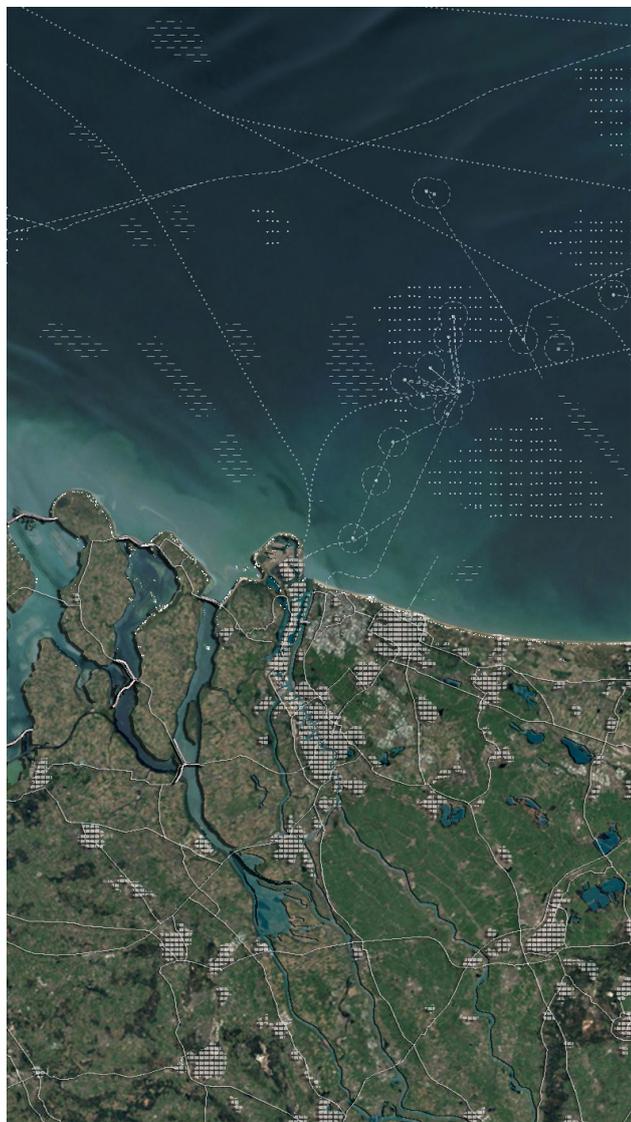


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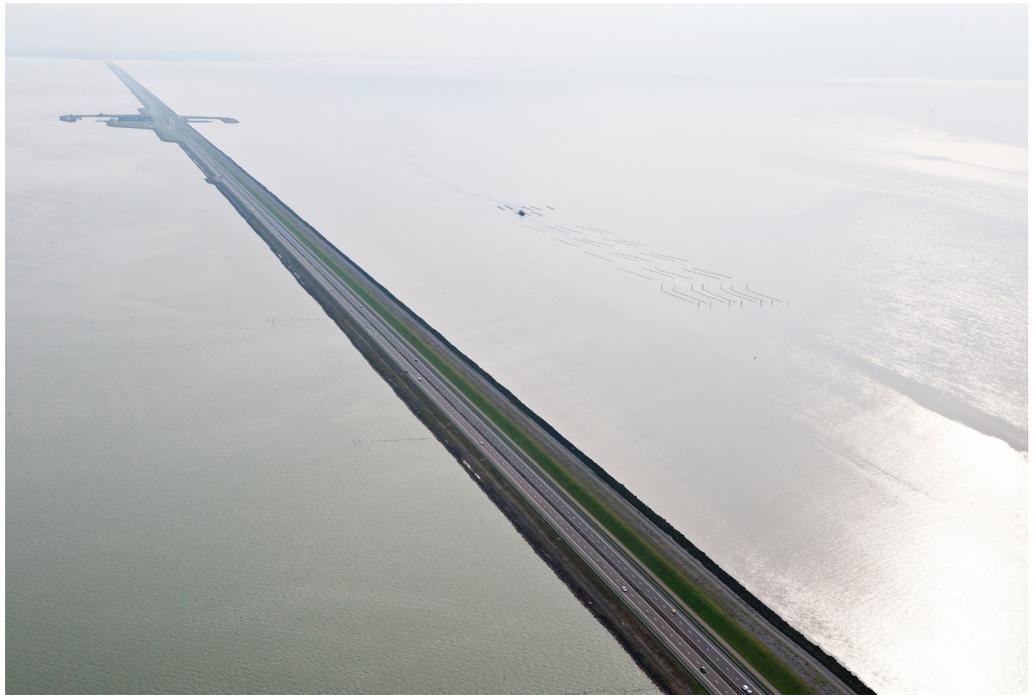
*Dutch designed  
'soft power'*

