

Integrated Conservation in the Netherlands on behalf of the Case of NIJMEGEN

A Historic Medium Sized Town in the Netherlands

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1. Introduction

The economic recession of the nineteen-thirties, the destruction during the Second World War and the 'baby boom' after the war caused the cities in The Netherlands to grow explosively. During the period 1945 until 1965 the pace of city extensions was at his highest level and thereafter it slowed down in favour of more political attention for the (historic) inner cities. During the period of extensions the function of the city's core was seen as a shopping centre and a business area. The residential function was more and more neglected and was driven away to the new suburbs. Which in practice meant that the inner cities turned into 'economic ghettos' with little or no 'normal' livability. At the end of the nineteen-sixties the Dutch Government decided that the policy of creating new suburbs could be slowed down (the post war housing shortage practically being solved), so more attention would be paid to the rehabilitation of city's core, including the historic centres. This policy was carried out by the Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning and was based on the Housing- and Physical Planning Act. In 1985 an Urban Renewal Act completed the legal support by which the implementation of the policy was decentralised to the Municipality.

The Dutch legislation in the field of physical planning and urban renewal has a relation with the Monument and Historic Buildings Act. The Dutch Monument Act states among others that the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Housing and Physical Planning might designate valuable historic centres as protected townscapes. This means that for such areas the Municipality is obliged to draw up development plans, taking the historic structure and building stock into account.

From 1975 on the Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning and the Ministry of Culture co-operated on the rehabilitation of the historic centres (in those days city centres were considered 'historic' when they dated from a period before 1850), with the aim of improving living conditions by upgrading the existing social-cultural pattern. This operation has proven to be very succesfull and today, after most of the inner cities have been revitalised, the national urban renewal policy is aiming at improving the post war quarters. These areas are now approximately fifty years of age and do not respond any more to today's living standards. Although not protected (yet) by law, these town quarters or suburbs are now also a point of interest for the Ministry of Culture. The extensions of the fifties and the sixties are seen as an inseparable part of the historic grown town.

Most of the dwellings of that period were build as social housing by government supported housing associations. Nowadays the latter being privatised, the interest of maintaining or constructing social housing is not very great. Which might turn out to be harmful to the lower income-groups and a threat to social diversifation in the city

2. Surveying the historical identity

The historical dimension of towns is, of course, a reality. An inherent part of the permanent character of towns is to be found in the process of expansion and contraction;

manifested on the outer urban fringes and the process of decay and renewal which takes place within the centre. The interaction between the two is extremely important. The development of a town is the result of apparently autonomous processes; the most important of which are economic, demographic, social and cultural processes. Development may also be determined by political and/or military intervention or by disasters. The autonomous process is nearly always an active one; only in exceptional circumstances is the process forced.

The spatial development of towns is not only the result of autonomous processes. Planning and management have played an important role right from the beginning of urbanisation. The adhered concepts, both architectonic and relating to urban planning and design, have had an influence on the historical characteristics.

Up to about 1800 the influence of planning on the urban area as a whole is an exception rather than a rule. In the 19th century a tradition of urban planning and design was gradually developed for the whole built environment, starting with the urban areas. During the course of the 20th century an integrated system of urban renewal and planning has been created at various scale levels (Housing-, Physical Planning Acts).

3. Planning

Planning the existing environment means to encourage, influence and steer future developments, according to democratic accepted strategic goals and by making optimal use of the amenities and the cultural identity of the place. All parties concerned (the population, the business community and the authorities) must agree on the course to follow. And, what is even more important, all parties concerned must be motivated to collaborate. The people's and the investor's confidence in the future development can only be gained by creating a sound perspective by strategic (physical) planning. Strategic planning is not a luxury. It permits the retention and strengthening of the existing social, economic and cultural infrastructure. A development plan is the first in the physical planning process and is meant to give an outlook on the social, economic and spatial effects of the community's view on future development.

The functional coherence of the different townparts has to be analysed, giving insight in the way they are complementary and together forms the city organism. The interrelation between the urban functions, such as residential areas, business districts, shopping and cultural facilities, leisure and public facilities (schools, administration etc.) and the traffic and public transport lines, are set out and rendered on a map. An integrated, coherent planning for all sectors is necessary to avoid obstruction. By definition this means a multi disciplinary approach, including conservation. The latter activity should primarily offer an outlook on social, cultural and economical development and secondly on visual improvement.

