

Planning in an Urbanizing World

The Dutch Approach

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The Netherlands has a long tradition in spatial planning based on spatial visions. This has been forced by the Dutch fight against water and the gaining of land (the 'polder'). Since the 1950s many national, regional and local vision documents came into being. Essential to the Dutch approach of vision making are creating alliances of power and using design as a tool. This asks a new role for governments.

The 'Dutch Approach' of planning is an active one. It means listening to and communicating with the people who are involved, who represent the different challenges and tasks and who share an ambition to make the difference. It means scanning the future, to be prepared for upcoming challenges and opportunities. The Dutch do not work five years ahead, not ten, but at least forty. Planning is being prepared, because solutions take time and need long term consistent policy and implementation. Dutch planning means integration of themes and searching for multi-purpose solutions. It means planning by design, through different (time-) scales and layers of occupation, networks (infrastructure, water system, energy etc.) and the physical and natural base.

The long Dutch experience in long term planning might be a help in the complex urban situation of today that needs more than ever a practice of planning ahead by vision making, developing instruments and implementation. Important in this case is that these processes go along parallel lines, instead of being executed one by one.

Urbanizing World

As the part of the world population that live in cities is growing, planning for sustainable, livable and economically strong cities is urgent. In 2008 for the first time more than half of the world population lived in cities. Such a growing concentration of population comes with new complexities and questions for urban planners. How to organize housing, mobility, potable water, safety, health, economic activity, access to green, etc in the urbanizing world? At the same time economic crisis, demographic development and climate-change are causing more complexity and uncertainty. It is in cities that these challenges come together and manifest themselves spatially. At the same time, these cities are the places where people come together, creativity and innovation flourishes, and wealth is created. All this takes place on only 3% of the earth's surface. A remark was made on the consequences of this for planning: "The city is the most complex artifact ever produced by human civilization; people settle there by the billions, yet they actually know too little about building, planning, designing and governing their cities."ⁱ

When alliances of politicians, market forces, bureaucracies, researches, civil society, agree on the questions at stake and start thinking in the same direction, only then we can respond to the urgencies and problems of our urbanized world. Together we can anticipate on the future. The hands on experience of Dutch planning might be helpful to face today's challenges in the urbanizing world.

History of the Dutch Approach

Like many other urbanized regions in the world, The Netherlands is founded in a river delta. The tradition of the Dutch planning dates back into the 12th century when local farmers and land owners founded the district water boards to cooperate in order to protect the land from water and to make it suitable for agricultural use. No farmer could build a dike on its own but together with all neighbours he could manage to build one. The district water boards were the first democratic institutions in the area of what is the Netherlands today.

Urbanization has always been high in the Netherlands historically. Already since the 17th century more than fifty percent of the population lived in cities. For the world population this degree of urbanization has been reached only a few years ago. Town planning made the concentration of people and economic activities possible. In their economic activities the Dutch have since long an international orientation. Since long the Netherlands has been a trade nation. Since mid 20th century the Dutch produced goods (for instance dairy products) on a large scale for international markets which they shipped from their numerous harbors. In the country side farmers and local land owners took the lead in planning and development. Since the 17th century not only the urbanization reached high levels also the Dutch increased their activities in land reclamation by drainage. This resulted in reclaimed land such as the Beemster-polder(1612). Very recent the Maasvlakte (2008) was claimed from the North Sea. In the Netherlands all the land is man-made. Every square meter has been worked by man and mostly more than once. This history taught us town and country planning. The history of living in highly urbanized country that had to be protected from rivers and the sea taught us to plan ahead.

Since the mid-twentieth-century both population and economy experienced a strong growth. The Dutch government started to make integral long term visions since the 1950s. The main purpose of those successive visions was to organize the rapid urbanization in order to make competitive and livable cities and to maintain an agricultural countryside. As conditions changed also the objectives of vision making changed, but vision making itself was and is still a necessity.

At first this vision making process happened at the drawing-tables of the Dutch department of Spatial Planning. But more and more the private sector and the public started to ask for a role in this process. The involvement of private parties dates back into the Middle Ages, when farmers took the initiative to organize themselves in water boards, and evolved with the rise of industry and tertiary sector later. The tradition of public involvement originates in the nature protection movements from the beginning of the 20th century and evolved during that century into the formal public inquiry procedures and the more informal public participation method.

The Dutch Approach – a Characterization

As shown above the Netherlands has a planning tradition of cooperation, making alliances between governments, the private sector and the public. It also has a tradition of integral planning - which means the opposite of sectorial planning - international orientation and sustainable landuse. This is most visible in the integration of urbanization, dealing with water, mobility, economic development, agricultural use and nature in the visions since the 1950s. Now the world is facing major challenges in its urban development, it seems that the Dutch planning tradition offers a helpful tool to deal with the complex questions of today.

