

power of ideas'. The start of a new development is no longer 'looking for money' but 'looking for energy'. The next step is not to 'make a plan', but to 'attract a crowd'.

During the Dublin visit, we saw a number of initiatives in the 'lived city' (mainly small in scale) that focused on issues such as sustainability and providing smaller or bigger social- economical opportunities. There are initiatives that help get the city moving again. We also noticed the involvement of a growing group of professionals, who come together in projects such as 'redrawing Dublin' and 'the Urban Party', in which they spend part of their private time on improving the city. The three worlds (the investor city, the government-vision and professionals and the 'lived city') are clearly necessary for urban development to grow and prosper. The big question for the coming period is how to avoid developer-led approaches, which focus on profit-driven plans and leave local communities with little say over their living conditions, from returning once the crisis is over. How can we succeed in finding or building systems in which investor-city initiatives and lived-city initiatives can work together in a sustainable way?

Three insights on urban development after the crisis

Our visit to Dublin on "Urban Development after the crisis" showed us 3 intertwining insights: a confusing mix of aspects all happening at the same time. Since the building activities of the booming last decade came to a standstill, Dublin now shows a visible patchwork of unfinished projects and developments: at the same time, however, groups of inhabitants seem shocked and show new energy. What did we perceive when visiting Dublin?

When real estate is leading

One of the success stories of the Celtic Tiger was the leading role of real estate. The European subsidies, governmental help and the major market parties all contributed to making the real estate market flourish. Looking back, the real estate bubble had also grown partly due to a dysfunctional balance of power between government and private market. After 1986, the government gave several tax incentives to developers, which led to numerous piecemeal developer-led developments instead of adopting a more holistic approach on area development and changes in the community. This has left the city with a mosaic of empty or unfinished projects since the crisis started in 2008.



It is clear that the crisis, above all, is a real estate crisis which was followed by a banking crisis. By borrowing more and more money, the investors were overheating the market, which led to residential prices spiraling out of control.

All across town, new projects or rehabilitation projects are now abandoned or empty. Following the deflation of the Irish property bubble, the Government of Ireland had to take over by creating The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to acquire property development loans from Irish banks in return for government bonds.

New perspectives

Secondly, the crisis shows that there are new perspectives on the horizon. For many inhabitants, the continuous upward spiral of more and more is now over.

Instead, people have gone back to basic values and given new meaning to them. In the housing market, the decrease in housing prices means that home-owners-to-be are no longer being priced out of the market (though, on the other hand, many home-owners are stuck because they can't sell their houses as their mortgage is a lot higher than the actual value of the house).

The Dublin Government felt it needed a long-term vision. The Dublin City Development Plan 2011 – 2017 of December 2010 sets out policies and objectives to create a sustainable and vibrant city. It recognizes that the 15 years of continuous economic growth are over and that a shared vision is important to have an idea about the long term aspiration of “what city” Dublin can be. Old values come back. Environmental themes are at the core of the development plan, the economic downturn is seen as an opportunity to create a vision for the city that will facilitate recovery in a coherent and sustainable manner. In the next 25 years, Dublin hopes to have established an international reputation for being one of the most sustainable, dynamic and resourceful city regions in the world: a socially inclusive city of urban neighbourhoods.

Strong communities

The third insight is about people. With rising unemployment and many young people now retaking the centuries old habit of emigration abroad, it is important to see that in spite of this, several communities are very present. The citizens in these communities are displaying much courage and social entrepreneurialism.

A key-issue for urban development now is social regeneration by and with the inhabitants. The ‘planning above the people and for the people’ approach is being replaced by planning with the people and through self-help. Besides this, the city government is more aware of the importance of grass-root organization and the power of the local communities. By preparing the Dublin City Development Plan, an interactive website was opened: Your City, Your Say.

Is this a real recognition of the importance of the inhabitants after the period when the inhabitants were overlooked? And will this continue after the crisis has passed? Will the actual changes and possibilities in strong communities be a longer lasting facet of Dublin life?