Mostly the growth of the population is the most is autonomous, that is to say the least influenceable parameter. Other sectors must be brought into agreement with the population figure. After expressing the future development strategy in spatial models, the consequences for the existing city, the physical and cultural effects can be analysed

4. Integrated conservation

An integrated conservation framework contains a step by step proces, which pays attention to political and technical aspects, implementation and monitoring. The framework is ment to be a structural support for designing urban development plans, which will take the existing (infra) structure and build up area into account. Before starting the planning procedure, it is of great importance to obtain *political commitment* for the general aspect of integrated conservation. From the beginning on it must be made clear that integrated conservation is not aimed at fixation of today's situation and appearance, but a system by which the existing urban pattern is reused and revitalised for as far as it is acceptable from an economic and social point of view. The community must be convinced that an existing

town or townquarter still has specific development opportunities without disturbing its identity and recognizability.

The framework consists of five steps (from analysis to implementation) and will involve everyone who is in one way or another related to the functioning of the city. The planning process makes it necessary to arouse the awareness of the community, but also of the responsible decisionmakers.

Step 1: Analysis

An analysis of the historic development and future expectation is able to visualise the mentioned development opportunities. Such an analysis is the first step to be taken in the whole complex of planning integrated.

Before starting with the analysis make a preview of all the existing plans, reports and feasibility studies. One does not have to do them over again and the mentioned data might still be of actual use. So the analysis covers two aspects.

1 At first one has to do a survey of the historic urban development throughout time. A presentation on a map of the 'original or historic' functions of the different townparts of the city in the sense of commercial, infrastructural, residential, governmental etc. Relate it with a map on which today's functions are notated and it will give you insight of the development trend that has been going on for – let us say – the last fifty years.

2 The second step is to draw a map showing, on behalf of above mentioned development trend, today's development opportunities and the development risks of the town. Locations where the original function seems to be degraded throughout time have a development opportunity. These areas can be indicated on the map with a green colour.

Original functions, which seem to be threatened by modern economic development, like the residential function in the town's centre, can be considered as development risks. The areas concerned are marked red on the map. A word like 'risks' does not mean that no development at all is allowed, but if the social cultural identity is the starting point of the planning, one has to be very cautious by altering social-economic functions. There are always areas, which are situated between 'opportunities' and 'risks' (for instance the reuse of the deserted lower floors of the dwellings as small shops); they can be marked on the map with green and red striping. Consequently, these areas are mentioned as 'areas with both opportunities and risks'.

The herewith presented vision must be related to the development policy of the whole built up area in order to prevent an undesired social and economic diversification between the city centre and its surroundings. Not until the (local) decisionmakers have shown commitment with the presented development opportunities, the vision can be further worked out during the planning process.

Step 2: Identification

Next action to be undertaken is to *identify the cultural (historic) values* of the city. This can be achieved by doing scientific research on all historic items of which the area is build up. The results should be layed down in academic descriptions. How important such an operation might be, practice has learned that in an integrated conservation planning process such a preparation consumes (to) much time. A more simplified system is therefore introduced. This so-called quick scan method deals with the architectural, infrastructural and functional values from an urbanistic point of view. The data gathered from an inventory must be indicated on a map of the area concerned.

First one has to look into the historic interest of existing urban fabric: the streets and building patterns and the historic image of the buildings (the extent to which the existing building are contributing to the historic image).

Individual buildings can be:

- contributing to the historic pattern (marked red on the map);

- they might be neutral in the historic pattern (marked yellow on the map)
- or incompatible to the historic structure (marked bleu on the map).

Above notated results of the inventory will give an understandable and clear image of the architectural qualities of the pre War City.

The same has to be done on the *infrastructure and public space*. The economic position of a town is greatly influenced by its reachability. Most markets are created around the intersection of two routes of which most of them are of a respectable age. An inventory makes clear that the majority of the existing city's streets, squares, marketplace etc. are contributing to the urban identity. The result of this inventory gives insight in functional importance and historic value of the town's infrastructure.

The identification of individual buildings is not suitable to post war quarters. Governmental authorities mostly planned these townparts; often mono-functional and designed on a large scale (compared to the historic inner city). Very often apartment buildings and uniform one-family houses dominate the architectural appearance. They don't need to be identified individually. Of more importance is the regonizability of the original urban concept. Using a map of the original design one can point out the aspects of cultural importance, such as the infrastructure, the greenstructure, social housing or private homes and of course architectural landmarks and special functions.

