

ENSCHEDE: IS THERE LIFE AFTER THE DISASTER?

Paul A.G. LOHMANN, The Netherlands

Key words:

ABSTRACT

One of the topics in the working-programme of commission 8, Spatial Planning and Development, is to form the working-group Urban Regeneration and Solutions to Inner City Problems. Aim of the working group is, to follow several urban-regeneration-projects for a period of at least 12 years. Some project of the Netherlands are about the Neighbourhood-Development Corporation (NDC) as they are in the cities of Rotterdam, Heerlen, Enschede and Arnhem, an new instrument for upgrading declined neighbourhoods. Germany has the project about the Emscher-project, an project that is completed now.

By the work of this working group, commission 8 will stress that we, as surveyors, share the responsibility for well-functioning cities. We should contribute to the prevention of the arising of urban problem areas. In fact, the goal the working group has set itself is to develop new, effective executive instruments that help to counter urban deterioration.

During the upcoming eight years both the results as well as the effects of the Emscher-project and the NDC will be evaluated. Februari 2000, there was the working-week wich was held in the Netherlands (Rotterdam) and Germany (Bottrop). We discussed the progress that was made on the project in Rotterdam and Bottrop/Essen. We chose to follow the same project in the forthcoming years of the working-group. But then:.....!

Saturday, May 13th : 15.19, an enormous explosion in the northern parth of the Dutch city of Enschede, destroyed the whole neighbourhood called "Roombeek". The disaster received the name: *The Enschede SE-Firework-Disaster*.

The disaster changed the life of more than a thousand people living in that area, (1.5x1.5 km). 22 People died, more than 960 were injured and more than 600 houses, 40 shops and 60 small-scale-factories were demolished: burned out or simply blown away by the great explosion. The costs were more than half-a-bilion dollars.

The disaster had, and still has, an enourmous influence on a great number of people, people who lived in the aera or worked there. People who knew people over there or just liked the area of its certain way of living. Political life in Enschede was, and still is under pressure because an official investication which must point out who is, or was, responsible: the company (SE-Firework), the local-government of Enschede or the Dutch government.

It speaks for itself that the government is accountable to society for its actions. Therefore, the themes in the official investigation are particularly related to the government, also with regards to the lessons, especially, in which the fire-work disaster has resulted.

This does not mean that the SE-Firework company can be left out of the consideration with regard to the firework disaster. With its plan of investigation, the investigators has set their task carrying out an integral and coherent investigation and analysing and assessing which actors – both public and private – bore the responsibility for which factors and circumstances of the disaster.

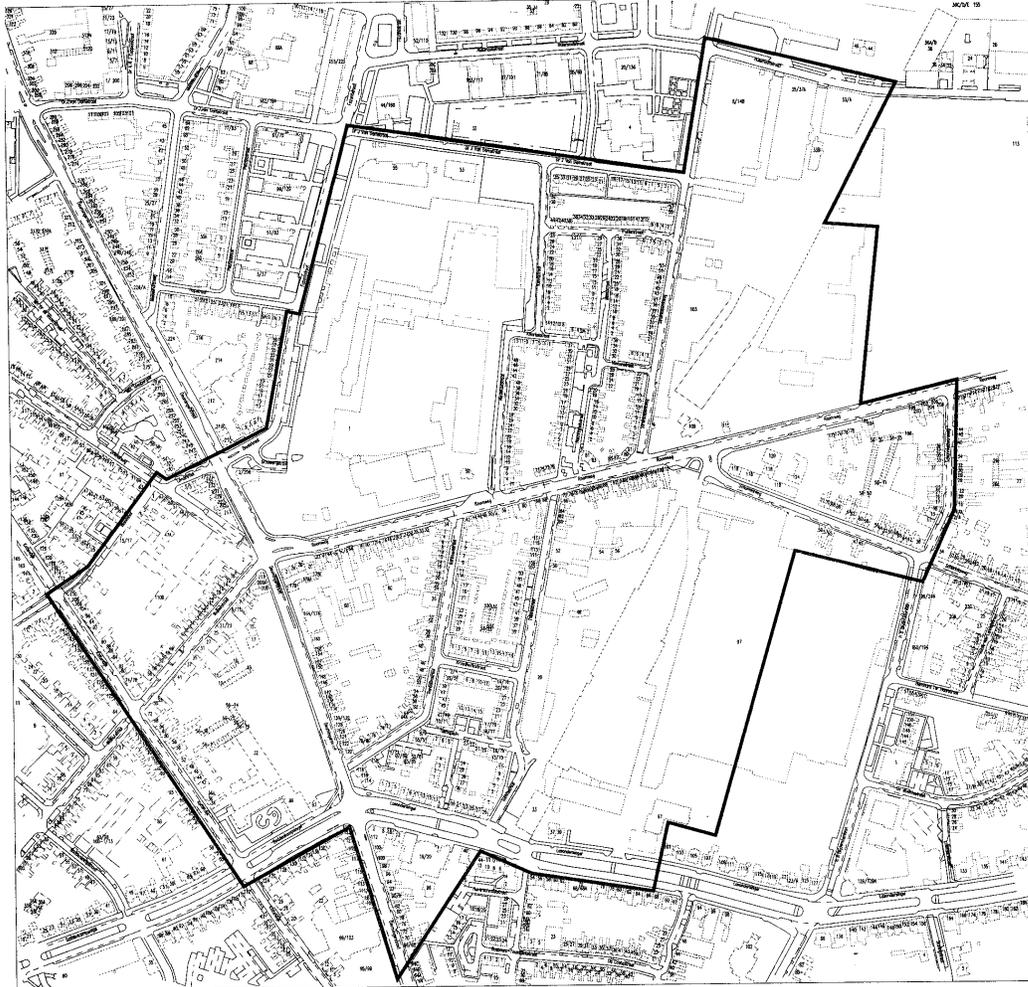
The SE-Firework company cannot be ignored for the fact that a balanced assessment of of the nature and magnitude of the government's responsibility for the disaster must be made.