*Daan Zandbelt*

In the Netherlands, there is the tradition of appointing a National Architect. This function expanded over time into an advisor for a national policy for built infrastructure and later for large national projects as well. Today, it is an advisory team, called the 'College van Rijks Adviseurs' (CRa), which consists of an urbanist, an architect and a landscape architect. Their impact is giving the national government (unsolicited) advice by the power of design, of demonstration; a 'soft power'. The red line in the story of the CRa is the need for a new chapter in Dutch spatial planning. They therefore created Panorama NL, an advice to the national government on how to develop a spatial vision for the Netherlands, what it includes, and how to formulate it, and which partners to include. Panorama NL is about storytelling, about how to offer a positive perspective in society to everyone. It is a book and it is also an app, in which you can see literally 360-degree panorama at eye level. Panorama NL paints a picture of what we should do and why we should do it. But the next question is: 'How do we actually do it?' This led to a competition called 'Panorama Lokaal' (the local panorama), which looks into post-war residential neighborhoods at a city's fringe, facing the countryside. Municipalities are challenged to think about how global and national challenges could help to qualitatively improve these areas. A new situation: national government is no more just providing funding but also needs to participate with a vision, be able to organize partnerships, with the most important scale of operations being the regional scale. This means that people need to be educated differently; at the ministry, at the national government level, and also at the university. The aim is to create T-shaped skills: a specialist in one specific domain or profession, but also able to communicate their specialist knowledge with people from totally different backgrounds, like economists or sociologists, laymen or politicians. It is regaining the Dutch Urbanism Approach: the ability to create a vision and develop it through an interdisciplinary approach into an integrated design.



01a



01b

01a 2011 Afsluitdijk  
Photo Joop van Houdt  
Beeldbank Rijkswaterstaat

01b 2011 Afsluitdijk  
Photo Joop van Houdt  
Beeldbank Rijkswaterstaat

In the Netherlands, we have a tradition of appointing a National Architect. Once started by Napoleon who used this National Architect to design the ministries and the palaces of the king, which, over the centuries, evolved into an advisor for a national policy for built infrastructure and later for large national projects. Actually, since the beginning of the 21st century, it was no longer one person but it became a board of advisors as it was not only one person who would comprise all these demands. Today, this team, called the 'College van Rijks Adviseurs', consists of an urbanist, an architect and a landscape architect.<sup>1</sup> Together, it is a team that can give solicited and unsolicited advice to the national government and its partners. And of course, it is not just these three people, but also an office with fifteen people. The advisors are doing it as a part time job, besides running their own offices. After four years, other advisors are appointed. Their main task is to bring state-of-the-art knowledge from practice to the national state.

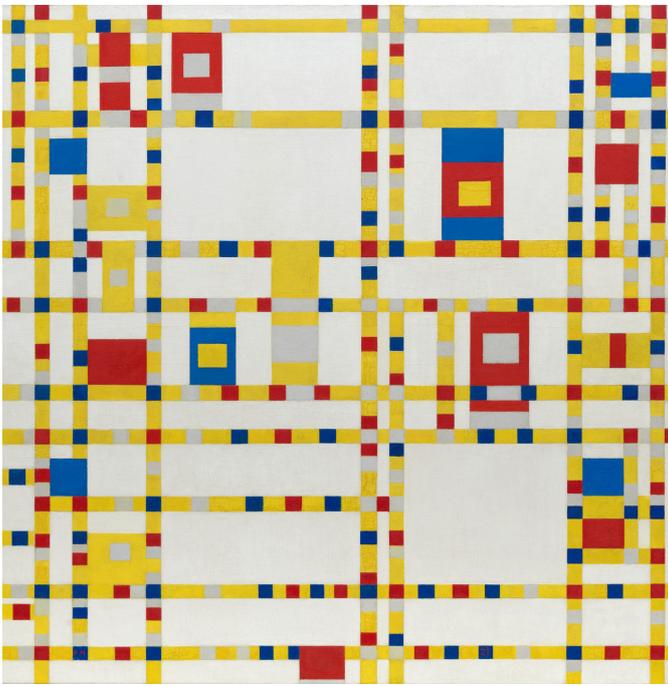
The power of the advisors is the power by design, by demonstration. They have a lot to say, but nothing to tell, so they can only convince by the power of ideas. That is what I call 'soft power'. I will try to illustrate in which ways we can use designer skills and soft power to get what we want. On the one hand, you can describe it as an advisory board. There are many advisory boards in the Netherlands, like the PBL, the planning bureau for spatial planning; or the RLI, the board for the environment and infrastructure. They work on the underpinning of policy by research.

