

De Dichterlijke Vrijheid Poetic Freedom

An example of regeneration in practice, using internal expansion and the limits of zoning fully in order to create new housing quality in a dilapidated neighbourhood; Spangen in the city of Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Users make it and decide, this is the original idea for our approach in developing the so called "Wallisblok"

A good idea develops usually in more places. One of them was the design school for Architecture in Rotterdam during a study on urban renewal. The municipality was thinking about a new way of developing plans with communities of future owners inhabiting their own designs. Attention for this was raised by an evaluation on building in private assignment...

According to the National Television News of October 2004 the Rotterdam Municipality gave houses away for free. The best publicity one can get. Of course for free was not really the truth but it was very affordable; the future inhabitants had to consider an investment of in average 1000,- Euro for each square meter living space. Limited by the concept of the development made by Hulshof Architects, a project was realized with a collective assignment which connects a wide individual freedom with a powerful architecture.

Research

In 2003 the municipality assigned us together with Steunpunt Wonen to investigate the condition of the Wallisblok, a housing block located in Spangen, Rotterdam.





It is an area on the edge of Spangen near the canal the “Schie” running from Delft to Delftshaven, the Rotterdam district with an historic harbour related to Delft and the old Sea trade in the golden age.

Many houses in the block were bought by the municipality to avoid annoyance by drugs dealers and users. For a long time, starting in 1990, it wasn't clear what to do with the houses. The planning of the redevelopment started in 1990 but failed to redevelop the Wallisblok as it was impossible to buy all the houses or to get the private owners interested in any development. Empty houses dilapidated and in 2003 the situation was very bad. Pictures show the bad situation, houses fenced and interiors wet and rotten.

Dilapidated Houses

- Over 30% was left empty and was fenced over five years
- Drugs and overcrowded roomrentals
- Bad foundation
- Lacking of upkeeping





Wallisweg side was fenced over 5 years

The result of our survey was a report and calculation showing the investment necessary was equal to the estimated value after redevelopment. This was not including the cost of purchasing the houses and the cost of improving the foundations. Because of the old dikes in the neighbourhood and the demolition of the neighbouring blocks the foundation had been influenced and we found an effect we call negative sticking. This means the wooden poles are not effective anymore and this makes the part they keep up instable.

We suggested improving the foundation of 70% of the houses and giving them with a good foundation to people who want to live there. Of course there is an important condition to mention; the buyers are responsible together for the improvement to the level mentioned before and set by our investigation and also calculated in an approach of collective contracting.

Another difficult thing in this proposal was the uncertain popularity of the area, in other words the area was known to be the worst in Holland and Rotterdam. Who would want to live there?

We thought the low costs could attract a new group of people but only if we could make a very affordable plan and give the buyer the opportunity to make a dream house. For this we made also some freedom for redevelopment by deciding to demolish the back facades completely. The condition of this construction was overall very bad, steel frames were rusty

and obstructing the brick walls. Also the balconies and loggias were bad and the wooden door and windows showed lots of problems. We calculated the cost of complete demolition and a new façade to almost equal the cost of restoration. With this new façade we could also enlarge the houses and make the insulation standard affordable.

Another important result was the conclusion that the architecture of the building was considered valuable as well as the construction heights, floors of 3 meters.

