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URBAN NETWORKS: PRESENT, PAST, FUTURE

## PRESENT

(1) **A comparison** between East-Asian and West-European experiences with metropolitan strategies has to look for common ground. A friend of mine at the Faculty of Architecture in Delft, to whom I will refer various times during my story today, defines culture as the silent understanding of all suppositions on which we base everything that we say explicitly. Because I am not sure that we share a common frame of reference, I will start with telling something of the Netherlands today, the present as it presents itself in the headlines of the daily papers.

What happens?

What happens today we necessarily interpret by our experiences of yesterday. The past is our frame of reference. For that reason the second part of this story about Dutch experiences and ideas on metropolitan strategies will be used to clarify my mental framework: how do I look at the world around me and what do I see?

Having said explicitly what otherwise might have remained implicit the stage is set to talk about the future. I will do this in the last part of this introduction on today's theme: urban networks and their role in metropolitan strategies. Our experiences of the past may be the only means available to interpret the present, the only reason why we need to do this is because the present forever implies that one question: what do we do now? Where do we go from here?

(2) **Last weeks headlines** brought the news that Air France purchased KLM, Royal Dutch Airlines. The combinations headquarters will be in Paris and Schiphol Airport will have to develop a new strategy as it is no longer the home base of a national carrier.

(3) **Protests against airport extensions** are a worldwide phenomenon. We have them even after the new runway has been built, because, contrary to government promises not to use them to full capacity, of course this capacity will be used. Protests also this week we had in Rotterdam, where dockworkers from several European harbours did show their fear of liberalization by the European Union of national rules and regulations, protecting national interests.

(4) **Another telltale picture** last week was of Ahold, our national grocer and one of the main grocers of the world, that came into financial trouble this year and had to work late at night to present a loss of more than a billion euro over last years. Having been a national icon of Dutch soundness and reliability, the financial troubles were experienced by many a Dutchman also as a psychological blow; the whole thing then being aggravated by excessive financial rewards to a Swedish gentleman becoming the new chairman that has to clear up the mess.

(5) **Headlines also**, last week, for the start of the intergovernmental negotiations on the European Constitution. Directly after the Draft Constitution was presented, the Economist was clear in its advise on what to do with it. Recently, it changed its mind as it expects European politicians to handle this matter in the same way as all European agreements have been handled from the start: never quite satisfactory to anybody, but nevertheless slowly and surely working in the direction of European integration.

(6) **Elected mayors** are part of the program of the present cabinet. Municipal elections last year introduced duality in municipal government between council and board, provincial elections this year did the same for provincial government. Introducing elected mayors is another step in providing local boards with more power and in clarifying the role of both bodies of local government. Like in the European Union, adapting the organizational structure of democracy is cautious and slow. It could hardly be otherwise with issues of balance in society.

(7) **Average age** tends to lengthen, while people tend to stop earlier with work. These tendencies combined produce a gap between the period to earn and save for old age and the period people expect to live from these savings. So the choice is quite clear, though not easy: either work long and earn a good pension or work short and earn a moderate pension. Up till now these decisions are made collectively by the State. Maybe, some day, they will be made individually.

I hope that this arbitrary selection from last weeks headlines will give you some impression of things happening in the Netherlands. This selection, of course, was geared to the subject of todays conference. That subject is to interpret these events and tendencies and to decide on what to do accordingly, with regard to urban strategies. What these headlines show is ongoing internationalisation of the economy and ongoing internationalisation of government. We experience both in a way as influences on our life that come from outside. At the same time things happen in society that are generated by ourselves, inside forces that aim, for instance, to improve democracy or to improve our health and prosperity so we may live longer.