The College van Rijks Adviseurs (CRa) created Panorama NL<sup>2</sup>, an advice to the national government on how to create a vision for the Netherlands, what it includes, and how to formulate it, and which partners to include. There is lot of research by design and design competitions in order to set this agenda. To get new topics on the agenda of the national government, to get the design community aware of things that could bring cities to work on projects more coherently on urbanization and infrastructure. It's about different forms of mobility: car-based, public transport-based, bike and pedestrians, about landscape and energy transition, among others. However, the advice is not only reviewing the meals coming out of the restaurant, wit is actually also advising on how to cook them. So, the Rijks Adviseurs are also part of quality teams of national projects, for example concerning our parliament buildings, large train stations, or the Afsluitdijk (see figures 01a and 01b), our big national dam that gets an upgrade. Here, they work on keeping the quality at the high level that was stated at the beginning of a project.

The CRa instigates design competitions as part of the research by design. With those, not only winners are selected, but also a community of people that were client or participant in these competitions. Thus, bringing the ideas forward to a society to work with. Examples of these competitions are: housing for refugees, new forms of living, care, the agricultural transition (new deals for farmers and citizens) and currently, how to empower city fringes; how can post-war neighborhoods and their landscapes fringes more attractive and up to date.

The red line of the story of the CRa is the need a new chapter of Dutch spatial planning. Dutch spatial planning was very much founded at TU Delft, by, amongst others, the founders of the CIAM movement<sup>3</sup>, of which architect and urban planner Cornelis van Eesteren was one of the founders, together with his colleague Le Corbusier. Van Eesteren also was

- 1 <https://english.collegevanrijksadviseurs.nl>
- 2 <https://www.collegevanrijksadviseurs.nl/adviezen-publicaties/publicatie/2019/11/18/panorama-nederland-engels>
- 3 CIAM. The Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) was founded in 1928 and disbanded in 1959. It was responsible for a series of congresses around the world by the most prominent architects of the time, with the objective of spreading the principles of the Modern Movement focusing in all the main domains of architecture (landscape, urbanism, industrial design, and many others).



02

02 Piet Mondriaan.  
Broadway Boogie Woogie.  
1942-43 MoMA



03a

03a Katwijk, parking garage in  
dune

one of the founding fathers of De Stijl, of which painter Mondrian was one of the leading partners. Not by coincidence, the classic Mondriaan paintings (see figure 02) and the classic plans of van Eesteren look very similar. They both have mono-colored fields; in terms of Van Eesteren these were meant to be mono-functional areas with only a residential function or a work function or another type of function. It was about avoiding conflicts between functions. The last Mondriaan paintings, made in New York, are a much more apt metaphor for the contemporary challenges that our cities face. This Victory Boogie Woogie shows a much more dynamic mix of colors in small patches.

