

ShopHouse Transformation in Feijenoord

Introduction

ShopHouse is a vernacular building type. ShopHouses are mostly two to three stories high, each with a shop operated on the ground floor for commercial activity and a dwelling above the shop. They are mixed-use buildings that serve social and economical functions. They could be found not only in Nederland, but are also very common in other countries. Usually, the dwelling part of the building is housing family of the owner of the ground floor shop. The relationship between shop and dwelling is close and direct. However, this building type became displaced in the twentieth century. "Shops" were claimed as sources of nuisance, and excluded from dwelling area. Housing developments, especially those being built after the Second World War (WWII), are always pure dwellings.

Example of the displacement of the ShopHouse could be found in Feijenoord of Rotterdam. Feijenoord was developed into a port industrial area in the late nineteenth century, ShopHouse were built for the port workers of ports and their families at that time¹. However, these ShopHouse were substantially changed over the past hundred years. Functionally, the relationship between shop and dwelling are disconnected recently. The shop operators may not live in the dwelling units above. Physically, some of ShopHouse were renovated, of which some shops were removed from the building in the Seventies. And last year, rows of ShopHouse in Oranjeboomstraat were demolished and left vacant (see fig. 1). Once being so dominant in urban culture and street fabric, what is the future of this building typology? Is being demolished the only way out for it?

In this writing, the fall of ShopHouse is briefly narrated. Followed with the highlights of significant district phenomenon and recently situations of ShopHouse in Feijenoord, possible direction of transforming the ShopHouse in Feijenoord, especially those in Oranjeboomstraat, is discussed.

The Fall of ShopHouse after WWII

Traditional ShopHouse were seldom to be found built after the WWII. The most obvious reason for this is the raise of "functionalism" which stressed highly on the perception that the society is a collage of individual utilities, organized a logical manner that serves collectively as a whole, for the well being of the society. As functionalism was the most important and influential doctrine endorsed by the modernist, the segregation of urban functions was widely pursued by the architects and urban planners in their design during the twentieth century.

During that period, the cities were split up into mono-functional areas. Residential areas, formed by pure habitation dwellings and shared communal spaces, are separated from other urban functions. The development of Bijlmermeer District in Amsterdam is a typical example of Modern city in the Netherlands. This type of urban planning was widely applied in the post-war period in order to fulfill the serging demand for housings. The boom of the Modern cities successfully resolved the imminent social problem of the Netherlands at that period. However, as an expense, ShopHouse, which was cultivated by the small-scale economy resulted from slow organic growth of residential neighbourhood, was rapidly excluded from the residential area.

Nowadays, as the cities evolves, the negative effects of this division-of-functions planning becomes obvious, for instant, it minimized the social coherence and neighbourhood connections in the residential areas. Residents set off for work in the mornings, and their children play on their way to school only. They have few activities in their housing districts. Though the communal spaces, which are designed in mono-function - park with large empty greenery, are provided as to promote sense of community; most of them failed. This failure results in not only the

¹ Meijel L. van, Hinterthür H, Bet E., 2010, Cultuurhistorische verkenning Feijenoord; P.41

under-use of space which is a waste of social resources, but, more importantly, a deteriorating neighbourhood relationship.

There have been huge debates on this kind of city planning for many years. For example, Jane Jacobs questioned about the division-of-functions planning and suggested to make linkage among district economy, district physical structures and the public space². Making cohesion among various urban functions became important.

Recently, there are national plans about the urban renewal projects in the Netherlands, for example, South of Rotterdam. This region is originally associated with social housing built in the pre-war and post-war periods. The linkage between different functions and areas by new public space is stressed in this project. However, at the moment, only literal connection among these areas by physical structures is provided. The need for actual connection among the residents that promotes human interactions has not been addressed. The linkage zone should be a mix-function entity that consists of various uses, for instance, housing, working and public spaces; that allow gradually transformation among different existing functional zones.

How to link up those existing buildings, for example the traditional mixed-use buildings – ShopHouse with the existing urban fabric, and transform them into a new model for the districts is one of the cases.