This tradition involves a method of planning that is called 'the Dutch approach'. This Dutch approach consist of four necessary ingredients:

1. Balancing governance: the right combination of vision, instruments and real projects;

2. Elaborating an integral spatial vision: sustainable, flexible, socially based and feasible;
3. Creating alliances of power between public bodies, the private sector, knowledge and society at large;
4. Using design as a tool for research, debate and decision-making.

1. *Balancing Governance*

The first ingredient is efficient governance with a balanced involvement of the government. In the Dutch planning system the government is one of the actors. All actors involved – both public and private – together create good governance of the vision making process. Balanced governance means the right combinations of visions, instruments and projects on the ground. Balanced governance also means to be specific on every scale in policy, rules and regulations and involvement of actors. Rules and regulations needs to be more flexible and adaptive. For governments there is a special task in redefining itself and accept its presence as well its absence. The world has changed and government has to change along with it.

2. *An Integral Spatial Vision*

A vision should be integral, multi level and feasible. This asks for involvement of actors from different sectors, levels of government and society and of both strategic people and those who do the implementation. There should be a social bases for the vision. A vision is not made upon a tabula rasa but founded on evaluating the past and scanning the developments of the future. A profound knowledge of the context is therefore necessary.

Flexibility is an essential quality of a vision. The vision should make it possible to deal with uncertainties of the future and come with sustainable solutions. And furthermore integral means also that a vision combines goals and connects scale. This all is developed in an iterative process.

3. *Alliances of Power*

Alliances of power between public bodies, the private sector, knowledge and society at large are necessary not only to create the vision but also to put vision into practice. In the increasing urbanizing world the roles and responsibilities of all the actors are changing drastically. Instead of working in the abstract space of administration and bureaucracy, politicians and governments are taking one of the seat around the table of actors. This goes for all actors: every party has to take an active stake in the alliance, working towards a common goal while at the same time, taking responsibility for his or her own part and trusting each other for that part.

An alliance of power asks for a confrontation of challenges, places and actors in specific projects. After all when actors come together their shared goals and communal challenges meet but also their differences meet. In general they initially tend to minimize their differences in the alliance. It can be helpful to use the power of ‘ambassadors’. These can be people of influence, or on the contrary also independent outsiders such as designers.

4. *Design as a Tool*

Design has an important position in the vision making process. It works as a tool for research, debate, decision-making and search for alliances. In the Dutch approach integral design studios are set up. Special attention is needed for the selection of the right atelier-master, mostly an urban planner of stature. During the work in the design studio the participants and the atelier-master should always allow scope for creativity and organize opposition and feedback. Important is that among the participants different stakeholders are represented. Only then they will be really designing together.

An important aspect of the Dutch approach is that in an ideal situation different processes are developed at the same time instead of preceding each other. In this way the different processes can interact. So vision making goes together with creating alliances, developing instruments, and sometimes even with implementation. Alliances are in this situation influential on vision making and vice versa, instruments can be made specific and when problems arise in the field of implementation, planners still might have the possibility to react in their visions or instrument. Keep in mind that this is a model for an ideal situation. The intention must be to work parallel but in reality processes can be complex. Even when it is not possible to walk the ideal path still it is worth having the intention to have parts of the processes going at the same time.

Vision as a Product

A vision generally consist of the following elements:

- The reason to make the vision: definition of the problem, urgency.
- Analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analyses should lead to well-founded policy goals.
- A spatial vision in both text and maps. Also underlying principles and choices are part of this.
- An agenda for implementation: this consists of a vision on implementation, the executing alliances and the national tasks within this.

This is an ideal model for a vision. In reality adaption to the current situation is often needed. When there is few time, high political pressure and media attention on certain issues it can be necessary to adapt to the local context. Keep in mind that also in the Netherlands an integral vision often comes by taking small steps.

Dutch Approach Put into Practice

The Dutch approach resulted in succeeding national en regional visions since the 1950s. Two recent examples are the Structural Vision Randstad 2040 and the Olympic Vision 2028. Briefly these two cases of vision making in the Netherlands are presented below. The ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment is also involved in strategic planning projects in cities as New Delhi. Also this case is presented.

Structural Vision Randstad 2040

Making alliances and using design as a tool, created an integrated structural vision for the most densely populated area of the Netherlands. This densely populated area in the western part of the Netherlands with Amsterdam as largest city is known as the Randstad Area. In 2012 this Randstad Vision was replaced by the National Structural Vision of Infrastructure and Spatial Development. Still the Randstad Vision is an interesting example of vision making.