But apart from that, a responsible enterprise which has become involved in a disaster should not be allowed to nor able to withdraw itself from a critical examination by that society.

The government is a collective noun for a varied series of institutions and persons. It is plain from the triptych of the three investigative reports that the government takes on a number of diverse guises in the investigation of the investigators: it sets rules and enforces them, combats a disaster and provides practical help.

Whatever comes out of the official investigations, life in the city of Enschede goes on, must go on! Soon after the disaster the municipality of Enschede founded a group of experts who made a all-over-plan for (re)building the neighbourhood. New houses, shops and small-scale factories.

This project will be followed the next 8 years by commission 8, Urban Regeneration. This project because of the impact the project had, and has in the Netherlands but also because of what happened, what went good or/and what went wrong.



The area on which the explosion had its influence: about 1.5 x 1.5 km. More than 600 houses, 40 shops and 60 small-scale-industries were blown-away. The SE-Firework-company was just in the middle of the area. All people within the area weren't allowed to return to their 'houses' for more than 2 weeks.

SOME ELEMENTS OF THE PROJECT PLAN OF REBUILDING THE AREA

Rebuilding the area, the principles

- a) Basis is: everyone who wants to return to the area, must have the opportunity to return,
- b) This to the cost of the situation on May 12th,
- c) Basis for rebuilding the area is an new area-plan: an overall-plan,
- d) This plan will be made in close cooperation with all the inhabitants of the demolished neighbourhood,
- e) within existing plan-forms, new houses can be build if they suit in the overall-plan,
- f) land- and houseowners must receive all the help they can get by rebuilding their property, (experience, financing , etc.),
- g) participation in the process of rebuilding is an topic,

- h) the overall-plan must lead to an situation that people can live happily in their old neighbourhood,
- i) the area must have something special in the new situation.

Buying the property of landowners

The municipality of the city of Enschede will start as soon as possible with the rebuilding of the area. This with the following aim:

- all inhabitants will be *completely compensated* for all loses
- if possible, all inhabitants must return to the area.

Principle: ground for ground

- the municipality of Enschede is obliged to buy the whole property of an owner (bought after May, 13th and gives the owner an ground-certificate
- this certificate shows:
 - the m2 of the sold property,
 - the price (what is it worth),
 - category (where: localisation)
 - Cadastral information.

Price

The price to pay is equal to the price the property has on *May 12th*, it was valued by an valuation-committee.

Category

Can be the following:

- urban villa
- standard house
- street-house
- apartment

Owners of a ground-certificate have the possibility to buy a property for their own living within the range of the ground-certificate. If the holder wants to change the category, he has an certain right to do so. This right doesn't give him the possibility to buy another ground-spot if anyone of this certain category want's to buy also.