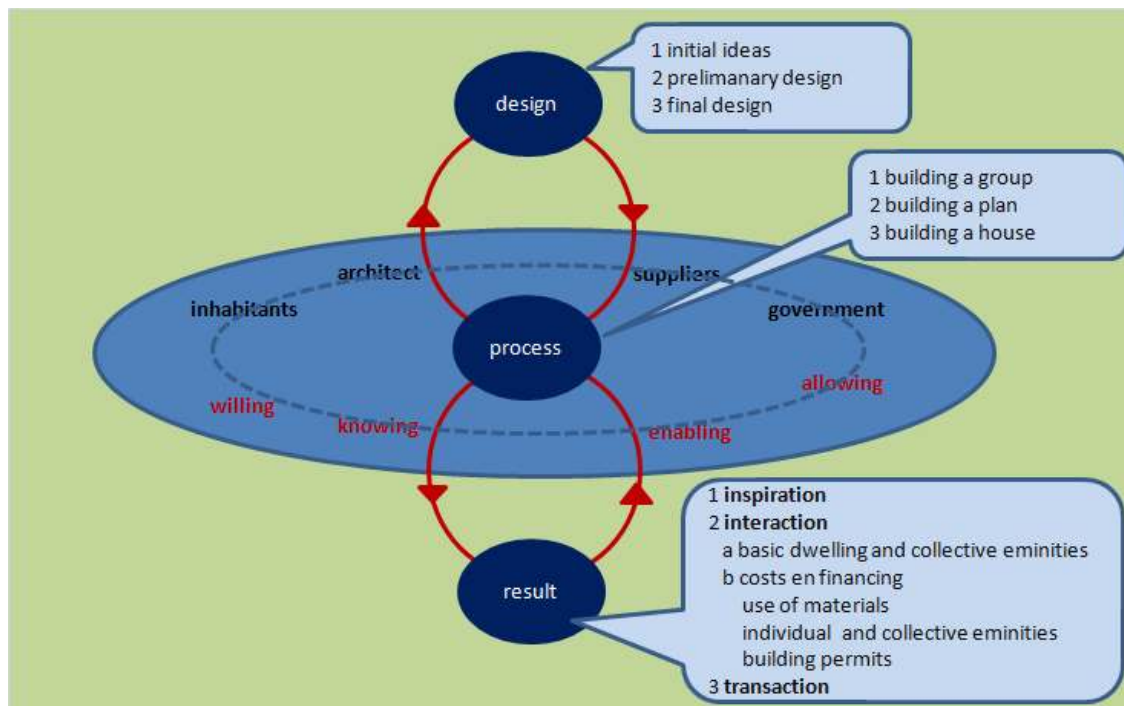
In the mean time the municipality restarted the buying process and with this it turned out to be impossible to reach complete ownership without the real start of a redeveloping process. To save time it turned out to be best to keep the construction and design a fast developing process.

Also we found the construction, with new back facades, to be able to meet all kinds of households, small and large, in a variety of floor plans and sizes. Also the roof turned out to offer new spaces, on the roof as well as on the third floor, a former attic shared by the two apartments of the first and second floor.

Concluding the research we found a new approach and it took some time but in the end the municipality agreed to start with first inviting the inhabitants still there to join in the process. Also the owners were invited but we had to enforce them with the regulations on safety and well keeping. This approach was added to the project in order to make the renovation of the block complete.

Planning and development.

Frans van Hulten and we, Hulshof Architects, took the initiative to improve the whole block in a collective mandate. The area was assigned to the so called “Hot Spot” approach. The Hot Spots being areas where the municipality invests money to improve living conditions. Here a new target group was attracted; buyers who are prepared to invest money in their houses and take the responsibility for their accommodation. The following figure shows the process and the relations between the participants.



We, together with Steunpunt Wonen, made the concept for the development which consisted of a set of regulations to be considered, as the municipality insisted on a high level of technical standards. We made a brochure on the project to explain the minimum plan which had to meet the technical standard level of new housing. As the technical condition of the houses was very different through the block we agreed to make a plan upgrading all houses to the same level and share the cost among the group of buyers. With this basic rule we could make the whole plan cheaper and affordable for all. This rule also made the group interested in the overall plan instead of just their own house. It also made way for an unusual approach on how to divide the housing block to each buyer.

In November 2004 the planning process started with a Group of 400 independent households interested in this approach. Here we found 35 to start the development seriously and a society was founded, a community builder started which makes the project notable.

An important condition was that the participants had to renovate the buildings together. We estimated the costs for a single apartment on approximately 70000,- up till 200000,- Euro for a house with four floors.

