TOWN PLANNING IN THE NETHERLANDS SINCE 1800

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This article summarizes part of the gist of *Town Planning in the Netherlands since 1800. Responses to Enlightenment Ideas and Geopolitical Realities,* a book that discusses Dutch urbanism in its international setting, dividing its contents in a series of clusters that are presented as being determined by geopolitics, ideology, and planning. The timeframe of over 200 years (400 years if the prologue is included) highlights continuities and discontinuities that otherwise would have been lost – a strong motive in favor or writing books instead of articles. It defines urbanism as a combination of spatial planning (distributing human activities across space in cities, regions and on the global level) and design (one of its uses being that of a billboard for local identity, the community, the nation or political ideologies).

In the two centuries of urban planning presented here, the Netherlands had to re-invent itself several times. Dutch urban history is marked by changes on the international scene, the prevailing political ideals, the development of modern planning as a distinct discipline and the continuous changes of the main countries that inspired Dutch planning – France until the 1830s, Germany from the 1830s to the 1930s, and since the 1930s increasingly the United States. The years between 1795 and 1815 marked the end of an era: though the nation still clung to the idea that it could play an important role in the world's political affairs, its days as a 'hyper power' - to quote Amy Chua - were numbered. Nothing illustrated this more vividly than the run-down state of most of its cities. Especially in the province of Holland, many had become a faded imagine of their former self: comparing maps made during the so-called Golden Age with the brand new cadaster maps that had been ordered by the national government in the early nineteenth century, nobody could escape the impression that for almost two hundred years, nothing had changed. Some cities, for instance Enkhuizen, had even lost a large part of their inhabitants and demolished part of their buildings… In 1815 the Netherlands definitely abandoned the political structure that had characterized it in its heydays: the federal republic was replaced by a unitary state headed by a king, William I, a representative of the Orange family the fate of which was closely connected to the Netherlands since it gained independence in the late sixteenth century. William I, who had spent many years in England, embarked upon an ambitious campaign that should restore the country to its former glory, an ambition sparkled by the merger with the Southern Netherlands (now Belgium). Canals were dug and new roads, subdivided according to a French inspired classification system, were built that connected the two re-united states, accepting the distinct nature of both: the former Republic was expected to revitalize an economy based on trade, banking and agriculture, whereas the Southern half continued to promote industry. Combined with many other differences - the North was Calvinist and bourgeois, the South was Catholic and here the aristocracy never lost its privileged position - the merger proved untenable and after a short civil war, Belgium became independent (and subsequently developed into the continent's first industrial state). William's revanchist policies caused economic stagnation in the Northern half, the huge investments in its infrastructure proved futile.

Probably the most interesting phase in the state's evolution began in 1848. Although the revolutionary wave that swept all over Europe that year never reached the low lands, the king gave in to the request of the liberal elite and accepted a new constitution - the beginning of parliamentary democracy in Holland. Its author, J. Thorbecke, considered the political structure as a belated victory of the ideals of the Enlightenment. Some ten years later, in 1863, he crowned the political *volte face* with an economic revolution that revolved around the introduction of new infrastructural networks that forced the local economic actors to compete with entrepreneurs in other cities, for the first time creating an economic space without political and economic barriers.

The term 'networks' indeed pinpoints to the system's essential qualities. Already in 1839, the first railway line opened; it ran from Amsterdam to Haarlem and was extended to Rotterdam in the following years. Other lines soon followed, but they were not connected, ran on tracks with different gauges through a country divided by regional time zones. The construction of the new networks was entirely the work of Thorbecke, who in the 1860s spent endless parliamentary meetings on almost every detail - bridges, trajectories, stations. Part of his ideals was to link the national networks with the global networks of steam powered ocean lines - these also facilitated trade with the Dutch colonies, notably Indonesia (then called 'the Dutch Indies'). Thorbecke considered the construction of a new port in Amsterdam and the reconstruction of the port of Rotterdam as twin projects and also - for the time being in vain - promoted the closure of the 'Zuiderzee', a branch of the Noordzee that threatened the coastal strip and promised immense profit if parts of it could be transformed into fertile land - this would have continued the tradition of the Dutch polder on the grand scale made possible by the latest technological inventions.