During our trip we had an interesting talk about the possibilities of using urban anthropology as a method of combining the investor-city and the professionally-planned city with the lived world of the communities and strong neighbourhoods in a more productive way of cooperation. It's a method worth

exploring. The ideas of urban anthropology are – according to the Irish we talked too- still quite new in Ireland.

Photo exhibition tells the story

The above mentioned 3 elements are at the heart of the views we experienced in Dublin: the failure of the landlord-investor as a motor for urban development (and reconsidering the ever-important role of government), the recognition of the real values in society after the fall of the property bubble and thirdly, the rediscovery of strong citizens and strong communities.

Most powerful to illustrate the failure of the property investment bubble was a picture exhibition in Fumbally Exchange, a fascinating building in an old factory where design-focused small businesses are cultivating an atmosphere for creative and regenerative growth in a time of great challenges. The photo exhibition showed the results of the property and construction bust, by depicting the half finished properties and half finished new houses in the greenfields, sometimes without any amenities in the area.



The pictures of buildings under construction in wasteland situations, evidencing that there was no master plan or area plan (almost like ghost villages), were shocking. On the other hand, during the trip we also visited the Northern Fringe, a half finished new neighbourhood. Here, however, amenities such as public transport and a train-station were already present and the design of the area seemed to be better than quite some of the Dutch Vinex areas.

Noticing all the effort that is made in those greenfield areas, it is strange (with Dutch eyes) to see that, even after all these years of building progress, so few inner-city areas have actually been redeveloped (besides some areas like Temple Bar, the Docklands, and some smaller areas). The city still has a lot of potential for renewal, housing developments, community facilities and vibrant areas.

Connecting with the energy of the city

The main focus of the Dublin City Council is now to tap into the city's energy and to move away from master planning and towards a more organic connectiveness, says Dick Gleeson of Dublin City Council. In this way, a framework for sustainable Dublin can be built together with social communities. And Mark Dyer of Trinityhaus focuses on 'people centered' urban development. How do people live in the city and how can the green print be



obtained, the slim city, the low carbon society?

Kaethe Burt-O’Dea has her own practical ideas for this. She is working on community-led interventions as inspiration to rethink our patterns of behavior and to begin a process of change. Most important is to combine community priorities and the possibilities for a more healthy life, greening the city and linking health, environment and education by starting small projects with mixed uses. One of her main goals is re-using the Lifeline, a former public transport ribbon, for experiments in urban agriculture, biodiversity, sports and a tree nursery.

The examples given during the Dublin visit raises the question: why are the communities now getting more attention? And why did they get less attention during the period of the Celtic Tiger? What new systems are needed to connect the inhabitants and communities in a more structural way, to ensure that they will not be overlooked again when the crisis is over.

Involving the community

The community-orientated visit showed us that a lot can be learnt from Dubliners on how to involve community residents and local business in urban development and how to appreciate small-scale interventions. The trip gave the impression that Dublin society is on the right track by capitalizing as much as possible on this crisis. For further practice this is very important. To learn from our mistakes in Europe means that, also after the crisis, we can opt for a more sustainable approach, with a committed community in a central position.

The trip showed that the human mind and spirit is very flexible. When the official projects can’t be financed anymore and when governmental organizations need to cut down on costs, there are always some people who stand up and stand out (as shown by the Lifeline Project).



Crisis, in other words, is also an opportunity. Not only for people to develop their own thoughts (for those who know how), but it is also an opportunity for others to be aware of projects that really make a difference. All the usual suspects and projects that cost money are stopped due to a lack of finance. When hardcore property development falls behind, the public realm and third places are possibly the key elements for starting new urban development.

Social sciences are essential in urban development and planning to interpret local knowledge and local entrepreneurship and to build bridges with more global practice brought by urban planners and decision-makers. Concepts such as social interaction, trust, cooperation, shared values and public interest all have to be based upon the local context and it is through involvement of end-users in the design process that successful projects can be delivered.

