban regeneration and gentrification.

"How can you live your life in a cosy neighbourhood and then be forced to move out? The aim is to give the neighbourhood a new image by getting higher educated people to the neighbourhood and disperse less affluent people all over municipalities in the suburbs". "Despite an increasing sense of insecurity the social cohesion stays high"

IKON TV Ned.1: 02-08-2005

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban regeneration is and was one of the major challenges for societies across Europe and the world. In this century, the Dutch housing stock turned out to be in good condition and, compared to other European countries, of the highest quality (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom relations, 2014). There were hardly any poor

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houses left due to large efforts since the 1970s to renew complete areas of housing to fit current requirements (Liagre Böhl, 2012). Only small concentrations of property owned by private landlords revealed deficits. Whereas in the mid 1980s' the share of poor housing was about 20% of the Dutch housing stock, this was in 2012 only 1% (Lupi, 2013).

But still there were many problems to solve, which led to the government selecting and defining so-called priority areas in 2003, later renamed as 'empowerment areas'. The main focus in the governmental problem definition was not so much on physical problems within the urban fabric but more on unemployment, social safety, education, multi-cultural and minority ethnic neighborhoods, crime rates etc. Paradoxically, the government then attempted to solve these social and economic problems through extensive spatial and physical interventions. The government had the intention to break through the one-sided housing supply: they argued that there was too much social housing in these areas. Following these policies, local authorities often chose demolition and new built housing accompanied by gentrification. Rotterdam with its existing (social) urban renewal neighbourhoods as assigned in the 1970s, got a high share in planning these market oriented strategies including building for higher income groups.

As in other European countries (Gospodini, 2002; Punter, 2010) urban design appeared to be an important instrument in the economic development of cities in the Netherlands, within the context of a new competitive global and regional environment; for metropolitan cities, larger cities and smaller cities, as well as cities in the core and cities in the periphery of Europe. Urban regeneration aims for the creation of lasting spatial solutions that connect design issues to their social, economic and political contexts. Due to the financial crisis of 2007–2009, conditions for modernization of urbanized areas have changed. What is the impact of changing policies and the crisis on the delivery of urban design qualities and planning strategies?

Design-led urban regeneration combined with a strong (public-) private partnership was recognized as an important mechanism in the urban regeneration of Nieuw Crooswijk in Rotterdam (Fig. 1). The restructuring project in Nieuw Crooswijk was launched in 2003 under the umbrella of a new form of relationship between urban design and development planning. The project with its conflicts about the final destination was regularly in the news, on the television and in newspapers. This approach marked a fundamental break with the former more social, tenant driven strategies. However, due to the resistance of the existing residents and the financial crisis in 2007 the flagship character of this project has had to be reeled back in somewhat smaller proportions. The experience of urban design driven by gentrification and its ongoing transformation into a significant issue of contemporary urbanism, is present in the urban regeneration process of this case. The primary topic in this paper is urban design as public policy and as

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an indication of why processes may or may not be successful. These questions concern the relationship between design and urban planning, and its processes and organization.

2. URBAN REGENERATION AND URBAN DESIGN

Generally speaking, the task of urban planning and design, including urban regeneration, is to integrate a variety of interests into proposals for design and process. Urban regeneration, in general, can be considered as developing a vision and approach in a complex urban context that includes a variety of spatial scales, sectors, actors and disciplines. Urban regeneration needs to respond to new conditions and aims to modify the urban fabric in order to suit new conditions, social requirements and demands (Stouten, 2010). According to Heeling, Meyer and Westrik (2009, p. 2) urban design is a "plea to concentrate the urban form not on the architecture of buildings as such, but on the issues that concern the urban tissue: the subdivision, the arrangement of buildings on the lots, the building density, the crossing between the public and private domain". They add that in the long term, social developments are uncertain and unknown. The UK government's definition of urban design adopts Punter (2010, p. 1), and is more focused on the agenda of the last decade: "urban design is the art of making places for people. It includes the way places work and matters such as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the processes for ensuring successful villages, towns and cities".