Thorbecke's administrative and economic policies were entirely based on a view of liberalism that prompted the state to create the framework for a society based on equality and equal opportunities for all citizens. The next phase in the evolution of liberalism urged the state to step back and leave economic life to the forces of the free market - its main role should be the construction of a framework that maximized profit of private enterprise. The emergence of very large nation states created large spatial containers that boosted economic growth. France and especially England built huge colonial empires. Russia marched to the East and eventually crossed the Bering Street to incorporate today's Alaska. The Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy that emerged as a response to Bismarck's decision to leave Austria out of the unified German state he created, took possession of most of the Balkans. Germany managed to get hold of some colonies in Africa but invested most of its energies in industrial expansion at home. The Netherlands finally recovered from centuries of economic stagnation, the impossibility to reap the harvest of the new canal networks, and the consequences of the failed revanchist policies after Belgium's independence; benefitting from Thorbecke's reforms and the economic boom of its neighbors, the economy slowly awakened.

Cities in the West benefited most and Rotterdam's port expanded at an unprecedented pace. Economic expansion was accompanied by chaotic urbanization processes and deteriorating health conditions - even though the existing urban pattern prevented the emergence of a truly metropolitan city - a phenomenon that caused alarm in the countries where it occurred. Health issues were the reason for the introduction of two laws in 1901: the health law, and the public housing law. The first secured the involvement of architects and urban planners in committees staffed with medical doctors; one of the principal tasks of these health committees was to assess the health effects of the urban expansion plans. The public housing law, apart from regulating the construction of new housing, also forced rapidly growing communities to make general expansion plans. H.P. Berlage, famous for his Amsterdam Exchange Building, designed general expansion plans for several Dutch cities, feeding on the theoretical treatises of mainly German professionals (Baumeister, Sitte, Brinckman, Stübben, to name only a few).

The First World War terminated the period of Europe's global supremacy and fundamentally changed the continent's self-image as presenting the apex of culture and civilization. It also destroyed the realities of an almost universal economic space where people and merchandise could travel without the constraints posed by political

borders. The Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy collapsed and gave way to multitude of small states which, usually governed by nationalist politicians, turned their back to each other. Poland re-emerged on Europe's political map, Germany had to give up a lot of territory and was split in two parts. In 1917, the Soviet Union replaced Tsarist Russia and embarked upon the road to socialism - a construct that was conceived as an economic, social and cultural Gesamtkunstwerk. In the 1920s, and early 1930s. it attracted many architects and urban planners of the modern movement which gained prominence during the war and was seen by its protagonists as the ultimate response to Europe's cultural decline. After the wave of socialist revolutions that followed the end of the war in 1918 had subsided, the Dutch authorities stimulated the construction of social housing in an attempt to appease the disillusioned population. In Amsterdam, the famous expressionist housing estates of the so-called Amsterdam School filled the plans of Berlage - an unlikely combination since Berlage actually favored a soberer architectural idiom. Other cities, notably Groningen, followed suit. Rotterdam, on the other hand, developed into one of the international strongholds of the modern movement, J.J.P. Oud designed many acclaimed housing estates. The International Federation of Housing and Town