It is especially important to believe in the smaller projects which promote organic growth. Those projects involve people from the bottom-up, which makes them much more (emotionally) attached to the project, their neighbourhood and the city. It's a relief to see this happening. But to really use the force of these 'lived city' examples, they have to be recognized and supported by the city planning professionals.

In short, the search for a balanced combination of city planning and facilitating communities asks for more emphasis on empowering local initiatives with more responsibility for citizens and entrepreneurs as co-makers. Looking for solutions has to stay close to the natural habitat of people (culture) and places (location and history), whereby soul and identity are important guiding principles.



The chances for overcoming the crisis will be eroded when continued progress in societal evolution and protecting the quality of urban environment fails. Critical to this is the idea of community participation and a quality of citizenship. Several of the case study sites that we visited were interesting precisely because they had individuals championing these ideas on behalf of their communities at their heart. The flip side of that was the Northern Area Fringe where the planning authority refused to see a failed urban realm and a failed process.

All in all, the opportunities for ordinary people to make their own ideas happen are so important that it should be taken for granted in every economic situation: in prosperity and in less affluent times..

The existing planning elite might not be the right forum to start a process of co-creation however. We need different planners and a different regime. If not, the result will be the same as seen in the banking sector: tax payers are exploited in order to cover the debts of banks and when the banks

start making profits again, tax payers are left out, consequently making it hard for them to lend money.

Rethinking urban structure during the crisis

Thinking of development after the crisis is still too early. Rethinking the urban form during the crisis however, is a very interesting topic: how can a city make the most of this challenging phase. After the over-development and now the complete stop of investments, it is important to look for a form of restructuring or reconstitution of the urban form. Considering the dislocation of empty houses, far away from schools, employment and transport asks for a reconstruction of the urban form. Like in USA and the East German Lander, the houses in bad locations have to be knocked down and the inhabitants can move to better locations.

A new balance between market and public domain needs to be found. Even though there are many differences between the Anglo-Saxon model used in Ireland, and the ‘Rheinland’ model used in the Netherlands, there are also similarities. Both in Ireland and the Netherlands, we are looking for a new balance between government and market.

The professional developers, planners and builders are stuck between old school thinking and, most importantly, the complete absence of a real estate market. Individuals are the only ones who seem to be moving and trying to find (small) solutions.



And a strong government has to work together with the market, and with social partners and with the inhabitants, by leading the processes and giving good directions for urban development and living conditions for people. This means, that the local and national government, must economize more and faster, to avoid a deeper crisis. In planning and development, the government has to make choices in all the plans and programmes.

Urban development is about people

An important issue is the idea that Urban Development is not so much about a short term profit by real estate agencies, but it is about people. The public sphere and the living conditions are too precious to give away to parties who only have short-term solutions and profits on their mind. The real estate bubble of the last years has had disastrous consequences. Many citizens are now feeling

the dire results through job loss, unemployment, empty offices and houses, enormous debts and so on.

As also happens in the Netherlands, planners on the city side in Dublin seem to overlook the new models in practice that are happening in front of them. Connecting is crucial. Is the availability of land the crucial factor to decide where to go? Or is the crisis used for a once-in-a decade opportunity to improve the ring just outside the historic centre? Will the poor urban structure be improved? Or, in other words: how do the strategic planners connect with the bottom-up developments that are still taking place? Do they know where to look? Or do they choose the flight forward into new theoretic models?



Cooperation is key to new forms of urban development. And this has to go together with integral smart planning that monitors general interest.

It takes some time to restart again, both for the developers, government and for the (active) local communities. An overwhelming conclusion for the participants of the fieldtrip is that in the triangle configuration of government, private market and citizens, the balance of influence and responsibility must be sought by government and citizens. And especially by empowering the inhabitants. The government has to play an important role in this.