## PAST

(8) **Time to pass on to** the interpretation of present developments and the frame of reference in which these may fit. Let me start with introducing myself, to inform you about my own experiences in this field. After studying architecture in Delft Technical University, I worked for five years in Amsterdam with the municipal Housing Department, first in urban extension, later on in urban renewal. From there I moved to the IJsselmeer Development Agency, a part of the Ministry of Public Works, working for seventeen years on the new town of Almere, that has come to life and on an new polder Markerwaard, that came to nothing, so far. Some thirteen years ago I became professor of urban and regional planning in Delft. More or less parallel to that I have been advisor on urban strategy to the Board of the City of Amsterdam, a job that later on changed into agent of the Deltametropolis Association. Parallel to these jobs I participated in a few more free professional activities. One, called the Netherlands Now As Design, was an exploration of the shape of the Netherlands halfway the 21 st century, according to four different political scenario's. The second, called the Metropolitan Debate, was and is an exploration of improved methods of political decision processes. The third, job and hobby at the same time, is Deltametropolis, the exploration of the possibility to transform the existing, more or less loose collection of cities, towns and villages on the western seaboard into an integrated urban system of metropolitan scope and scale.

(9) **The association Deltametropolis** is an association of municipalities, waterboards, chambers of commerce, employers associations from industry and agriculture, nature conservationist organisations and housing corporations. Recently, western provinces are joining the club and the Association also tries to get the universities to join, up till now with no success. The aim of the Association is to develop the emerging metropolis in the Rhine Delta, using spatial planning as its main instrument and acting as an 'idea factory' to inspire its members as well as others that may feel attracted by this Deltametropolis concept.

(10) **The economical frame of reference** I got accustomed to may be summarized by the Limits to Growth, published thirty years ago and the Global City, twenty years later. From the Limits to Growth I learned to conceive the economy as a world system, that is a set of interrelated and interdependent variables that has survival as its foremost rule. From the Global City I learned to conceive this system as a layered system, with the worldwide pattern of human settlements as centres of production and consumption as its base, a network of regional distribution centres as an intermediary layer and a system of global cities from where the process of production and consumption is regulated at the top.

(11) **The political frame of reference** that belongs to the silent understanding of Dutch Culture - and one might say of European, at least Western European culture - is the political mainframe succinctly expressed by the French Revolution. Liberty to express individual opinion, equality before the law and brotherhood in things of common interest, from public works to public health. These principles reign in different realms of society. Freedom of independent media is a necessity to guarantee freedom of religious and political preferences, freedom of arts and sciences. State law and a hierarchy of legal institutions are necessary to guarantee equality before the law. And private ownership of means of production and the opportunity of trade in a market are conditional for competition, complementarity and co-operation.

(12) **The vocabulary for decisions on landuse** , developed by my friend Taeke de Jong of the Faculty of Architecture is the third component of my frame of reference in matters of metropolitan strategies. This vocabulary distinguishes four types of land-use: landscape and city as places to be, water and roads as spaces of flow. This territorial vocabulary replaces the functionalist vocabulary of modernists with its well known quartet of living, working, recreation and traffic.

(13) **A typology of futures** is another scheme developed by Taeke de Jong and another friend of mine, Jan Brouwer, also shaping my frame of reference. The scheme distinguishes different types of futures. A set of possible futures, the realm of artists, inventors and engineers. A subset of probable futures, the realm of science. Another set of futures, desirable futures, the realm of a wide variety of social clubs and associations, political parties among them. And a subset of these desirable futures, called useful futures, the realm of public and private governors that have to decide on investments. Analysing these types of futures with regard to their aims and means, it is helpful just to distinguish between them if we want to know or do not know them.

Possible futures know neither means nor ends. For the creative mind anything may serve as means or ends. Original

ideas apparently are generated by chance meetings and events. Force and necessity have never produced fertile soil to grow inventions.

Probable futures are those where means are known and aims are not. Wherever human societies are unable to agree on common aims these societies will get the character of natural phenomena, with human beings behaving like all organisms in nature, adapting to external conditions in their aim to survive.

Desirable futures are those that people dream of, without acknowledging as yet the price to be paid, not by themselves and certainly not by others. So in these futures aims are clear, but means stay vague.