Planning developed into the leading platform of modern urbanism, promoting the idea of the regional cities at a series of international conferences. In 1924 the conference in Amsterdam witnessed the merger of the Ebenezer Howard's garden city movement, which originally wanted to do away with cities, and main stream urbanism. In Rotterdam, W.G. Witteveen made a series of expansion plans (some of them based on earlier ones by Granpré Molière, Verhagen & Kok). His General Expansion Plan of 1927 summarized the views put forward at the international stage: he designed a compact city for about 2.5 million inhabitants, introduced parkways and green wedges that opened up to the surrounding countryside, located housing for the working forces next to their working places (industrial zones and the port), and designated the inner city for so-called city- functions: offices, shops, administrative buildings. The groundwork was an infrastructural network that was largely based on railways (Witteveen started his career as a railway engineer). This enabled the planners to regulate the flows of traffic, forcing it to follow fixed trajectories and timetables. All over Europe dozens of similar plans were made. In the US, the explosion of private car ownership threatened the logic of these mobility concepts time and again this alarmed European urbanists traveling America in the 1920s and 1930s. The car, they believed, was bound to destroy inner cities, the countryside, and made rational planning that used traffic structures as the basis for urban patterns all but impossible. Witteveen also authored the regional plan for IJsselmonde, which is based on a distribution of freight traffic over trucks, railways and shipping. The most ambitious regional plans were made for the former Zuiderzee; closed by a dam in the early 1930s, Thorbecke's dreams became true in a series of large polders. The first was the Wieringermeer polder, for which Granpré Molière designed the villages. Arguably, the 1920s and 1930 saw the heyday of urbanism: in many countries it was the only form of planning that was accepted, economic planning being impossible in countries that stuck to free market principles even during the Depression of the 1930s; apart from the objections of economic theorists, it was viewed with suspicion since the Soviet Union made it the corner stone of policies that should introduce socialism. In England, J.M. Keynes laid the foundations of a theory that did promote economic planning, and the totalitarian regimes that began to dominate Europe in this period - beginning with the Soviet Union, followed in 1927 by fascist Italy and in 1933 by Nazi Germany, and emulated in many other states - all accepted economic planning as an indispensable response to the worst economic crisis ever... In a politically fragmented continent like Europe, the planning perspectives of the various nations were hard to reconcile. The Second World War that broke out in 1940 can be seen as a conflict between incompatible planning ideals. Inspired by the new science of geopolitics, the scale of planning had exploded. Experts of the German Reichstelle für Raumordnung, for instance, made spatial plans for the entire European continent.

After an intermezzo of three years, in 1948 the Cold War divided Europe in two ideologically powered blocks. The division line ran from Lübeck to Trieste in Western Europe; from this time part of Western and Central Europe got the stigma of belonging to Moscow dominated Eastern Europe. Behind the iron curtain - the name Churchill coined before the division line became reality - the political borders between the states were redrawn. On the history of Europe, this had happened many times before. Now, the areas that were handed over from one state to another were

presented to their new sovereign without their original inhabitants; these were forced to move; the abandoned areas were repopulated with people from areas these countries had to hand over on the opposite borders. Thus, entire nations appeared to move across the map, adding to the flows of millions of refugees. All over Europe, cities had been destroyed, unprecedented numbers of civilians had been killed, genocide had decimated their Jewish population, many of the men that had been forced to fight never came back, factories had either been bombed or dismantled, the infrastructure was in ruins. Only planning could pave the way out. Everywhere economic planning was seen as the most effective vehicle on the road to recovery; spatial planning was subordinated to economic planning. The building trade acted as a steering wheel for the entire economy, which implied the introduction of methods from industry: standardization of floor plans and building components, mechanization of as many working processes as possible, ways to calculate the investments in terms of labor, materials and transportation capacity, etc. In the emerging 'cultural cold wars', architecture and urbanism were seen as effective means of propaganda - and here the 'West' faced what leading circles saw as a major problem: whereas the Soviet Union had fostered socialist realism as an appealing alternative for modernism (which it banned in the 1930s since it sadly failed as a vehicle for enthusing the public), the 'West' lacked a viable alternative. Here, too, modernism had never been popular, and with the sole exception of Italy and the countries looking to it for cultural guidance (notably Poland and Hungary), modernism had disappeared even where it had not been banned by totalitarian regimes. Several high ranking institutions, among them the CIA, the United States Information Agency (ISIA), the Economic Cooperation Agency, channeled money and guidance to persons and institutions, the most prominent of which was New York's Museum of Modern Art, MoMA, to develop a style that could compete with socialist-realism. Few objective reporters would be inclined to deny that the defeat of Nazi-Germany was largely due to the war effort of the Soviet Union, which boosted its popularity in Western Europe, and in the mid- twentieth century the belief in the arts as signposting specific social ideas was still very much alive. Though it would probably be an overstatement to explain the emergence of the so-called International Style entirely in terms of political propaganda, it has become clear in recent years that the carefree, leisure oriented style in which abstract (European) modernism was enriched with the appealing qualities of consumerism would never have happened without the stimulus of the Cold War. The urban complement of the International Style was the concept of separate components in low densities – in the 1950s this was also promoted as a counter model to socialist realism.