THE DISASTER: EXPECTATIONS IN RESPECT OF THE MUNICIPALITY

It was remarked that a disaster not only confronts government with an enormous task. For, because of the action it takes after a disaster – while a disaster is being combatted and also during the assistance it provides afterwards – the government can show what it is worth. In terms of trust that a citizen has in the government, this is an important point.

What must be recognised is that the government is placed under great pressure in its efforts to provide assistance after a disaster. In the first place, this may occur when the cause of the disaster is (partly) ascribed to the government from whom people had possibly expected that it could have fully guaranteed the safety of the citizens. In a

situation such as in Enschede, assistance from the government will partly have the character of the repair of affected trust.

Pressure on the government may be felt in a different manner. For, however the government exerts itself, it is not always able to do the impossible, and, certainly after a disaster, the government is not infallible, and it makes mistakes. This may then clash with victims, who expect that the government will immediately be able to properly solve all acute problems also because they have been dependent on help from the government because of the disaster, or feel themselves otherwise dependent on the government.

So it remains that a disaster is an enormous task for any government, also in respect of practical assistance. This also applies to the municipality of Enschede after the firework-disaster. The municipality immediately recognised this. This appears not only from the memorandum about the way in which the after-phase should be approached, but also, for example, from the choice of basic assumptions for the communication policy after the disaster: a reliable and caring government.

The ‘reliability’ aim expressed in the communication policy was quite specific; it concerned the content of the information issued by the municipality. In the period of confusion and uncertainty which follows an disaster, it is, of course, absolutely essential that citizens can trust on the accuracy of the information issued to them by the municipality.

By contrast, the ‘caring’ objective is extremely broad, and arouses expectations, both in respect of the content of the care and in the manner in which it will be provided, of which the question is whether the municipality will be able to meet all aspects of this.

This is not only concerns the question of the responableness of these expectations, but also the limits to the possibilities and other resources are – also with financial support from central government – not unlimited.

INFORMATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER REGISTRATION

The great importance of proper information which is available on time, to anyone whom it concerns, has already become apparent from both other parts of the investigation. This is no different for the practical assistance provided. On this point, a clear problem occurred in respect of the registration of victims.

As seen in Enschede, the registration of victims did not run smoothly, even after the initial hours of great confusion. The afterwards entailed a major practical problem for the relief activities, since it was essential that proper information about the victims be available. It should have been possible to expect that the preparations made for disasters, were such, in terms of the registrations aspect, that the failings which have now become apparent not occur. This is a clear lesson to be learned here.

BACK TO THE ORDER OF THE DAY, AND THE FUTURE

A disaster turns everything upside down in one fell swoop. A lot has to happen immediately, often with considerable improvisation. Ample room for initiatives from below is then vital; leadership receives many chances too. Suddenly, the pressure of the disaster situation makes everything far less rigid, so it would seem.

This also applies to processes within government, and to decision-making, which is then mainly crisis-decision-making. The fire-work disaster witnessed many heart-warming examples of this.

When the tension of the disaster situation has somewhat ebbed away, the government (also) gradually returns to the order of the day. The combatting of the consequences of the disaster then has a certain structure of routine, and, in addition, the 'ordinary' everyday administrative problems also again require attention. The normal administrative and official division of tasks and relationships, and the normal procedures, return. In addition, the disaster also demands decisions which will make themselves felt for a long period of time, and which, notwithstanding their urgency, must also be prepared with the care required. The flexibility that was evident immediately after the disaster decreases, and a certain solidification occurs in the administrative-official processes. What first occurred quickly and easily, now again occurs far more slowly. This experience can lead to frustration, both from the citizen and within government itself.

It is a great challenge for the municipality of Enschede to maintain the long-term elan that is necessary to deal with the consequences of a disaster on the scale and impact of the fire-work disaster. In general, this is important if the citizens' trust in the government is to be recovered, trust which suffered a substantial blow in many as a result of the fire-work disaster, and this applies particularly to those victims who will continue to be dependant on the municipality for considerable time to come.

CONTACT

Paul A.G. Lohmann
Director
Holland Urban Institute
Nieboerweg 228
NL-2566 GC The Hague
NETHERLANDS
Tel. + 31 70 346 4485
E-mail: Lohmann.Paul@Zonnet.nl