We set conditions for the participants in short as follows:

- Process planning is part of the deal; construction has to start within less than a year.
- Process assistance with Steunpunt Wonen.
- Hulshof is the architect to use maximum knowledge, technical and process wise.
- The renovation plan has to follow regulations on building quality and has to aim at a high level of sustainability.
- Knowing this a general program for renovation was made and was part of the deal.
- Everybody taking part has to live there in person for at least one year.

The basic intervention included the independent entrance for each house, new stairs, insulation, central heating, new installations and measurements. The buyers own the right to finish the houses as they wish but they have to follow legal regulations. Each buyer can use six months to finish the construction themselves or to have this done with the building company doing the general construction.

With the group of buyers we started a learning process with a workshop on the building in general and the measurement and construction possibilities. We made the layout of the main construction visible in a hall and took furniture to investigate the space.



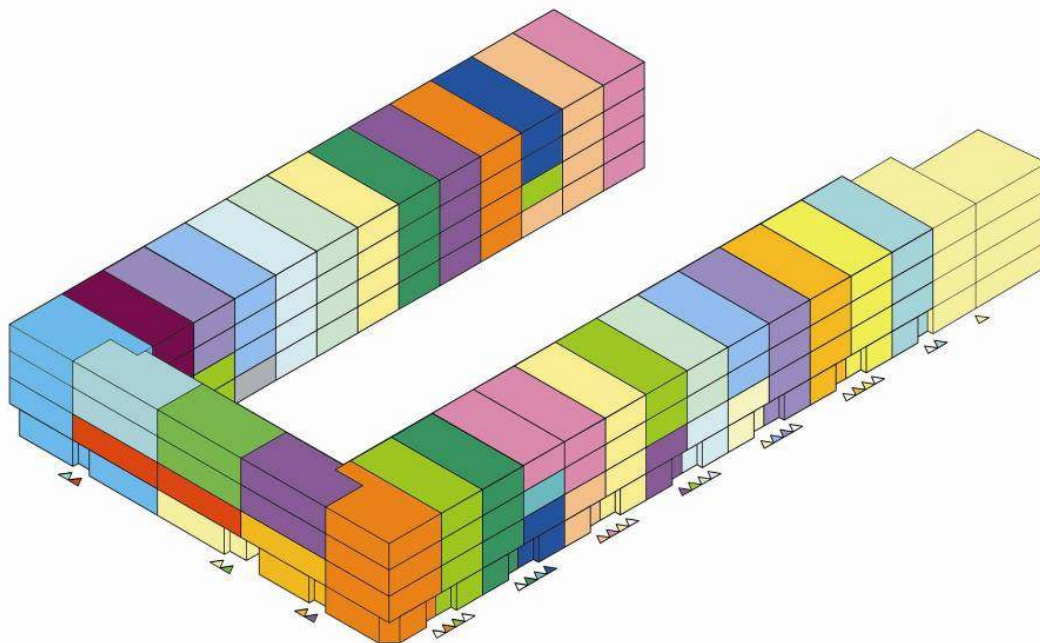
First meeting and workshop

We developed a variety of floor plans and possible sections shown here, volume options.



Existing condition of the building

After combining this with the wished spaces we made a differentiation in the building block to meet the wishes. This turned out to be very difficult as wishes grew, houses became bigger and fortunately the municipality came up with more houses right in time. Finally all houses were owned and this resulted in the scheme below showing the final differentiation fitting the group as they grew along the process.



Construction and management.

Together with the society of buyers we made the plan and chose the material to be used. Along the planning process we met each individual twice to develop the plan for their own house fitting the scheme and meeting the required standard. In this way we developed options to be calculated in order to make the personal decision after the price was set. We invited four building companies to bid and thus we could arrange a serious offer and make the plan fitting all buyers' needs.

Future development.

Finally the city of Rotterdam deserves congratulations with this result and we are happy with the offspring of more like this. At this moment a new campaign is started to sell houses in the city with an agreement on the upgrading with the help of selected architects. This will result in more collectives to develop their houses in several neighbourhoods. The first 169 houses have already been sold and upgraded, the success is obvious.