Next to the architectural and structural features, *the functional aspect* of the city as a whole and the individual buildings is of main importance. Nowadays, some of these original functions have left the centre and one should be aware of the fact that some parts might now even become mono-functional and thereby losing its historic identity. An inventory of today's functions will give insight in this functional erosion. The results of the functional inventory are also marked on the map. Same thing has to be done with the post war quarters. In these cases one has also look into the social-cultural aspect. For which people the houses were build and does this target group still exist. Should early social housing being altered more expensive private homes?

On the fourth place, an inventory of the technical condition of the existing buildings has to be made. Inspecting the individual building on their state of maintenance can do a quick survey.

One might find buildings:

- in a good state of maintenance (marked yellow on the map);
- in a moderate state of maintenance (marked green on the map) and
- in a bad state of maintenance (marked red on the map).

This inventory, in combination with the data of the historic quality of the architecture gives insight in what technical measures have to be taken in order to get the existing building stock in a good state of maintenance and favourable functional perspective.

The results of this combination can be visualized on a so-called synthesis map. With the knowlegde of general conservation costs, one can make a rough calculation of the amount of financial investments needed to update the build up area. In post war quarters it is not the architecture as such which has to be maintained. Most of the buildings have been build in a period that good building materials were scarce and quantity of production got priority. Most of these buildings have to be reconstructed. In all these situations the individual building is of minor importance to the concept as a whole.

Step 3: Proposal

On behalf of data, collected from the analysis and the identification, one can draw a proposal for the conservation and development of the historic city. This proposal must be able to give insight on what actions have to be taken in order to

- improve the living conditions of the area concerned,

- the rehabilitation of the existing building stock, public space and infrastructure (including sewerage, electricity and water supply)
- the possibility to reuse the existing building stock in post war areas and
- the revitalisation of the city's economic potential.

The proposal must also include an estimate of the amount of money that needs to be invested in order to get above aspects realised.

On behalf of *public awareness* and participation, the proposal is brought into discussion with the residents, the private business sector and financial institutions. At this moment, the proposal should also be discussed with the local government. Although this does not have the power of final approval, the local attitude to the proposal is of great importance for the final plan. The different non-governmental groups can comment on the proposal and its annexes, they can bring forward alternative solutions and they can suggest alterations. The proposal is not a Masterplan yet – this would be too static at this moment of the procedure – but it must, in an understandable way, make clear how future developments show respect for the city's identity and how individual residents will be able to profit from the urban conservation planning.

Step 4: Masterplan

On behalf of the proposal and including the result of the above mentioned discussions a final plan can be drawn up and presented to the decisionmakers for formal approval. The plan should, next to the above mentioned items within the proposal, include a revitalisation scheme, which shows which conditions have to be created in order to encourage the economic (re) development of the mentioned urban areas. For instance the creation of shops in the unused first floors of the houses, handicraft ateliers, tourist facilities etc. One can transform a quarter build to house low income people into an area with private homes. Residents can buy their houses and have them altered, as they like.

Next to the revitalisation scheme, the plan must include a multi-year implementation program, which gives insight on the rehabilitation of the existing, historic valuable buildings and public space. This program must make clear in which period of time the execution is foreseen; for instance within a period of 10 years.

On behalf of the aspect of *economic feasibility* the plan must also make clear how the revitalisation activities will be financed and by whom.

On behalf of the approved plan the implementation can start.

5. CASE STUDY NIJMEGEN

5.1 History

Nijmegen represents, together with Maastricht and Utrecht, the oldest urban settlements in the Netherlands. It was founded during the Roman occupation and is approximately 1800 years of age. It started as a Roman fortress and it was transformed into a market city when the Roman garrison was drawn back around 300 AD. The Latin name Noviomagus for Nijmegen means 'new market'. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Nijmegen became a major city of the Holy Roman Empire, governed by Charlemagne (Charles the Great) and came to bloom as a trading town in the Middle Ages. The medieval pattern consists of two land routes, one running from east to west and one going from north to south. The northbound road crossed the river by ferry, while the town's market place is formed by the intersection of the routes. The old Roman highways fulfilled the first infrastructural needs, but due to negligence and lack of maintenance in the period after the Romans, they were abandoned. After that, the river Waal, which is a branch river of the Rhine, functioned as the main transport route. Therefore, in Nijmegen, the quay along the river, the market and the district in between were the main (economic) components of the town.