Research into urban regeneration is too often based on one of two approaches. The first is concerned with urban form, the design of housing and the urban fabric. The second deals more with questions concerning the planning of environmental processes, participation, and social and economic issues. The aim of this paper is to combine these two approaches and to show a broader view of the impetus for urban regeneration and renewal, within an understanding of changing context and policies.

3. CHANGING CONTEXT

Between 1975 and 1993, urban renewal, embedded in the world of the Dutch welfare state, had a major impact on urban planning in the Netherlands. Essentially, social housing, schools and healthcare were dependent for their production, distribution and management, on the intervention of the state. The changing

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context since the mid 1990s with privatization and market-based strategies as main driving forces, means that an age when the social sector seems the solution and the private sector the problem belongs to the past. The net result is, according to Merrifield (2014), that collective consumption items, as defined by Castells (1972), have changed into those of individualized consumption, framed by the debt economy. All those major items of collective consumption, as mentioned by Castells in the 1970s, are in the current situation items of household debt such as housing, health and education (Merrifield, 2014). Many Dutch local governments have run into serious debt since 2007, mainly caused by financial deficits on land development. Policies are no longer driven by control of completion (the legal need to deliver a certain amount of development), but are based on guideline figures for housing and building production, resulting in increased uncertainties and an unstable foundation for spatial planning policies. Showing the way to Dutch policies in the future, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy introduced the principle of development planning in 1998 (Scientific Council for Government Policy, 1998). According to Hobma and Jong (2015) the principle of development planning is gaining popularity, aiming to establish a link between spatial planning (predominantly the domain of government) and spatial investments (predominantly the domain of private parties). Within the current context of urban design and planning, the local government has, as agent, to work in a more corporate and collaborative way that enables and incorporates design quality and place making dimensions.

In this respect it should be emphasized that the Netherlands today has still the highest proportion of social housing in the EU, about 31% of the total housing stock, and for the large Dutch cities this proportion can be, as it was in 2014, as high as 47%. However, in the last decade, the housing market in most of the Dutch cities has showed severe problems e.g. a decrease of prices in the owner occupied sector, many houses for sale, hardly any access to the housing market for first time buyers and tenants, and hardly any moves from the rental towards the owner-occupied sector.

4. URBAN RENEWAL AND URBAN REGENERATION

In the 1990s in the Netherlands, urban renewal became more or less part of a more comprehensive form of urban regeneration of a city or region. Urban renewal was more area based while urban regeneration referred to interventions city wide or even region wide. Since then, years of experience with urban renewal processes have taught us that what matters is not just physical decay but also a complex of social and economic issues. Roberts and Sykes (2000, p. 17) define the essential

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features of urban regeneration 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". Urban regeneration has to be characterized as a process with design based on a strategic vision, partnership(s), and sustainability. And in many approaches to urban regeneration, the improvement of quality of life including livability has become an important issue.

In more recent years there has been a strong governmental call for initiatives and investments from the private sector that are expected to complement or replace the public investments. But these expectations seem too optimistic concerning the recovery from the crisis. Currently in the Netherlands, despite economic growth being predicted at 2,25% for 2015, the production of buildings is still 20% below that in the period before the crisis and similarly 30% below for building materials. Besides, local Dutch governments lost 2,9 billion euros on land development between 2009–2011 (including 1,8 billion on public private partnership projects), and the national average vacancy of office buildings was 16% and shops 8% in 2013 (Council for the Environment and Infrastructure; 2014). As Stiglitz (2012) argues that markets are supposed to be stable, but the global financial crisis showed that they could be very unstable, with devastating consequences. Topics like sustainable development have to be explicitly planned and will not be solved by market forces alone (Korczak, 2007).

