

Post Disaster Consolidation of Land, Memory and Identity

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SUMMARY

Disasters in cities contain severe destruction of buildings and loss (of access to) land. Consequently, a post-disaster re-development plan needs to rely on land consolidation approaches. An associated dilemma is to re-establish the built-up area in its original formal shape, or to innovate the urban design partially or completely. An important consideration in the allocation of new land and building rights is whether to reconstitute former rights or allocate new rights. Participation of former residents and firm owners alongside overcoming the immense social trauma are crucial elements of this process.

The aim is to derive new land consolidation optimization criteria which could support urban post disaster land consolidation. The guiding hypothesis hereby is that consolidation of memory and identity are two important aspects which need to be incorporated in land consolidation design and implementation procedures in order to ensure ownership of the consolidation result and to help overcoming the social trauma.

Land consolidation theory has primarily been rooted in agricultural economics and land management. The concept of optimization during the consolidation processes can however be critically questioned from the perspective of social disaster mitigation experiences. In this body of literature it is argued that the return to daily life after a disaster requires both a sufficient acknowledgement that humans tend to want to re-install historically known artefacts in order to be able to reintegrate into regular new social routines. This is summarized by the concepts of memory consolidation and preservation of identity. These concepts provide an analytical way to question contemporary urban land consolidation approaches.

Two relatively recent specific cases were used to assess the degree to which elements of memory

consolidation and identity preservation are incorporated in post disaster land consolidation: the firework disaster in Enschede, Netherlands in 2000, and the Merapi disaster in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2009. These cases were chosen because sufficient documentation has been collected, and it was still possible to acquire additional data from people who had experienced both the previous and post disaster situation.

Both cases exhibited considerable attention for the simultaneous processes of reconstruction and participation in the land consolidation processes. Participation is often framed as a process which has to be stimulated during a technical land consolidation and reconstruction process. In some instances it is however an endogenous social process whereby citizens claim ownership of the process prior to the technical reconstruction. Especially in the resurrection of historical monuments and/or in the delineation of areas with spatial significance in relation to the disasters.

Where conventional consolidation approaches in rural areas tend to emphasize the need to optimize agricultural production or environmental protection, optimization indicators in post disaster consolidation need to be adapted. Especially procedures and tools to incorporate memory consolidation and identity preservation need to be incorporated. This can be done theoretically, but still requires further research and actual implementation experiences into how to consolidate that into current institutional procedures and operational software packages.