The structural vision was made possible by a number of parallel going processes. Substantive input to the vision document was to be delivered along four tracks: reports by leading advisory agencies and formation of implementation partnerships, design workshops and organized dialogues with the public and private actors. Research was done by specialized institutes, not only to provide the necessary information but also to check the vision itself. Alliances or implementation partnerships were created already during the vision making process. This made it possible that implementation could be preceded by a test by the implementation partnerships. This happened in the case of harbours. Design was used as a tool for dialogue and to discover planning solutions and to make these visible. This all was

accompanied by a series of dialogues, gatherings, questionnaires, interactive websites, etc. with different groups such as planners, regional and local governments, ngo's, civilians, etc. This helped to develop a vision with the help of all parts of society. Next to this there was also the fifth process of negotiation between national and regional governments.

These different ingredients interchanged information and eventually led to the development of the Structural Vision Randstad 2040. This vision included a agenda with questions and research for the future and also new alliances and follow up projects.

The vision was created with help of landscape architects, urban planners and architects. On request of the Dutch department of Spatial Planning they played a major role in the process. They devised three spatial development models for the Randstad urban conglomeration in 2040. With this they prepared the strategic policy document Structural Vision Randstad 2040. Applying design principles to aspects of a future Randstad was seen as a way of fostering a lively debate with professionals and the general public, and eliciting original ideas for resolving the tasks to be addressed.¹¹

The implementation was as mentioned before secured by creating alliances for implementation during the vision making process. Results of this can be seen in the development of the connection between Amsterdam and the new town of Almere. It is visible in key projects as on the South axis of Amsterdam. It can be seen in the so called Deltaprogram that deals with and anticipates on climatechange. It is most visible in the MIRT-investment program where national, local and regional authorities together work on urban development. The paper presentation will elaborate on the implementation.

Olympic Structure 2028

Planning for possible Olympic games in 2028 served as a reason of making a strategic vision for the development of the Netherlands. The question was what possibilities Olympic Games in 2028 would offer to the Netherlands. An alliance of actors from the field of sports, government, private sector and ngo's worked on this question. Design played again an important role in this process. Urban planners and landscape architects were asked by this alliance to establish design studios. In those design studios the Olympic program was combined with the Dutch urban agenda for future development. This exploration of the possibilities of Olympic Games in combination with future urban development was intended to be a help in a discussion whether an Olympic bid could be reality. Four main models of spreading the Olympics over the Netherlands were presented. In this case implementation is still far away and uncertain. But at the level of decision making this vision proved already influential. In June 2012 the document helped the Olympic Alliance to choose for Amsterdam as an Olympic centre and Rotterdam as a partner in this process. The process of design made the future tangible. Working in an alliance paved the way for acceptance of the vision.

The Delhi 2050 Process

That there is also interest in the Dutch Approach of vision making in India is shown by the process towards the vision Delhi 2050. In a close cooperation of Indian and Dutch planners and experts, a vision for the development of Delhi in 2050 is being prepared. Delhi 2050 is an open and inclusive process to fundamentally rethink the future of Delhi, the capital of India, by combining relevant disciplines, conducting exhaustive research and gathering larger public opinion. Within the ambition of Indian ownership and Dutch partnership, Delhi 2050 combines Indian evolving planning tradition with the Dutch Approach. This 'research by design' approach constitutes bundling, coordinating and attuning of sectorial principles in the areas of spatial-, urban and landscape planning, economy, civil engineering and water

management into an integral vision, related to concrete realization. Delhi 2050 is above all directed at maximizing the collaboration between government organizations, universities, corporations and the design community in both the Netherlands and India. Collectively Indian and Dutch planners will envision a sustainable and healthy future of Delhi.

The Delhi process is taken step by step. The first step was to raise awareness for necessity of a long term and integrated vision. The second step has been a search for facts and figures, problems, opportunities and threads. During this second step a network of experts was built. In the third phase, that officially hasn't started yet, the actual vision including a agenda for implementation will be elaborated.

The Delhi 2050 process has been exposed at the 5th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR). Further and intensive collaboration between the IABR and the Delhi Authorities by means of a test site in Delhi is being discussed.

Dutch experience on spatial and urban planning, architecture, water management, civil engineering and mobility, in combination with Indian knowledge, can help to establish prosperous, attractive, sustainable and future-proof Delhi. Knowledge and experiences in Delhi can help other fast-growing cities. Other examples of international use of the Dutch approach can be found in cities such as Shenzhen (China) and New Orleans (US).

Conclusion

The Netherlands has a tradition of comprehensive integrated planning. This combines a tradition of making long term agendas, working in alliances, planning with the help of design and producing integrated visions on water, housing, infrastructure, nature and economy in smaller and larger regions. Both in the Netherlands as abroad the method has proven to be an effective tool to make concrete, integral and comprehensive plans for future development of metropolitan areas.

The method of making integral visions makes it possible for cities and regions to be prepared for the future. The experience of the Dutch can be helpful to face the challenges of our urbanizing world.

Endnote

ⁱ Curator statement of the 5th International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Bart Vink and Elien Wierenga, 'The way ahead. Towards a competitive and sustainable Randstad in 2040', in: Architecture and design, May 2012, 66-72.