The Changes and Problems in Feijenoord District

Feijenoord is located in the South of Rotterdam where was developed when the port industries peaked in the nineteenth century. It was a large scale urban development. Many factories and housings were built in the area together with the streets and the related infrastructures, such as bridges and railways³. The streets profiles were wide in that period. ShopHouse was then the most typical building, with shops operated on the ground floor to support the daily life of the residents in the area. Since most of the residents, the workers and their families, were came from different towns or villages, those pavements were important places for them to meet, to play and to rest. Street pavements were designed to benefit the connection among people came from different social backgrounds.

The influence of the modern movement is also obvious in Feijenoord. After WWII, the port industrials were getting down; factories were moved away from Feijenoord and replaced by residential blocks. Shops were also taken out from the area. Although the area was successfully changed from port industrial area into residential area, there are also negative effects generated from these changes.

Disconnected and Small Communities Circles

Since Feijenoord area was survived from the bomb of Rotterdam in WWII, many of the old pre-war buildings was still exists after the War. The redevelopments of Feijenoord were carried out in bits and pieces. As a result, these redevelopments reflected and reinforced the separation of the population structures in Feijenoord. The housing projects built or renovated in the fifties and the seventies were designed to suit for specific group of people with own characters. Old districts are transformed into relative poverty and socioeconomically groups, while new districts are built for higher income or social classes. Feijenoord was cut down into many small communities-circles of which people may be come from different social groups⁴. Although the planners tried to increase the connections among different areas by constructed some cross streets; the interaction among different social groups is rare. This is because of the absence of pavements nor facilities that promote the mixing of functions in the districts, there are no places for people to communicate; there is no connection and exchange among districts.

² Jane Jacobs, 1972, The Economy of Cities

³ Meijel L. van, Hinterthür H, Bet E., 2010, Cultuurhistorische verkenning Feijenoord; P.12-P.61

⁴ Rotterdam Vakmanstad M/V, Veldacademie, 2010, De Nieuwe Belangstelling; P.31-33

Vanishing of Street Activities

During urban renewal in the Seventies and Eighties, since the urban planner aimed to make Rotterdam centres more cheerful and welcoming, they tried to reduce the housing density in the centre and spread housing districts to the city edge. Since Feijenoord is not in the centre of Rotterdam, it was transformed into “pure-dwelling” district. The urban renewal planning in Feijenoord followed the concept of “mono-function”, the housing and other related facilities of daily life were separated. The small-scale urban economies were viewed as ‘impurity’ and were removed from the housing area. It was quite common arrangement in the period due to the assumption that businesses and shops were sources of nuisance. Communal spaces were became an important element in housing projects instead. As a result, street activities were reduced and daily life activities were separated from housing district. Local’s residents are seldom to be seen outdoor (see fig. 2). The area became quieter with various nuisances⁵. If there is anyone hanging around, residents may feel danger to stay outside in the districts.

Green Structure without Coherent

There are many green structures in Feijenoord. Over thirty percent of the areas are green spaces, of which about sixty percent are common or collective garden for adjacent inhabitants and private gardens on ground floor. The rest are kind of public green area, where can be accessed by anyone, including the parks and green plants in the streets. The two big public green parks are located near Nassauhaven and the other located near Rosestraat⁶.

Although these two parks, consist of squares in the middle of the districts, are important public spaces for residents, they do not form coherent components to the existing street network. For example, the Rosepark, located on the island between Oranjeboomstraat and Rosestraat, is more than 400 meters long and about 75 meters wide. It is located close to the “paper clip” residential buildings in Rosestraat and the row of traditional ShopHouse in Oranjeboomstraat, but is separated from those buildings blocks by busy carriageway and a long big wall respectively (see fig. 3). Also because there are no specific functions in the green park, it is always empty. Green structures divided the areas instead of linking the areas.

Sub-conclusion

Obviously, division-of-functions planning divided Feijenoord into small subdivision communities, but no proper linkage space is provided. Making linkage among local economy, transforming existing buildings and public green structures to form cohesion among the districts in Feijenoord is required. It is not a transformation to combine all the subdivisions. The focus of the transformation is to strengthen the connections and increase the sense of belonging of the area among residents. For example, opening up a subdivision area, and transformed it into a public and representative zone, that will be an attractive spot for social activities among districts.