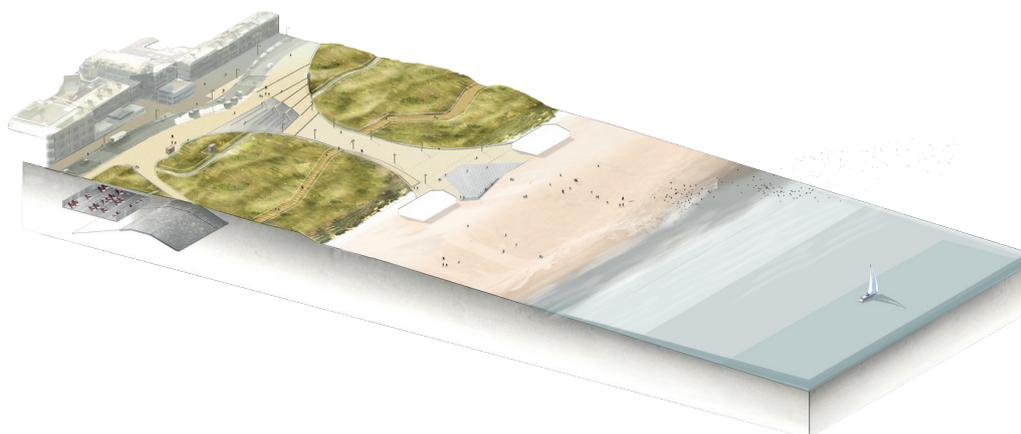
In the days when van Eesteren was wearing his white lab coat and thought about what was best for the future of the Netherlands, they did scientific surveys on how the Netherlands could house for example twenty million people. In their Research by Design they worked on three options for a patchwork region: have bigger cities, allow urban sprawl, or opt for a polycentric region. In the end, all experts thought this polycentric model was the best and they spread it out like peanut butter across The Netherlands. They called it 'gebundelde deconcentratie', concentrated de-concentration, but it is state-driven sub-urbanization. Those were the days they thought of the Netherlands as being a world champion of urban planning, which is no longer the case by far. Because both as urban designers and as politicians, currently there is no room for others to add their ideas and their initiatives. And in fact, politicians and designers have to acknowledge that a lot of times they have been wrong, and society or the economy or the climate or nature actually knew much better than the politicians and designers did. So maybe there is no longer a need to make plans that are blueprints, but plans that are actually leaving room for all these other powers in society to incorporate ideas. One example is the city of Amsterdam where urban planners were trying to redevelop the IJ-banks at the north of the city center to become an economic heart. But then the ABN Amro Bank decided that the south side of the city, situated between the city center and the airport, was a much better place for its headquarters. And after five years,

the municipality gave in, the national government gave in and all agreed that the south side was a better place. Now it is called De Zuidas and it is the Central Business District of the Netherlands.

The Netherlands actually faces big challenges. Looking at the newspapers and the public debates, it looks very negative: all change is received as a kind of threat. The CRA thinks that is a missed opportunity. Change is in fact an opportunity to adapt to new circumstances and to pursue evolution. Big challenges the Netherlands faces are identified: to reach the Paris Climate goals, to build one million homes in the next two decades, to adapt to climate change in order to keep our feet dry and our mind cool. However, these very big issues are not of daily concern of our citizens and companies. These issues are perceived as something important but not taken into action.

The CRA thinks that there is the need for a frame to motivate people. Hence Panorama NL, a perspective of the Netherlands in two or three decades, that people can identify with and desire to be part of. One that they look forward to; a Netherlands that they want to work on, that they want to be a part of, that they dream of. Then, all these big challenges from before probably work more as an engine behind the new Netherlands. And it is actually that panorama that we have painted: how the Netherlands can change in the next generation. It is a very optimistic story. A story that shows that the Netherlands can remain recognizable as the country as we know it; yet it will operate or function completely different as we were used to. That is the Panorama NL, showing how big challenges can be used to make the Netherlands richer. That means more diverse, but also more prosperous. It should be more coherent, both socially as through mobility networks, and much 'schoner', which means both cleaner and more beautiful.

This Panorama was created with a small team consisting of West8 landscape architects and urbanists and Vereniging Deltametropool. Four big challenges were identified: climate adaptation, energy transition, one million homes and to transform the agricultural system into a much more sustainable way. A system that is good for the farmer and good for the landscape as a new deal between farmers and society. These four challenges cannot be addressed separately, as was done traditionally, but together. The best level to do so is at the level of the region. That is the level on which urban systems function and where three governmental layers (national government, the provinces and the municipalities) meet and



03b Katwijk, parking garage and dike in dune; image by OKRA Landschapsarchitecten

03b

(should) make deals. At this level, it can be explained to citizens that some of the measures are maybe not so nice, but that they can be balanced out with other measures that make it much more attractive. Challenges can be used to make each region (thirty in total) stand out a little bit from the others. Instead of that the regions would start to look more like each other, they can be much more different, based on their landscape features, their cultural history, their economic profile and the cocktail of challenges they face. Differences are not contradictions. It is also a way to address the division that seems to be buried in the Dutch society, between the gilets jaunes, the yellow jerseys, and let's say the elite of white wine drinking people, it is actually part of an answer to minimizing social segregation. Because these regions offer on the one hand, a kind of safe, recognizable home region, their traditions are still there and it is kind of a protection against the big world outside. And yet, for all the cosmopolitans there is also this palette of very different regions on offer from which one can 'shop' for all the different qualities amongst them. The dream is that all of us will sometimes wear a yellow jersey to protest all the movements and drink a white wine from time to time. This is also a power to use these new challenges to make what exists now much better.