Integral planning means focused planning

In a way, it is shocking to see that beside looking from the short-term perspective, the urban developers also carried on with new constructions, while other buildings and city parts are empty. Some buildings have been empty for 7 or even 15 years. It is baffling that their eyes were still focused on creating new buildings instead of dealing with the already existing city. With so many dispersed projects and constructing new neighbourhoods in the green fields with the occasional reconstructing of some inner-city areas, the danger is that none of them get finished or filled. Now the important issue is to restructure the urban form and to knockdown houses in bad locations.

Looking at the city, one of the observations is that if the program of housing, facilities and shops in the new area Northern Fringe was realized in downtown Smithfield, then Smithfield would now be a

lively and safe neighbourhood. In Ireland, the forces of flowing capital and landownership block this kind of 'reading' and developing the city.

It seems important to focus on the areas near the city centre. Dublin has a very small historic centre. By forgetting to use the boom to transform the 18th and 19th century ring; the city skipped the ring and jumped right to the estates such as the North Fringe. The only main inner-city area that was redeveloped on the outer ring of the inner-city was the Dockland Area. Interestingly enough, this almost vacant ring (Newmarket, Lifeline, Smithfield) is where the little development potential that there still is seems to be located now. Is the crisis a chance for expanding the historic centre?



The large property developments such as Northern Fringe, as well planned as they were, have now come to a standstill. The large scale development was based on bank loans and short-term profits. On the other hand, there are developments that still continue. Smithfield theatre, Food Co-Op, Fumbally Exchange, Lifeline. What do they share? They are small scale, bottom-up and based on strong personal involvement. The initiators have a very long term commitment: Fumbally was developed by landowners who are in the area for 40-50 years already; the Food Co-op has existed since the 1970s; Lifeline has yet to prove itself but is initiated by the residents in the area. Their approach is very much action-based and trial & error. There are thus two streams here: top down by urban planners versus community initiatives. There is a huge gap between those two worlds.

Cooperation and innovation are key words. For the Smithfield area patience and temporary use are the main issues. This area will become vital over time and can be stimulated by short-term catalyst projects.

The Northern Fringe project as a greenfield area requires a different take on the whole development. Landscape can play a role here: maybe urban farming. Possibly, after the crisis, the 'strange' development in the outskirts, the empty premises, can be a blessing in disguise. Currently it has the potential for organic grown neighbourhoods, rather than huge areas which are developed in a single time frame. This is a real and huge problem in the Netherlands, particularly in areas built after WWII. So those new living areas can, for the time being, be areas for 'living in green and in nature'.

Big issue for the period to come

The crisis could provide a role model for a deeper lying change in urban development:

- from ‘city making’ to ‘city being’
- megapolisation, the ever continuing new order of urban, social and economic patterns on a world-wide scale with the whole world slowly turning into one huge urban network (maybe not physically, but certainly in terms of the connections). See how easily the young Irish age-group move abroad, or how close we followed the Tsunami in Japan.

These changes will lead to urban development that needs to interconnect scale levels (local-global) and disciplines (economy, spatial planning, social and cultural development). Urban development will take place in networks, coalitions and alliances. Changing existing urban structures means involving tens of thousands of residents and hundreds of owners and investors. The profession will no longer be rational only, as it may have once been in Greenfield development. It will be about emotions, trust, temptation, understanding and building on existing qualities (soul). Urban psychology and urban anthropology will become more important, dealing with fear of change and uncertainty.



Making new cities was difficult; but changing existing cities is also complex. Rational, mechanic-like process models as used for building new estates no longer suffice for changing the existing condition. It requires a constant link between chaos (creating change) and order (fixing change).

Complex models require intuition and the ability to understand situations culturally. The profession cannot rely on blueprint models anymore, but needs the acceptance of uncertainty, finding joy in discovering a more fluid or organic process if you like. Certainty in this situation cannot be found in rules or codes, but more in internal trust and craftsmanship: working from understanding rather than (only) knowledge and above all, in a clear view of what urban quality is.