Transformation in Oranjeboomstraat & Rosepark

Oranjeboomstraat is the ideal location for this transformation. There are four main reasons. Firstly, Oranjeboomstraat is a symbol of the district as “everyone knows the Oranjeboomstraat”⁷. It is a traditional shopping and community centre of Feijenoord, in where ShopHouse are the main typology of shops (See fig. 4). They support the social-economy to the nearby community area⁸. The importance of Oranjeboomstraat was only dimmed recently after rows of ShopHouse are demolished. Secondly, Oranjeboomstraat is located in the middle of Feijenoord. The ground floor shops in the street are occupied more than 30% of retail shops and supported to the eastern part of Feijenoord (See fig. 5). Thirdly, there is an empty green structure, Rosepark, behind the row of the

⁵ Ibid; P11-12

⁶ Rotterdam Vakmanstad M/V, Veldacademie, 2010, De Nieuwe Belangstelling; P.34

⁷ De Nieuwe Unie, Wijkvisie Feijenoord 2006-2016; P.16

⁸ Ibid; P.18

ShopHouse. This green structure is located at the edge of the eastern part of Feijenoord. Although there is no proper public access at the moment and development feasibility requires further study, its emptiness possesses huge potential and possibilities for transformation. The last but not least, there will be a new tramline constructed in the coming years. A new tram station is proposed next to the Rosepark⁹. With the new public transportation facility, the benefit of the transformation might magnify due to the increase of pedestrian flow. Moreover, as the new station will bring more 'outsiders' to Oranjeboomstraat, if the transformation is successful, there is a chance that the enhancement in neighbourhood interaction may even radiate out to the other areas as well through the tram network.

Transformation Feasibility of Existing ShopHouse in Oranjeboomstraat

There are rows of existing ShopHouse located along Oranjeboomstraat and survived from the demolition in 2010. If transformation is taken place in Oranjeboomstraat, these buildings should be utilized as one of the key elements. The potential value from the unique style and qualities of the existing buildings provide possibilities on the physical transformation.

Building Style

These buildings were used as "Social Housing" for workers. The design of the building facade was simple and identical; and the layout was basic and logical: narrow and elongated with repeating depth and length in the plot. During the renovation in the eighties, they were still renovated as social housing. The building facade and layout were renovated in the concept of "merging horizontally". As a result, the building plot, in terms of front façade, layout and sectional arrangement, were changed from "Identical Individual" to "One" (see Fig. 6). The back facade of the building is a kind of "private façade" but it is facing to the Rosepark and one main carriageway of the area. Renovation on this façade is necessary.

Building Quality

The structural system and materials of the building followed the typical era of the Netherlands. Upgrading renovation was made to the building by adding insulation during the Urban Renewal in the eighties. The building structure and foundation limited the extendable height of the building; however, the wall and floor systems allow possibilities for alternative and additional changes. In last renovation, the living units were rearranged horizontally by making holes on the party walls; openings were made to the timber floors for the new construction of internal staircases. Basically, the buildings are mainly structured by party walls; the façades and floors are relatively flexible to make transformation.

Sub-conclusion

How to transform these ShopHouse is important. Not only the technical issues would be considered, but also the social-cultural content of the ShopHouse should be touched on. The existing ShopHouse is mixed functions of "shop" and "living", which operated with shop on ground floor and dwelling above. What are suitable combinations of functions for nowadays and future? What is the new definition and relation of "work" and "live"?

Re-thinking "Living" plus "Working" Spaces and Its Social Implications

Recently, there is growing attention to the combination of housing and working. This does not mean literally placing the housing and working spaces next to each other. It is the experiment of a single space that serves both production and consumption functions.

⁹ www.portfeijenoord.nl/visie.pdf;P.11-14; accessed in April 2012

‘Home-office’ or ‘SOHO’ is an example of “small-scale economy”. The term ‘Home-office’ or ‘SOHO’ refers to a category of business that involves less than 10 workers¹⁰ each works in their own home, integrating his/her working life with his/her family life. It is particularly popular in relatively small-scale business. Small-scale economy can provide opportunities for people with different backgrounds to become integrated and emancipated. People can create their own businesses and the economic independence, which can help them to have better equality in the society¹¹.