Useful futures then are those where everything is said and done and people decide where and when to invest their money in what.

(14) **To sum up this exposure** of my frame of reference, let me finish with an image how planning policy works in the Netherlands. Planning is a popular pastime in the Netherlands, so all levels of government engage in it, and all political parties have ideas about it. Political rationality does ask to attend to ones voters. In the Netherlands we have three mainstreams of political preference, in line with the principles of the French Revolution: Freedom promoted by a party for freedom and democracy, abridged to VVD in Dutch; equality promoted by the labour party, abridged to PvdA in Dutch; brotherhood promoted by the party called Christian Democracy Appeal, CDA. Socialist voters are concentrated in urban areas, all over the country, Christian democratic voters are concentrated in rural areas, villages and towns mainly in the south, east and north, Conservative voters are concentrated in the west. As no party will ever get a majority vote, coalition governments are the rule. Keeping the dispersal of voters in mind, it becomes easy to predict what planning policy any coalition will follow. A coalition of Labour and Christian Democrats will opt for national dispersal and regional concentration. A coalition of Christian Democrats and Conservatives will opt for national concentration and regional dispersal, just the opposite policy. In the unlikely event that Socialists and Conservatists co-operate, they will opt for national and regional concentration. But as no coalition will ever stay in office for more than two terms, no long term policy can ever be pursued for more than eight years, and often even less. This means that in practice not central government but the municipalities decide on land-use in the Netherlands and thus give shape to our country. And so what you see in the Netherlands is national and regional dispersal, showing the way we are, an easygoing democracy, tolerant maybe to others, but certainly to ourselves.

## **FUTURE**

(15) **Looking at the future** in the Netherlands means looking to four different desirable futures, as far as conceived politically. In 1987 the foundation 'The Netherlands Now As Design' gave, in the wake of reports of the Scientific Council on Government Policy, a first example of this way of political planning as opposed to traditional government planning, that vainly presumes to be non-political and above party-policy. Ten years later the Landuse Planning Bureau of central government followed the same line of thought by presenting perspectives for the Netherlands as conceived by the Ministries of Housing, Planning and Environment ('Netherlands urban land'), Traffic and Water management ('Netherlands Flowland'), Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries, ('Netherlands Landscape land'), and the Ministry of Interior ('Palette' or, one might say 'Netherlands municipal land').

(16) **Looking at the future** of the Netherlands on a world-wide scale does ask for assessment of this position on three layers of the world economic system. On the basic layer of production and consumption we do fairly well if one may take GDP per person as an indication. On the intermediate level of the worldwide network of regional distribution centres the Netherlands does extremely well. Combining relative positions in transport by ship, by airplane and by cable, the Netherlands belong to the top of the list together with worldwide HUBS like London, New York, Los Angeles, Singapore and Hong Kong. Even if Shanghai and other Asian HUBS may rise in rank, the Netherlands will probably keep its position in Europe, given its geographical situation.

(17) **Looking at the future** with regard to its position in the top layer of world economy, the Netherlands has a very moderate position. Only Amsterdam does play any role in the gamma category of world cities. As long as the main cities in Holland are not part of an integrated urban system, this position will stay weak. It may even deteriorate in an integrating European market. As headquarters of heavy industry like steel and international airlines like KLM move elsewhere, lawyers, accountants, finance companies and advertising firms may follow soon.

(18) **If one does aim**, as the Deltametropolis Association does, to strengthen the position of the urban constellation of Holland in the top layer of the global economy, it is clear that something should be done. The Association itself can only plan a minor role. What it has chosen to do is to act as an 'idea-factory', generating concepts to give shape to the central idea of a delta-metropolis. According to the frames of reference presented just now as vocabulary for decisions on land-use and as political mainframe, the organisation of work on Deltametropolis is envisaged as working on the four subsystems of the overall metropolitan system via three realms of human intervention: free generation of ideas on the

left, useful co-operations in the marketplace on the right and necessary regulation by government in the middle.