Nowhere was the iron curtain as inescapable a reality as in Berlin – it is no coincidence that the most outspoken examples were built here: the socialist-realist Stalin Allee (today Frankfurter Allee), and the Hansa Viertel, the result of the Internationale Bau-Ausstellung 1957; the latter was celebrating as a key example of the open, democratic ideals of the 'West' and visited by thousands of people living in East-Berlin (the connection between the two parts was lost only in 1961, when the infamous wall was built). The Netherlands began to build dozens of neighborhoods in low densities, largely made up of public housing in collective typologies (row-houses, flats) and with all the facilities needed for everyday life usually concentrated in neighborhood centers. This model was propagated as a booster of a sense of community, and thus as a remedy for what was generally seen as the main cause for all the misery that had struck Europe and the world in the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, low density housing guaranteed close contact to nature and could, therefore, be seen as much healthier than the older, densely built-up areas. Research by sociologists and medical doctors soon proved both assumptions wrong. Spatial and social structures hardly ever coincided, and the stress promoting qualities of the new housing estates were discussed during numerous conferences. Behind the scenes, other motives called for low densities. The memory of air raids was still fresh; the atom bomb drove the point home: the best protection in times of war was the spread the population over large areas. Dutch planners sometimes used the term 'megalopolis' for urban patterns that envisioned urban life without urban form, the idea being that urban life can survive the annihilation of urban form. In megalopolis, home was the primary source of urban life: flats and single family houses filled to the top with new electric household appliances and the inevitable television set. Networks of highways connected them to similar housing estates and the zones with shops and other 'city functions' (or, as in the US, to shopping malls). Characteristic of the new urban patterns was the almost complete dependency on the car – since the 1950s, car ownership rapidly spread, one of the markers of the success of the Welfare State.

The urban consequences of the Welfare State soon became the object of harsh criticism. Apart from the negative social and medical effects of the new housing estates, inner cities suffered from plans to make them accessible for the car, retail business believing that this was the only way to compete with suburban shopping centers. Traffic arteries ruthlessly cut open the historical tissue, monuments were demolished, distinguishing features were sacrificed. The possession of a private car was a sign of success. In most European families, a car bought in the 1950s and 1960s replaced the bicycle or the moped, greatly expanding their owners' radius and level of convenience. The car liberated them from the constraints of time and space, as Martin Wagner, chief of Berlin's planning department before 1933, had already remarked in the 1920s when visiting the US – at that time this positive assessment was unique among European planners... In the 1950s and 1960s, planners were more than happy to project highways through the heart of historical cities and even proposed to fill in one of Amsterdam's famous canals to accommodate what appeared to be the single most effective and appealing vehicle for personal freedom ever invented – the history of post-war town planning is to a remarkable extent determined by the car... Equally rigorous was the approach to urban renewal. Nineteenth century neighborhoods were especially vulnerable for clean slate renovation schemes. Since the older parts of many cities were run down and in bad shape, this seemed a reasonable thing to do – moreover, providing decent housing in suburbia was much easier than the tedious renovation projects in historical areas when the clean slate procedures provoked too much protest. Protest became a key word since the late 1950s. It was closely associated with a movement within the CIAM, the flagship of international modernism outside the US. The group preparing the tenth conference, appropriately called Team X, convened in the Dutch village Otterlo in 1959. This meeting marked the end of CIAM. Shortly before, the Dutch protagonists of the movement, notably Jaap Bakema and Aldo van Eyck, took over the editorial board of *Forum*, which developed into the porte voce of the movement. Though the members of Team X and the 'Forum Group' did not have a solid and consistent theory – some, the Smithsons among them, remaining car crazy, whereas others rediscovered the values of the historical cities, for instance – all of them saw architecture and urbanism as artistic disciplines and abhorred the technocratic approaches that had become synonymous with modern planning.