In 2003 the Minister of Housing, Regional Development and the Environment launched the Actieprogramma Herstructurering (Action Program of Restructuring) including instruments for the improvement of 56 priority areas. According to this approach, a start was made in Rotterdam in five areas with a large-scale and long-term physical approach to battle complex quality of life problems. The government and real estate developers hailed Nieuw Crooswijk as a 'shining example' for this new design-led approach. Once again the areas in question had for years been included in lists prepared as part of earlier urban renewal policies. Although in the programs attached to these policies modernization or transformation was mentioned, the approach in 2003 was mainly aimed at demolition followed by new housing, mainly in the owner-occupied sector (Fig. 2).

Since 2007 the central government has renamed 40, out of the former 56, assigned 'priority areas' and they are currently defined as empowerment areas (krachtwijken). These areas are defined by a high representation of residents with hardly any access to the labour and housing market, including problems of quality of life and deprivation. Rotterdam is again 'champion' on this list including seven areas from the national list of forty. In total, 38% of the Rotterdam population lives in an area that is assigned as an empowerment area.

The market oriented policies of the late 20th and early 21st century caused changes in the housing stock and divisions of housing tenures. In the period

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1995–2012, the share of owner-occupied housing in the housing stock of Rotterdam increased by 13%, from 21% to 34%. This occurred mainly at the cost of the share of social housing. This declined from 57% to 47%, while the private rental sector decreased from 22% to 19%. The crisis of 2007 had very serious consequences for the completion of new build housing. Completion declined in Rotterdam and the region as well by about 40%; in Rotterdam in the period 2005–2008 the average completion was 2.850 per year and in the period 2009–2013 only 1.770 per year, mirroring the national picture. This situation makes urban planning and urban regeneration, whether it is defined as development planning or collaborative planning, quite uncertain (Fig. 3).

5. URBAN DESIGN AND PRODUCTION OF SPACE

The execution of urban renewal programs in the period 1975–1993 was based – and that was crucial – on the production of spatially and temporally defined entities. Those entities were called 'communities' and the manner of production of spatial-temporality itself became a vital component within the social process (see also Harvey, 1996). The idea in advance was to solve urban problems by an area based community approach, mainly founded on the spatial way in which urban renewal areas were each searching for a more inward-looking strategy. The spatial and social frontiers of areas were seen as equal parts in attacking the problem and in the execution of programs. The organization of those, then well-founded 'communities', had an incentive to define themselves against and through exclusion of others (for example social groups or population categories) (Stouten, 2010). In the beginning especially starters on the housing market and immigrants were excluded; they had no access to social housing. On the other hand, because of this approach, displacement of original residents from their neighborhood was avoided and a large proportion had been able to improve their housing conditions. Besides, in general urban regeneration caused and will cause population growth in cities and an increase of young families in cities (ABF research, 2014).

After a couple of years, during the urban renewal process, neighborhoods seemed less homogenous than desired by the original residents. Neighborhoods seemed to be persistently heterogeneous with different groups living next to each other, meaning that claims on using public space were not without tensions but polarization and duality is inadequate to describe the situation. Neighborhoods that were part of urban renewal policies offer also low-income groups a large number of positive elements. Due to urban renewal a large share of the housing stock is of good quality with a reasonable price and quality ratio. There is a diverse supply of shops, specific facilities and shops for ethnic groups. Informal scenes offer all kind of services.

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Later, with urban regeneration seen in the light of restructuring and urban renaissance, urban design was recognized as an important mechanism in the re-imaging and place marketing of cities. Thereby, as argued by Punter (2010) explaining the urban renaissance in UK, enhancing competitiveness between cities. In Rotterdam one can see the same kind of changes in the city center, with its large scale interventions including high rise buildings, as an introduction of the new age of planning. It was the introduction of a period with agendas of driving urban economic competiveness between cities (inter) nationally, tackling the mismatch between commuting and the current population by building housing for higher income households, and speeding up infrastructure. Recently the new central station, including a new node of many sorts of public transport was completed as part of a national program of key projects to regenerate areas around the stations of six cities. But, in Rotterdam, some of the former urban renewal areas were also planned to be part of restructuring strategies combined with gentrification. Iconic architectural projects were completed and show the bias towards 'designing' the city center of Rotterdam. On the other hand there had been criticism on these forms of city branding, and urban design as an agent of gentrification. Although quality of life, livability, and design quality are not the main drivers of economic competitiveness, they are an increasingly important part of economic decision-making in neighborhood renewal (Punter, 2010, p. 29 and Council for the Environment and Infrastructure, 2014, p. 68).