The scale of the bubble which was created in Ireland has led to such a huge impact. The scale of the problem is so big that city-planning and other (relative) micro-developments (for example in neighbourhoods) have to stop looking at the government or at NAMA to solve their problem. In other words: they have to come up with a totally different self-reliant approach. Strong personal involvement and action based approach are thus key factors.

Insight and conclusions

Cities should be able to grow and they are not the product of the developers, nor of great gestures. In every development it should be taken into account that (economic) growth is always followed by economic decline. The examples showed that real urban development should come from smaller scaled initiatives and from individuals. The larger the initiative, the bigger the risks.



Crisis does not equal standstill: it means different development. Be it smaller, but still, if one knows where to look, one can find the new seeds. So no more new town development, but more of a focus on existing buildings and places. The small scale initiatives, bottom up, can be the new basis for urban development.

The city is made by those who live in them, with city councils as representatives and planners as coordinators.

One of the lessons is to realize how inadequately urban planners engage with communities and with social entrepreneurs. It means that planners need to learn how to engage properly with communities in order to tap into their potential and energy. To do this, they need to learn different skill sets. They also need to learn how to bring their own organisations (which are usually compartmentalised) with them. That last matter is a difficult, structural challenge, perhaps it asks to make place for a new generation of alliance based planners.



The second lesson is that the foremost approach for urban development is to keep a city and neighbourhoods liveable: to give possibilities for social inclusion, for building up a good life. Therefore, the empowerment of the citizens is very important. And empowerment only works successfully when it goes together with a government with longer-term visions and in collaboration with social partners.

Basically this shows that a good market needs a strong government; for good urban development, one needs a strong government, giving guidelines and ideas for a sustainable city and society. And the government has to work together with the inhabitants, creating real empowerment on the urban level and in the neighbourhoods. In other words: we have to transform our approach from 'making a city' towards 'being a city'.

Marijke Storm

Stipo, team for urban development.

Field trip to Dublin March 10th – 12th 2011

Participants:

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Feed back to the Dublin experience was given by 14 participants, this was the input for writing the article "Dublin between crisis and new energy".

A closer look at the Lifeline project in Dublin

The Lifeline is a hidden treasure in Dublin. Not only because of the industrial heritage of the former transport line, but also because the half-open and neglected line now offers a long green corridor.

The main question for the Lifeline is how to re-use this former line for the benefit of the communities on both sides and for improving inner-city living conditions.

This question was posed to the Dutch visitors by Kaethe Burt-O'Dea of the Sitric Composting Garden Community. This organization sees the Lifeline as a possibility for empowerment of the inhabitants by using the potentials of the green ribbon of the lifeline for a more healthy and bio-diverse lifestyle. This asks for an active and community based participation.

In a short lecture, Kaethe Burt-O'Deas explained that health issues and a growing awareness for wholesome food, physical exercises and biodiversity are key issues for the urban population in the coming decade. What possibilities and health impact can the Lifeline have and how can the public awareness and social cohesion be strengthened?

With these questions in mind, the excursion group made a stroll through the neighbourhood and had a look at the small and deep trough, almost an open air tunnel. The reality that the line is lying so deep is partly a disadvantage (because it is hidden and not very visible) and partly an advantage (because it is easily possible to link the 2 communities on both sides by constructing bridges and connections on ground level).



The group discussed some ideas for the Lifeline as a tool for public awareness and community bridging and ideas and possibilities for practical use in the coming period.

The rope of nature

Use the 'hiddenness' as a strong point: rename it the Mystery Mile and use this for publicity and campaign for generating concepts of mystery among the neighbourhood, children, the city of Dublin, students, etc.

Keep the Lifeline quiet and natural. Attract children with an adventure voyage. Make a roundtrip somehow. Build nature. And create gardens along the steep slopes on either side of the line.