Also a new concept for upgrading has been developed for the housing cooperation Vestia in the Pretoriaaan in Feijenoord, the south centre area of Rotterdam. We are introducing Slow Economy and using all material, coming out of the buildings in order to renovate them, to new uses or to make them better usable together with the local crafts schools. The improvement will take place slowly as houses get empty by natural forces.

Conclusion.

The creativity of people shows great. By developing together more knowledge and variety emerges.

First the sustainable components of this approach:

- it offers opportunities to enrich the urban environment
- it promotes independent caring
- it promotes private ownership
- it promotes community building

things usually difficult in "the City".

And most important: It makes building cheaper!

With this project a new client was found. A client developing new collectivism. This can only exist on behalf of the fact that there is no plan to start with and the opportunity to define the possible investment. Worth noting is also the amount of former inhabitants renting returning to own their house. This is app. 20% of the households. They form a bridge to the neighbourhood.

The result is unique. An affordable product made by developing this together. Also resulting in a new feeling of togetherness in the effort to make more with less.

Opposed to new building, existing constructions offer more opportunities to imagine spaces and make them yourself. In this aspect our creativity shows great. By developing together with the future users and inhabitants, more knowledge and variety emerges.

To realize a plan like this cooperation of many institutions or participants is necessary. Apart from the inhabitants and owners we must give lots of credit to the architect and the advisers in the process as well as the building cooperation and the Municipality. Most important is somebody in charge with the local government with power. There were lots of challenges to deal with and all were beaten. The result is a happy community and a strong improvement of a former problem area. The rate for safety in Spangen went up from four to seven, which is very good.

Rotterdam has a lot of space to continue this experiment showing we have spaces with unexpected capacity in order to avoid urban sprawl.

Impressions:



Construction; demolition of the back facades



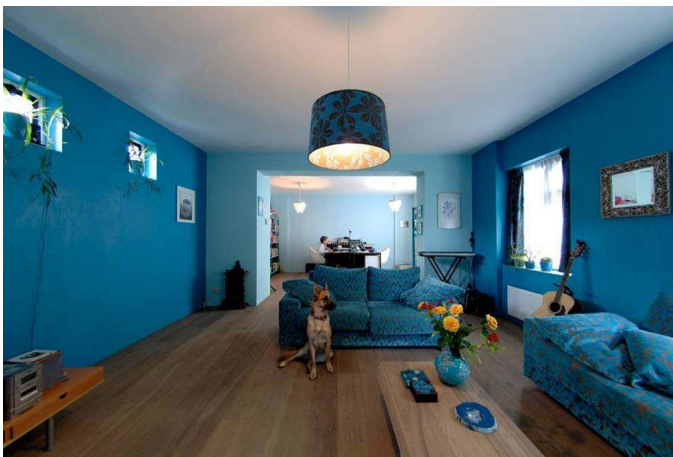
Construction; the new façade almost finished



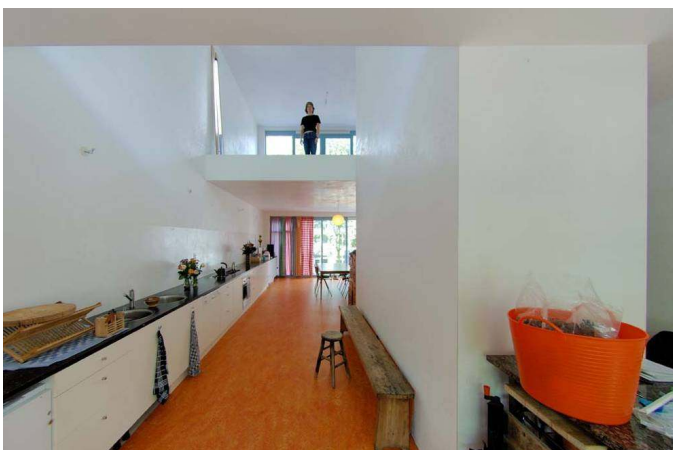
Result; the garden in progress



The inhabitants; each house completely different



The inhabitants; each house completely different



The inhabitants; each house completely different

Ineke Hulshof, Hulshof Architects, The Netherlands