6. GENTRIFICATION

In most of the Dutch cities (like in the UK, Tallon, 2010, p. 205) national and local policies have encouraged the repopulation of the city center, exemplified by urban renaissance, brownfield development and mixed-use development. There is a wide range of strategies from restructuring and privatization by demolition of the social housing stock, to upgrading and modernization measures. Neil Smith (2002) argued that the process of gentrification, which in early stages emerged as an incidental and attractive anomaly on the housing market of some true metropolitan cities, is since mid 1990s much more generalized as an urban strategy and its incidence is global. Jones and Evans (2009) define gentrification as 'the process by which buildings or residential areas are improved over time, which leads to increasing house prices and an influx of wealthier residents who force out the poorer population'. Gentrification means displacement and is quite different from residentialization processes that occur by building luxury housing e.g. on former brownfields near city centers. Though gentrification is basically driven

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by the private sector, urban regeneration and renewal processes are very dependent on national and local government policies.

However, the tension within policies on community renewal between the idea of bottom-up community-led empowerment and the ideas of centrally driven priorities remains. Concerning gentrification and urban renewal in individual neighbourhoods, this tension is in most cases a relatively limited process from a temporal as well as spatial perspective. To understand these perspectives, more insight in to the development and changing context of more inward looking approaches to urban renewal and more outward looking approaches to urban regeneration is needed. That will be analyzed in the case of the plans in Nieuw Crooswijk.

7. NIEUW CROOSWIJK

Nieuw Crooswijk was one of the 'empowerment areas' (and former selected 'priority areas') that were in 2003 as part of the national action program of restructuring. Housing associations aimed to demolish more than 10% of the total social housing stock in favour of owner-occupied housing in these neighbourhoods (Volkskrant, 11–02–2008). In Nieuw Crooswijk, the demolition of 85% of the dwellings was planned based on a so-called cooperative urban regeneration. The design and planning process started by bringing agents together that had interests in financial investments and land, along with the relevant authorities.

7.1. Urban fabric and social fabric

The neighborhood Nieuw Crooswijk was built between 1913 and 1930 and about 50% was completed in the social sector. Most of the housing has access via porticos and has up to 5 storeys. The urban renewal in Nieuw Crooswijk, as a neighbourhood of the wider urban renewal area Crooswijk, took place between 1978 and 1993 following the 'building for the neighbourhood' strategy and was, for example on the national TV station in 1982 (Stouten, 1982). In this period urban renewal meant mainly modernization of old housing owned by the housing association. As part of the strategy the municipality forced private landlords to sell their property to the local government because, by lack of maintenance, these houses were often in a very poor condition. In the flourishing period of urban renewal about 80% of the social housing in the area was modernized (including 15% that was new build) and buildings serving as shops and businesses. Nevertheless, after 25 years, in 2002 – 25% of the modernized housing revealed deficits and needed serious maintenance. The improvement of housing conditions was focused on social renewal as

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well as technical renewal within an area based and inward looking process. After modernization of the housing, the number of households declined and a decrease in nuclear families occurred.

Before the new master plan was launched, in 2004 – 40% of the households were dependent on social benefits and half of the population belonged to a minority ethnic group. There were no extraordinary figures of mobility of persons and households in terms of influx to or exodus from the neighbourhood. The social fabric in 2013 reveals a changed neighbourhood, but also a general picture of this sort of area: many young people, a majority of single households (56%), one-parent families (10%) and nuclear families (11%). Most households are native (52%), compared to the Rotterdam total (55%), although significant majorities of Turkish and Moroccan (16%), Surinam and Antilles (10%) and a lot of other different ethnic groups, makes the heterogeneity even larger. The so-called productive age bracket of 20–65 years is well represented with 73%, which is 10% higher then the city total.

