

# ENSCHEDE: IS THERE LIFE AFTER THE DISASTER?

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## 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 13<sup>th</sup> : 15.19*, an enormous explosion in the northern part 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-billion dollars.

The disaster had, and still has, an enormous influence on a great number of people, people who lived in the area 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 investigation 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 privat – 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 form 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.

*In the presentation in Korea I will show you impressions of the first moments after the great explosion and the life in the first few weeks in this part of the city in Enschede.*

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