Moreover, they saw streets, squares and alleys as a stage that presented the community to its members – people walking were actors and spectators at the same time. Thus, the public qualities of public space, which were lost in megalopolis, began to be rediscovered. In the Netherlands, the ideas of the 'Forum Group' manifested themselves most clearly in the design of the new housing estates, which took inspiration from villages and forced the car into intricate street patterns. Cul-de- sac development with dead end streets and so-called 'woon-erven' lined with low-rise single family housing in complex patterns replaced the straightforward, car-oriented neighborhoods with industrial building typologies. Urban renewal projects abandoned the clean slate ideology, respect for the existing building stock and its inhabitants ushering in an entirely new phase. Inner cities should no longer be sacrificed to the car and to large-scale office blocks and department stores.

Groningen was one of the first to transform its main shopping street into a pedestrian zone. Structuralism became a highly fashionable approach that combined a collective, usually geometrical grid with individually designed cells. Blom's Kasbah inspired projects in Rotterdam and Helmond allegedly fostered a more natural living environment than the traditional housing estates in the outskirts. Representative buildings – Van Eyck's unrealized project for a new town hall in Deventer for instance – paid tribute to their context, notably the parceling structure and the street patterns. Allegedly, architecture and urbanism no longer served the moneyed interests, but rather the ideal of the 'homo ludens': playful man liberated by economic wealth and technology from the historical restrictions that, combined with a traditional bourgeois morale, had alienated him from from is true self...

The end of the Cold War appeared to mark the final victory of capitalism over socialism and its planned economy. Before the Berlin Wall came down, the collective social arrangement of the Welfare State had already been identified as too expensive; rather than promoting economic growth, as the economic theory of J.M. Keynes maintained, it threatened to end in stagnation. Increased competition from overseas – Japan, India, China – marked the end of many traditional industries in Europe – in the Netherlands, most textile factories and shipyards closed shop.

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were the international spearheads representing policies that were emulated in many western countries, the Netherlands not excepted. It resulted in a *volte face* relative to planning: instead of redistributing wealth to the weaker people and regions that lacked behind, promising parts of the economy should be sponsored. Schiphol, the international airport of Amsterdam, and the port of Rotterdam were designated as 'main ports'. Abandoned industrial areas, often near city centers, presented a new challenge to urban planners. The Kop van Zuid in Rotterdam, the Java eiland in Amsterdam, and the Ceramique area in Maastricht, for instance, were redeveloped; apart from their urban design qualities, these projects highlighted the remarkable renaissance of Dutch architecture which, with the support of the state, became an international billboard of Dutch culture. What rescued the Netherlands from permanent recession, however, was the digital revolution that began to reshape the global economy from the mid-1990s. Dominated by the service sector, the post-industrial era opened the perspective of a new, urban economy centered on cities; gentrification processes resulted in the upgrading of the housing stock even in areas that not long before had been stigmatized as the worst examples of unrestrained, nineteenth-century capitalism (notably the 'Pijp' in Amsterdam). Following the village-like expansion plans of the 1980s, the 1990s witnessed the last phase in the construction of large- scale suburban housing estates (now officially promoted as strengthening existing urban cores – a goal that was never realized). The so-called Vinex housing estates were planned in one go, but instead of up to 70% public housing, as had been normal in previous years, owner-occupied, carefully marketed housing typologies prevailed.

More recent developments – the shift to a 'globalized', neo-liberal system, decentralization and the virtual abolition of planning, the emergence of what in Germany has been coined the post- democratic era, rapidly growing inequality, the development of a green, sustainable economy, the concept of smart cities, the prospects of the 'internet of thigs' and the promises of the circular economy – again change the urban scene. The most striking aspect, however, is the slow realization of a major phenomenon: the end of rapid economic and demographic growth. Brown field development replaces green field development; reconstruction becomes much more important than new expansion plans, and the consequences of suburban growth – the destruction of the landscape, the emergence of wasteful and unhealthy urban patterns, the bleeding to death of many inner cities and the destruction caused by attempts to save them – are almost universally deplored. These trends, however, exceed the all too limited space for this short essay...