The income structure is very much related to the social fabric as many young singles are starting their career in the labour market. In 2012 the average income of households living in the neighbourhood was 16% lower than in Rotterdam, and the average of Rotterdam is 12% lower than the national average. In 2012, 27% of the households of Nieuw Crooswijk lived on or below the poverty line. That is much higher when compared to Rotterdam (17%) and the Netherlands (9%). The unemployment rate in 2012 was 23%, compared to Rotterdam (15%) and the Netherlands (9%).

An important quality of the urban fabric is the green; a couple of wide avenues with trees, the river and green along two cemeteries. The neighbourhood is just a few meters away from a city park and a few minutes away from the ring road and (inter) national highway and well connected with the city center by public transport or bicycle.

7.2. Land use plan 2005

As said before, Nieuw Crooswijk was launched as a flagship project following the design-led strategy as part of development planning. The preparation started in 2000 with the private partnership OCNC as client: two private developers and one housing association. The agencies of this partnership had signed an agreement with the local government about financial, organizational and procedural matters. The housing association owned approximately 95% of the housing stock and the municipality owned the public space. The local government was forced to take care of quick procedures and debates in the city council (Fig. 4).

From the beginning, the private partners and local government did not take the participation of residents very seriously. The time schedule and financial scheme was, according to the private developers, in combination with the planned stages of design, demolition and completion of new housing, very tight. This situation was a source for

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strong conflicts with groups of residents, which were on the local and national news. In 2005, according to the land use plan, 1800 of the 2100 should be tear down and 10% of the total neighbourhood population of 5.000 residents had already moved out because the situation in their living environment was very poor and threatening. The social landlord anticipated demolition by doing hardly any maintenance and leaving houses vacant when residents moved, attracting for example burglaries and drugs. This strategy was initiated particularly in the areas indicated in the first phase of the plan and the building blocks that were to be demolished. This bad practice fuelled the resistance of residents in other parts of the neighbourhood. Besides, according to Postumus, Kleinhans and Bolt (2012) there were negative effects caused by so-called 'waterbed effects'. This meant that residents in other neighbourhoods, although not directly affected by the master plan, developed negative evaluations of changes in their own living environment, mainly due to the influx of relocated households that had to move due to urgent matters such as demolition.

The aims of the private partnership organization and the local government prioritized the attraction of higher and middle-income groups, advertising the position of the neighbourhood near the highway, city center, city park and river, as icons for luxury housing developments. This mostly outward looking approach raised sharp conflicts with the resident organization of mainly tenants and a small group of owner-occupiers that were threatened by demolition of their property as well. The land use plan (master plan) according to the design of West 8 meant a fundamental change of the social and urban fabric. The design proposed three 'classical' avenues to create direct connections e.g. with the city center and city park, the replacement of former building lines, changing of subdivisions, creation of new public spaces, mixed use, spacious inner courts, more parking facilities mainly completed within the building blocks, variety of facades, (higher) building blocks up to 9 storeys and two tower blocks up to 18 storeys (Private Partnership Nieuw Crooswijk, 2005). The sustainable agenda in this plan included the enlargement of (rain) water storage, separation of sewage, flexibility of floor plans and use of ground floors of buildings (housing and or businesses up to a floor height of 3,5 m). According to the plan, the division of housing tenure should fundamentally change with the completion of 34% social housing compared to the 95% of the original situation. This fuelled the resident's fear of displacement, including a group of owner-occupiers, who feared displacement because according to the master plan, the building lines of their blocs would change and lead to a completely new subdivision.

