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Workshop 13 - Housing and Urban Processes: Towards Sustainable Communities?

Sustainability through incorporating tenants' preferences in redevelopment processes

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Abstract

The ongoing redevelopment processes in residential estates, especially from the post war era, cover high potential for more sustainable qualities. Obviously energy consumption for heating can be reduced in the old housing stock. Incentives such as subsidies as well as an increasing awareness for energy costs foster energetic refurbishment. Beside direct financial considerations, image effects can influence the decision as well. An inquiry carried out recently gives evidence that solar energy is important for residents. But as sustainable development is more than ecologic improvements, social, economic and cultural aspects have to be taken into account.

Housing companies can take advantage from redevelopment processes and stimulate neighbourly social interaction. The Green Folder - a new participation method - will be presented. It aims at gathering ideas for the redesign of the greenery within a residential estate. Even more important is the opportunity of provoking dialogue between neighbours. If residents get the chance to take part in the planning process, they influence the conditions for their leisure activities right on their doorstep. As an ecologic benefit, this may reduce traffic. Moreover it may intensify identification with the residential estate, which is not only an advantage for neighbours, but also for housing companies.

1 Introduction

The findings and practical experience underlying this paper derive from a transdisciplinary research project that concentrates on redevelopment processes in residential estates, built in the post war period. Due to the destruction of World War II, huge numbers of dwellings had to be built quickly and with the restricted resources of this time. Nowadays this housing stock covers one third of the multifamily housing in Germany. Because of this enormous share in the housing markets and because of its huge energy consumption these settlements play an important role within the process of sustainable urban development.

Within the redevelopment processes currently taking place in post war period residential estates, high potential for more sustainable urban development can be ascertained. As the concept of sustainability is holistic and covers at least an ecological, an economical and a social pillar, we have to consider the relevant consequences which redevelopment processes will have on these dimensions. First the paper shortly outlines potentials of the energetic refurbishment. The relevance of reduction of energy consumption for the ecologic dimension of the sustainability concept is beyond dispute. Beyond question is also that housing companies will make their decision based on based on economic considerations. Therefore the paper will concentrate on the social aspects by considering effects that energetic refurbishment may have on residents. It refers to a qualitative inquiry which asked for reputational effects of solar energy in one residential estate.

The main focus of the paper lies on the potentialities regarding the redesign of outdoor spaces. Here again the three pillars of the sustainability concept strongly interact. If outdoor spaces meet the needs of the residents they may spent more time in their residential estate. This contributes to social sustainability as well as to ecological sustainability (through reducing leisure-related mobility). Not only the results of the redevelopment, but also the redevelopment process itself may be used for stimulating neighbourly social interaction. Therefore residents may be enabled to participate in the planning process. The paper presents a participation method, the "Green Folder", which was created for the planning of residential green spaces. Besides assessing the demands of residents, the major objective is to initiate contact and communication between neighbours.

2 The initial situation

Due to the urgent necessity of rapidly providing large numbers of homeless people with housing space after World War II, a huge number of settlements were built in Germany as well as in other European countries. Those settlements were originally built in pure simplicity with low quality building material. 60 years later, they face new challenges. On the one hand tenants desire larger individual living spaces and demographic alterations have to be taken into account. On the other hand the building services engineering is not up to date, e.g., dwellings have no central heating, windows are not air-tight and sometimes single glazed and the insulation of walls and roofs is bad. Consequently, the housing estates urgently need alteration now.

Because of their simplicity, the post war settlements were often criticized. There are even voices calling for pulling them down. For instance, Mitscherlich (1965) described the post-war housing programmes as "totally neglecting peoples' psycho-social demands". Looking at these estates nowadays, other factors than dilapidation and desperation, as expected according to Mitscherlich, can be found. Today the settlements in question are also characterized by well-functioning social structures and networks, contentment and a strong sense of belonging among residents. On this



basis relationships may even be enforced within participation processes that involve neighbours in the process of planning. The typical spacious greenery in post war era settlements (see foto) serves as a resource for different leisure activities, improving neighbourly interaction through common planning and common use.

3 Potentials of the energetic refurbishment

Considering the energy consumption of buildings from the post war era, there is much to be done. Because most energy-saving regulations are only relevant for construction of new houses, the redevelopment of the existing housing stock mainly depends on incentives from the market. Only heating systems (older than 1978) need to be changed until December 2006 due to the Energy Savings Order (EnEV). But there is no regulation that forces companies to improve the insulation of houses unless they have to renovate their façades anyway. Also the incentives from a CO₂-related renovation program, where interest rate reductions are offered, were overestimated.

Therefore the central question is whether energetic refurbishment pays for housing companies and if they achieve competitive advantages out of it. Although energy prices are rising, and heating costs could be reduced considerably, energy-saving renovations are still relatively rare. We could presume that there is also a lack of knowledge and insufficient support by planners, architects and specialists who are unfamiliar with current products and practices¹. But possibly housing companies may achieve additional competitive advantages which are less obvious than investments, prices and rents. One potential, but not directly assessable advantage should be considered more detailed: reputational effects of energetic refurbishments, especially from the use of solar energy.