This vision of economy is definitely suitable for Rotterdam, also Feijenoord. This is because, firstly, it matches one of the main goals in Rotterdam Urban Renewal plan - “strengthen the economy structure” which promotes knowledge and innovation businesses and service economy¹². The idea of small-scale economy, due to the low starting costs, is suitable for different groups of people, including singles, couples, students, even families to own their business. This is very beneficial to Feijenoord, especially for the improvement on youth employment. Secondly, it is suitable to the economical background of the district. Since residents of Feijenoord are mostly immigrants with lower social strata¹³, the economy footprint is relatively low. This is also suggested that “high-class” commercial activates are not fitted there. On the contrary, the small-scaled business is well fitted in the social environment. It can provide living space and working space. It allows people to start their business in budget, while people can save money and time in transport. It is one of the local economy sources. The individual and distinguish characters of small shops can help to strengthen community circle in the area and even attract adjacent communities to visit.

Although the existing functions arrangement of ShopHouse is typical, the composition, circulation and orientation of shops and dwellings limited the variation of shop types. Transformation to the ShopHouse to suit the contemporary business model is required. Traditional ShopHouse can be transformed into new composition of living and working places. This is a good chance to re-think and re-define the meaning and the future of ShopHouse in Feijenoord.

Possible Direction

The notions of ‘Functionalism’ were DIFFERENTIATION AND SPECIALISATION which promotes the ‘Economy of Scale’; the internal social cohesion was sacrificed for maximizing the cost effectiveness and productivity. We are actually benefited from such mode of development. Large cities and big corporate is vital to our daily lives. However, it does deepen the gaps between different social groups as the less competitive ones will always be marginalized and displaced. The emphasis of INTEGRATION AND COALESCENCE might counter-balance the ‘side effects’ of the Modern city planning and way of living. The emphasis of human interaction interface at the ‘intersection’ of functional zones and the idea of a spatial setting, that can accommodate both working and living activities, will cohere the various social fragments without a wholesale change in social structure that will in turn resulted in another set of social problems. There are necessary and opportunities to make transformation in Feijenoord to improve its living environment. It requires of involving both urban and building levels.

In urban level, the green empty structure, Rosepark, can be redesigned with new facilities to bring a new balance and harmony to the area. The public from different communities can go to enjoy the new green park and experience the new and specific composition of ShopHouse and park. This linkage zone can be part of their working and leisure place.

¹⁰ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_office/home_office; accessed in April 2012

¹¹ Komossa Susanne, 2010, The Dutch urban block and the public realm

¹² Gemeente Rotterdam, 2007, Stadsvisie Rotterdam: Ruimtelijke Ontwikkelings-Strategie 2030 (Concept); P. 26,80

¹³ Rotterdam Vakmanstad M/V, Veldacademie, 2010, De Nieuwe Belangstelling; P.16-18

In building level, the existing ShopHouse can be modified and transformed. Small-shops, studios or work-shops plus living spaces can be provided. They are suitable for different sizes of people groups from single to families. The residents who live in these buildings can be offered a semi-communities-and-public space. The building front façade can be transformed to embrace the district image, which can maintain and emphasize district identities. Meanwhile, the existing back façade of buildings can be re-invented to bring a new image of each individual or small group of houses.

In a long run, projecting the potential of this architectural / urban design concept into the social/cultural level, the transformed ShopHouse may form a new housing typology that not only provides living space for people, but also facilitates people starting up small businesses, at the same time forming a new characteristic communities and society structure. The local economy will also be benefited. Facing the fall of economical footprint in the area and competitiveness from big corporations, these small businesses with distinguishing qualities may be a way out.

“ShopHouse Transformation” is an interesting and meaningful topic for the moment and the future of Feijenoord.

Conclusion

To conclude, now the housing problem for the mass has been resolved. We are now faced with new social problems of deteriorating sense of community and a disjointed society that is generated by the Modern city paradigms. To tackle these new problems does not mean the complete restoration of the old system. It should mean a new typology that reflects the traditional system in an innovative way. By mixing the old buildings with the new ones through the injection of new communication platforms that encourage communication among people from different cultures and backgrounds, a more well-balanced society will be the new model for the future.

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