Not until the end of the nineteenth century the city lost its status as a military stronghold. Trade activities dropped, the first railway infrastructure neglected the town and the military function (and with it, the garrison) was abandoned. The economic development of Nijmegen stayed behind. The town tried to keep up as a regional market amidst an agrarian countryside and building and selling villa's for wealthy and retired people from the Western part of the Netherlands on the abandoned fortification area. These activities gave no economic input to the town as a whole and the city centre pauperised in a fast way. From that period on, the impoverishment of down town Nijmegen started. The at the end of the nineteenth century attracted industry, the railway infrastructure and (in the twentieth century) modern motorways, gave no benefit to the inner city. Damages during the last war finalised the economic existence of down town Nijmegen. Part of the city was rebuilt in a modern way as a commercial centre, but the oldest part of town was left to decay and future redevelopment (for which plans had already been drawn before the war).

Mid sixties down town Nijmegen was already been torn down for about sixty percent and the open space was in use as a temporary parking lot. Beautiful houses dating as far back as the Middle Ages were demolished, the quay along the river Waal had lost its industrial and traffic functions and had become a slum and the amount of inhabitants had dropped considerable. Down town Nijmegen fulfilled no social or economic function what so ever.

5.2 Conservation approach

In the beginning of the seventies the opposition of the last remaining inhabitants of down town Nijmegen forced the local authorities to alter their urban renewal and reconstruction policy in favour of a conservation scheme. They were encouraged by the central government and the Department for Conservation appointed the specified and identified area of Nijmegen as a conservation area. Which ment that the improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants could only take place with consideration of the cultural values of the still existing build area. The Department for Conservation developed in close co-operation with the Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning, an integrated system for urban revitalisation for historic areas. With the aid of this system, the local authorities could draw up a renewal scheme based upon the existing buildings, dwellings, public space, street pattern and - last but not least - the social structure. The renewal scheme, together with a rehabilitation programme, had to be approved by the town's council and could afterwards be presented to the central government for financial support.

In a later phase, the Nijmegen system was generally accepted as an overall method and was therefore published, among other examples in the Netherlands, in a booklet called 'Urban heritage, a concise guide to planning the historic urban environment'.

In Nijmegen itself the mentioned approach ment a total (social economic and social cultural) revitalisation of a down district, which had been neglected for at least four decades. Of which a lager part of the build area had already been demolished and the social structure and identity had been badly disturbed. The conservation activities were meant to create a new identity in relation with the remains of the former social structure in combination with the designing of new housing (including housing for people with low income) adapted to the existing urban pattern and developing new functions for the riverfront. By doing so, the conservation scheme got the status of a development plan, based upon the historic social and cultural infrastructure. The development plan, after being translated into a democratic controlled land-use plan and supported by a financing scheme, was implemented in the period between 1975 and 1988.

Today, down town Nijmegen is enriched by a historic influenced new quarter, which kept its original social cultural identity alive and has again become a pleasant place to live, work and recreate.

5.3 Post War areas.

As mentioned above, in urban renewal scheme in the Netherlands is now aiming at the upgrading of post war quarters. The municipalities are invited to express their revitalisation

policy in a development plan by which they can obtain financial support from the central government. One of the planning conditions is that the historic aspect is taken into account. So the upgrading becomes a new method for integrated conservation.

The aspect concerning the post war residential quarters is mentioned above. But some cities in The Netherlands had their inner cities destroyed during the Second World War. For instance Rotterdam, but also Nijmegen. A bombardment of 1944 wiped out the whole economic and social centre of the town. After 1945 plans were developed to reconstruct the area as quickly as possible. These plans adapted to modern use (as it was seen in 1945) like efficient traffic penetration, shopping centres and space for offices and the service industry. The mediaeval structure was not reconstructed, but some parts of the ancient infrastructure were reused.

A renewed inner city had to create its own cultural values.

How to evaluate these concepts nowadays from a cultural point of view.

One of the first steps to be taken is designing a method to include recent 'history' into spatial planning. One of the options on behalf of the Monument Act is to appoint the post war area as a protected townscape in order to oblige the Municipality to a development scheme with respect to the original design. The city of Nijmegen seems willing to participate in such an option, although it is not yet a political item. At this moment the Department is starting research how such an approach would work out. For the necessary activities the faculty of Planning of the University of Nijmegen is asked to assist. Hopefully the results of this research will be comparable with the innovative revitalisation of down town Nijmegen. Nevertheless the most promising aspect of the operation will be that the cultural aspect of post war cities is now brought to the attention of the decisionmakers and politicians. The post war planning and designing will from now on be treated with respect. The architects and town planners of those days deserve it.