7.3. New plan stops demolition

According to the master plan, as legalized by the city council in 2005, demolition of 750 dwellings started in 2006, although up until 2013 only 278 new houses were completed on the vacant land. As part of current plans, this vacant land will get a temporary use. This stagnation was caused by the conflicts between

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the present residents and the private developers and reinforced by the crisis in the capital and housing market. Tenants that were threatened by the demolition of their homes went to court, which resulted in the verdict that the municipality had to reconsider the land use plan. This situation led to extra costs of 1,6 million per year (AD 20–07–2006) above an investment of more than 450 million as estimated in 2004 for the total plan (Cüsters, 2004). In addition there would be a loss of approximately 27 million euro on investments in modernized and new build dwellings completed about twenty years ago that would have to be demolished too. Finally, due to the crisis and the lawsuit, in 2013 the municipality and the private developers launched an alternative plan to stop the vast demolition of the neighbourhood (Fig. 5). The plan was more tailor-made and introduced more intensive procedures to match the regeneration with the demands of the (future) residents; only when the buildings had serious foundation problems would demolition be chosen.

The residents' response to this change of plans were – politically and literally – two-sided: disappointment by residents of the new build housing, mostly owner-occupiers, because their dreams as promised by the private developers would vanish and on the other hand happiness of the original tenants because they could stay in their homes. Tailor-made, building block by building block with participation of the residents, mainly meant modernization and in the case of poor foundations, after demolition, new build housing. Looking at the demolition and the division by tenure, the new situation was that in total about 1000 houses fewer than before would be demolished and the share of social housing would decline from 95% to 68%, instead of to 34%. In total, due to the delays, the completion of the regeneration will take ten years more than was planned in 2006.

8. CONCLUSION

In the Netherlands, as in other Western European countries, a period characterized by urban growth and large strategic projects has ended and the elaboration of new forms of strategic plans is needed. However the design-led urban regeneration and development planning had very serious consequences for neighbourhoods such as Nieuw Crooswijk and failed. To begin with, the collaboration with involved agencies was limited to the private developers and the housing association, with the local government in a back seat position. In fact the private legal agreements had a large impact on public justice. The original strategy was to upgrade the neighbourhood by building new housing for more affluent residents. But the process of completion destroyed the urban and social fabric, including where constructive and improving communities existed and where the situation called for encouragement rather than

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destruction (see also Jacobs, 1961, p. 270). The solution to these problems lies not in dispersal and displacement but working with the existing social and built capital, working to increase safety, education and investments in refurbishment of public space and modernization of building stock. Local government mostly activates self-organization and if that is the case there are unequal positions of the participants, particularly among residents with quite different positions e.g. an owner-occupier in comparison to a tenant of social housing, or a private landlord.

Nieuw Crooswijk was launched as a new strategy for design-led urban regeneration and the private legal procedures directed the public legal master plan procedures. The design-financial format and planning appeared too tight for participation of residents. Despite the motto of collaborative planning, residents were excluded from the design process. and that fuelled the lawsuits initiated by the resident organizations. Reinforced by the credit crunch and the crisis in the housing market, and the verdicts in court, the plan changed fundamentally. The situation led to a strong divergence of problem definitions between the private developers together with the municipality, and the resident groups. The main aim should be to use urban design as an instrument to integrate interventions in the urban fabric without exclusion; to combine an inward looking, area based approach with outward looking strategies and see them as complementary. Besides, the design should avoid great differences between social housing and owner-occupied housing that is manifest in differences in architectonic qualities and image within a very short distance from each other. As proven by this case, at the end it is still the government who has to control the planning strategy with a more equal and institutionalized position of residential groups during the planning process. Flexible forms in terms of the urban fabric and floor plans are important to meet eventual new demands and requirements.

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Fig. 1. Avant-garde design Nieuw Crooswijk (Rotterdam)
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Fig. 2. Demolition in Nieuw Crooswijk (2007)
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Fig. 3. Land about ten years waiting for re-development: Nieuw Crooswijk
Source: own



Fig. 4. Land use plan Nieuw Crooswijk (2005) as proposed by OCNC private partnership
Source: OCNC, Rotterdam

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Fig. 5. Saved from demolition
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