For illustrating possible reputational effects, one example should be introduced. The housing stock of a housing company, located in the eastern part of Germany, urgently needed renovation (see photo).



¹ Studies analyzing the restraints of energetic refurbishment show that information deficit is one of the most important constraint. TECHNOMAR, 2005, p. I and p. 53.

The company decided to use the necessary renovation for energetic refurbishment. Although the installation of solar energy was not cost-effective they decided to install solar-modules on a façade. The company used this object as symbolic action for fundamental change and to present its ecologic awareness. The installation was placed on a façade heading to the street, clearly visible to everybody living in the settlement or visiting it.

Additionally a display supplies observers with information about daily energy-supply and emission savings.



The housing company uses the energetic refurbishment consequently within its marketing strategy. Flyers, the companies portrait within the internet-presentation and a tenants magazine which is delivered to every household supply interested tenants with further information about the energetic innovations used in the settlement. They also appeal to the environmental consciousness of their actual and potential tenants:

"Sollten Sie ökologisch bewusst leben wollen, bieten wir zu Unterstützung Wohnungen mit solarbeheiztem Wasser an." (If you wish to live ecologically consciously we provide flats with solar heated water.)

A qualitative survey which was carried out in the settlement seems to confirm that this strategy meets the preferences of the residents. More than fifty persons were interviewed. Some of them lived in the house with the solar energy façade or in the neighbourhood and some were passers-by. Most interviewees mentioned the positive effects for the environment. Surprisingly only one tenant spoke about cost reduction. We also asked the interviewees about the aesthetic quality of the façade. More than fifty percent did like the aesthetics. One even described it as looking very innovative, whereas twentyfive percent were not very happy with the aesthetics and would, for example, prefer solar energy on the roof. When we asked whether they would like to have more solar energy in the neighbourhood, many said, they would like to. And some even said that solar energy is one aspect within the decision to move from one place to another.

This short overview shows that energetic refurbishment meets the preferences of tenants not only because of possible cost reduction but also because of their environmental consciousness or the reputational effect for the settlement. For this reason, incorporating tenants' preferences in the

redevelopment of settlements is another argument to integrate solar energy into the refurbishment concept. Thus tenants' preferences may lead to more sustainable communities. But as the energetic refurbishment is only one aspect within the redevelopment of settlements, the following will concentrate on the redevelopment process itself, especially on the aspect of participation of tenants. A participation method which was developed to incorporate the tenants' preferences within the planning process will be presented. It was developed and used for the redesign of outdoor spaces within residential estates.

4 Participation in the redevelopment process of outdoor spaces

There is no doubt that participation is one element of sustainable urban development. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development 1992 in Rio, participation is encouraged through Agenda 21. Still the implementation of Agenda 21 is not finished yet everywhere. Nevertheless participation can be applied not only for official urban planning but also on the level of redevelopment of housing estates. In this case housing companies are responsible for planning and may involve their tenants in the process. Thereby participation may not only be considered as a measurement to create suitable planning results but also to intensify social interaction within the neighbourhood.

Intensifying social interaction is important for building and bridging so called "social capital". Social capital in the sense of social relations based on commitment and trust (Coleman 1987, 1990) as well as social control among neighbours in functioning living quarters (Jacobs 1961, 1966) can be more or less incorporated in neighbourhood structures. This kind of a city's irreplaceable (social) capital is receiving more and more attention in the discussion of sustainable urban redevelopment.

4.1 Social interaction in post war era settlements

Considering post war era settlements, we can find good conditions for participation processes. The well-functioning social structures are based on social aspects related to the historical situation as well as to some physical frameworks. One major impact derives from the fact that the majority of residents of these estates are first time movers. When they moved into the estate, they were all in a similar situation. The infrastructure of these new settlements was not well developed so far and it was helpful to share information and to help each other.

Also the physical framework supports to build social networks. The houses usually have 2, 3 or 4 stories, with two or three flats every story. This results in a total number of about 10 households sharing one staircase. Under these conditions, neighbours get into contact easily and know each other quite well. They know about their jobs, their children and many other details of their private

life. At the same time they know about peculiarities and oddities of neighbours and they have learned to handle them. Not incorporating this knowledge within the neighbourhood into the planning process will be missing a chance.

If we consider the situation today, it is comparable to the situation fifty years ago. Again neighbours are often in a similar situation like their neighbours. Many of the residents are old and their radius of activities is decreasing. Some of them seem to have similar needs concerning the greenery and the infrastructure within a settlement. Furthermore having contact to their neighbours may play a more important role in their social relationships. Those who moved in in the last years are often single person households as the average size of a flat is very small in these buildings (many flats have less than 50 square metres). Without having children it seems to be difficult to get into contact to neighbours. In this situation participation can be used to support the process of getting into contact.

Regardless the time of living in a settlement or the individual situation of the household, participation can be a measure to evoke or intensify individual identification with the neighbourhood and the housing company. Moreover, it can work out as a means to build and enhance the reputation of a residential estate. Thus it is an example of a win-win situation that reflects aims of the social and the economic pillar of sustainability at the same time.