The Organic Mile: make the Lifeline about nature, healthy lifestyle, organic food and community. Make it also organically organized, network based, bottom-up. Have an organic process that starts

from small and grows from there. The concept is so clear and strong that others can easily connect and link to it, help build the Lifeline.

The rope of activities

Turn the Lifeline into a 1.6 km long Natural Playground for kids, young people, students, residents wanting to do fitness. In a natural playground only nature based material is used. This material is not costly and easy to build such as rope bridges.

The lifeline can attract many different groups and activities: explorations in nature for school classes, birthday parties for kids; school gardens with children growing their own fruit and vegetables and selling their own products on a local market or at the Food Co-op, etc..

Connect with the market theme of Smithfield, walking horses with kids in cooperation with the market and teach them to take care of the horses along the mile.

Create a grid of footpaths and bicycle tracks on old railway lines and along canals. Connect it with routes going out of Dublin, and around. Create 'knots' enabling people to shorten or enlarge their route. The Lifeline is the first step.



The growing awareness in the communities

Generate ideas for new parts of the Natural Playground by organizing competitions among the future users: schools, DIT, etc. These will also be extremely sensitive for publicity, so use the competitions and their outcomes to involve the media.

How can the Lifeline be 'opened up' for the Lifeline for communities on both sides of the line?

'Bridging' in many senses: contact schools to adopt a part, make playgrounds for children (slides, ropes, natural materials, rope bridges).

Collect the stories of the Lifeline, from the last stories when the railway was operated the railway to children now; make the Lifeline a place in peoples' hearts.

Thinking in short term and long term

Make use of the linear quality to connect the tram of Smithfield square to the possible new campus and the outer city; make it a route. Start with a walkway, this can be turned into a bike path, and later be transformed over time into a light rail or other. Add access points with stairs. Use the new route to free up space in the existing road patterns of the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Short term: use the line for recreation and playgrounds for children. Long term: use the line as public transport.

Process Ideas

Create a sense of ownership in the neighbourhood and at the same time get a better 'power base' next to DIT and RPA by selling pieces of air above the lifeline.

If one takes, for instance, 0.5 m for each piece, there can be 3,200 symbolic owners. Another possibility is to sell smaller bits, perhaps not only campaigning in the neighbourhood but in the whole of Dublin (is Lifeline for the neighbourhood or for the whole of Dublin?) It will generate some money, or energy (by asking people to become active in return for their 'share'). Combine it with a website showing 'which piece is my piece', but also 'who else is in it'? Get some celebrities to buy first, to draw media attention. Of course, with the RPA as formal owner of most of the track, it is more a symbolic mental ownership.

(Previous experiences: Vondelpark Amsterdam sold trees and benches; names were mentioned on the website; people bought to show their love for the park and their support for the renovation. There was a forest to the north of Dublin that did the same, however, it remained abstract for most people never come there. The Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam sold chairs; people's names were actually mentioned on the chairs in the stadium.)

Keep the joke alive. The project has been a metaphorical joke. Keep it that way. It makes it easily accessible because it is driven by enthusiasm. Strengthen and brand this metaphorical character. Organic in a broad sense: the trial and error approach. Just take action and see if it works. This works for the Lifeline itself, but also in the process. Temporary use is good and it gives an insight: what is good, will remain.

Know what you want. Especially because of this trial and error approach there should be a vision to see if the activities fit with the overall idea. The vision must not be too narrow: adopt the 5 aims of the Lifeline (similar to the Food Co-op).

Keep it small. If it is made too big, it will kill the initiative. The small scale is the essence.

Don't start by building a legal construction. Structure should follow strategy.

The story of the Lifeline and the enthusiasm and ideas for this community driven project were a very inspiring part of the visit to Dublin. Of course the ideas of using the line for public health and possibilities of urban recreation and community enforcement are important. But more important still is the broader idea for stimulating awareness for growing food, eco-literacy and a healthy lifestyle.