(19) **To clarify the method** I show a design of a few years ago of the Deltametropolis, conceived as an interaction of the four territorial systems mentioned earlier. This looks like a quite traditional map of a land use design.

(20) **If we then deconstruct** the overall image into its separate components we may look at the water system as a subsystem to manage the mainframe and we may look at the transportation system. Both spaces of flow are considered to be of structural importance on the scale of the Deltametropolis. The water system is then considered in its historical development, as this water system is providing the image and identity of the delta. The transportation system is considered with regard to the measure of interconnectedness it provides for the different urban centres of the metropolis, internally as well as with the outside world. These two systems -water system and transportation system- are then chosen to develop further by a combination of research and design.

(21) **For the water system**, a concept is generated to combine the restructuring of the water network that is necessary with regard to climatic change and ongoing urbanisation along the Rhine with the completion of recreational network for boating, cycling and walking. This concept of a metropolitan recreational network is called 'Water Realm' to clarify that the water system is the leading system.

These recreational networks mostly already exist but they are not yet connected into a metropolitan recreational network offering access to rural landscapes, nature reserves, historical monuments and a wide variety of lakes and ponds for all kinds of water recreation. The concept is designed in several steps, two of which I show here just by way of example.

First of all the claim on extra room for water storage during dry summers and as extra weight to keep down salt water coming up from below.

(22) **The recreational network** on the scale of the Deltametropolis has mazes measuring on the average six by six kilometres, interconnecting the cities and the main recreational areas, large and attractive enough for day-trips.

Of course this map is a reduction of the reality. Networks of more local importance and small scale recreational areas are not shown.

(23) **To underline that Water Realm** uses existing networks wherever it can, I show a map of the main routes for boating and sailing as anybody may obtain at one of the shops of the National Tourist Association, ANWB. Present policies on water management will enlarge the possibilities for recreation in this network.

(24) **Another example** of existing networks is a recent addition along an old line of defence. In history, the Dutch have used inundation of polders as a defence line of Holland against invaders from the east, hence the name Holland Water Defence Line. It is a combination of waterworks and fortresses along a line of 180 Km, running from north to south, from the so-called Southern Sea in the north to the southern branch of the Rhine in the south.

(25) **The transportation network**, called Deltanet, is conceived as a double network of road and rail, interconnected by multi modal connectors and serviced by public transport by rail and by road. To integrate the urban system it is envisaged that travel time on a local scale has to be reduced by 20% and travel time on metropolitan level also, adding up to a 40% reduction in travel time. Inventing national, provincial, regional and local policy documents we discover chaos: a large amount of so-called nodes in the networks that are ill-defined with regard to their place in the network as well as with regard to their development potential.

(26) **Strictly speaking**, only fifteen of these nodes really connect the national road system with the national railway system and even then, the central stations of the main cities are ill-connected to the national road system.

(27) **At the end of october**, the Association organises a week of working together on Deltanet. Design-teams of municipalities, provinces, national railways and national government will join forces in a professional effort to define and design Deltanet. To this end a typology of Delta-centres and Delta-connectors is introduced that offers the opportunities to position all centres in their present as well as in their future shape. It is not sure that participants will agree on such a typology, because it clarifies features of these centres they -or their political masters- may prefer to remain vague about. But it is worth a try and it is a positive sign that these parties participate in this exercise.

(28) **A result of this exercise** may be the production of a provisional map of Deltanet, consisting of a configuration of city centers that belong to the metropolitan outfit of the Deltametropolis as well as a network of connectors between these Delta-centers, served by multinational connectors. By showing this dummy of an eventual result of work yet to be

done, I think I may say that the medium is the message: we are in the midst of finding our way to discover and invent a strategy in transforming the present urban pattern into the integrated metropolitan constellation we call Deltametropolis.