But how is it possible to implement or “awaken” that kind of social capital within the redevelopment process in a settlement? Following this objective, a participation method, called the “Green Folder”, has been developed.

4.2 The “Green Folder” method

The "Green Folder" method was developed as an instrument to carry out participation processes in residential estates. It combines different methods of participation in successive steps and tries to encourage neighbours to express themselves, to bring forward new ideas and, at the same time, to get into dialog with each other. It was designed and applied twice for the planning of residential outdoor spaces and the implementation of institutional arrangements for their sustainable use. Until now it is rather uncommon to involve residents as experts for their specific residential environments in planning and moreover, in care-taking activities. But, handing over responsibilities to the residents could help solving problems connected with commonly used green spaces and it could bring neighbours into contact.

In both applications the “Green Folder” method has proved appropriate to integrate the ideas and preferences of residents and to anticipate potential rivalries integrating the knowledge and creativity of neighbours as experts. To be appealing for all residents and to address all kinds of

creative potential, the „Green Folder“ method combines adequate components from existing participation methods, complemented by newly designed components for those who are not familiar with filling in questionnaires (prepared stickers to be placed on a map, sheets for drawings and collages...). The whole participation process consists of two folders, an exhibition and a final event. It starts with a first folder specifically adjusted to the current situation of the settlement in question. The folder is designed according to the work-book method² that was successfully applied mainly in Scandinavian countries. To achieve a high rate of participation the folder is handed out personally to every household by members of the executive team. Residents are informed about their possibilities for participation and can get assistance with filling in the folder.

New and very successful components of this first folder were e.g. the part “Write us a postcard!”. Here, the residents could choose from a set of picture-postcards from their settlement. They were invited to briefly tell whatever they think, planners, housing companies and other stakeholders should know about their settlement. In effect, residents wrote about the current situation, if they feel comfortable or not. They also took the chance to express their worries about future developments and stated what should be done and what should strictly be avoided within their neighbourhood. Those qualitative statements were evaluated and they were a good basis for the planning process. Other components were stickers to be placed on a map from the area in question as well as the creative sheets for designing, e.g., a “water basin without water” that turned out to be broadly accepted by the participants. The results can be portrayed by collecting the ideas and carefully integrating them on maps or posters.

The second module of the method is a second folder, presenting first results from “Green Folder I” and offering the chance to give comments on the presented results and to discuss topics of interest in depth. Additionally an exhibition on site serves to present and discuss the results of the first folder in an appealing way. Persons from the executive team should attend the exhibition to be addressed by and to talk to the visitors and, of course, neighbours have another possibility to talk to each other.

The last module is an event together with tenants. In one application of the method the final event offered working groups on topics like “godfathers for meeting places” or “playing and relaxing”. This completed the proceedings and was meant to initiate long-term arrangements within the neighbourhood. The whole process was designed to give residents the possibility to join the

² As so called *Arbeidsbokmetoden* this method was mainly developed by two researchers, Johs Oraug and Einar Rutledal Oraug, at the NIBR (Norwegian Research Institute for Town and Regional Planning) from the end of the 1970s (see Oraug 1979).

process at any time starting with the first or the second folder, with visiting the exhibition or just with participating in the final event.

The method had been carried out in a post-war settlement in Berlin with a total number of 560 households, where the green residential environments and their use had to be planned and in a city in Brandenburg, south of Berlin, where a semi-public green space - left after demolition - had to be planned for a future design and use. Here 700 households were addressed with the "Green Folder" method. In this second application 100 households participated. In the first application which was embedded in a wider redevelopment process in the settlement about 200 households filled in the first folder, 150 of them answered the second folder, many neighbours visited the exhibition and discussed the results and about 100 persons attended the final event.

To conclude, the method proved to be adequate for participating residents of different social and migrant backgrounds in planning processes. It is very important that the method implies low thresholds to participate. The method also proved to generate creative ideas as well as solutions for major problems in the neighbourhood.

First evaluations of expectations and experiences with the process have been carried out. Residents were asked within the second folder and planners, housing companies and janitors were interviewed after the whole method was carried out. Residents were very satisfied about getting the possibility of participating this way. Most of the interviewees stated a positive impact concerning the acceptance of the newly planned residential environment as well as for the neighbourly relationships. For some experts from housing companies the method offered the first opportunity to get into direct contact with the residents. At the same time housing companies got useful hints on issues that are important for their specific neighbourhood not only for the actual planning task.

As the outcomes of the first application of the method are already implemented it is also possible to observe first reactions to the realisation of the planning. Tenants as well as planners and the personnel from the housing company are proud of the process as well as of the results of the process. The following foto illustrates a part of the outcome. It shows a "Place of Water" for relaxation and a chessboard for tenants.



5 Conclusion

Incorporating tenants' preferences within the redevelopment processes may lead to more sustainable urban development. The "Green Folder" method has turned out to be able to create a basis for planning processes on the one hand side and it also showed its potential for initiating contact between neighbours. Results of the participation method have recently been implemented. Future evaluation of the results will show how the neighbourhood will be satisfied by their own common planning and by the future common use of the greenery.

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