The CIAM movement really saw that the dark medieval city was chaos, a place to be avoided, which needed to be erased and replaced by something completely new. This promise is no longer true, we are at the end of 'new is better'. We have to shift from the modernistic Tabula Rasa to Tabula Scripta<sup>4</sup>, we have to write on top of what is already there. And that's not just a design statement; it is a social and ecological statement as well.

Johanna Westerdijk was the first female professor in the Netherlands. She was studying fungi, and, after a career-long study, her main observation was that a boring and monotonous life even kills a fungus<sup>5</sup>. This is not only true for a fungus, but it is also true for mono-functional urban areas too, like a residential neighborhood or a business district or a recreational forest area. If they are only good at one thing and the world changes,

- 4 <http://tabulascripta.nl>
- 5 Kerling, L., Ten Houten, J., & De Bruin-Brink, G. (1986). Johanna Westerdijk. Pioneer Leader in Plant Pathology. In: Ann. Rev. Phytopathol. 24:33-41. See also: <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/utrecht-university-hall/j-westerdijk-room-johanna-westerdijk-the-phytopathologist>



04 Panorama NL

they are dead. Urban areas need to be good at multiple things. David Rusk studied from a social perspective why some American social groups were able to make a social career and others were not<sup>6</sup>. He concluded: it is not a problem if your parents have a low income or low education. It becomes a problem if none of the kids in your school class, or the kids you play with in the street have parents with a different perspective in life. If you never meet other walks of life, then the idea of climbing the social ladder becomes like a Hollywood movie. It's a fairy tale, not a prospect for you.

- 6 Rusk, David. 1993. *Cities Without Suburbs*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press/The Woodrow Wilson Center Press
- 7 <https://www.collegevanrijksadviseurs.nl/projecten/panorama-nederland>

### *THE DESIGN OF 'SOFT POWER'*

The Panorama NL is about storytelling, about how to offer a positive perspective in society to everyone and Panorama NL does just that. It is a book and it is also an app, through the app store, in which you can see literally 360-degree panorama at eye level<sup>7</sup>. It is one big photoshopped collage of the Netherlands, in which you see recognizable elements knitted together without being able to pinpoint where exactly it is. The CRa did a promotion tour with the Panorama NL with lectures and an exhibition: a big panorama with a diagonal of eight meters and a small one, with a four meters diagonal (see figure 04). It toured around the Netherlands to tell the story and regions organized a debate about the future of their region within this panorama. The panorama was copied by the regions and made specific, for certain topics, for certain companies. The regions are also struggling to formulate their own vision. Panorama NL was a way to promote this type of thinking into stimulating debate and complementary to design and design thinking tools to get our ideas across.

While creating Panorama NL, CRa found out that the national government was not interested in the housing question, the building of one million homes. It was considered as a local issue and not of national importance. CRa developed a tool that showed its impact on the national budget and how it was about national goals. It consists of a rainbow of societal values that were important to the national government and in which they had a financial stake. It showed that in the Amsterdam region only, one urbanization model versus the other made a difference of € 10 billion on national level. Suddenly the politicians and civil servants were very interested in the regional housing question. Because they realized they would have to pay for extra infrastructure, or for extra energy, or for support in some large residential neighbourhoods that were getting weaker. And so at last they concluded that they want to collaborate with these regions on their housing tasks. This shows how through design thinking you are able to incorporate finance and get ideas across, get attention. Without the language of finance, it would never have worked. It was also linked it to other issues like health care, which today is number one on the agenda.

Another collaboration of CRa with the largest five cities in the Netherlands (G5) was about how to develop mixed-use areas in a high population density. The argument to why mixed-use development is good was made to explain better the concept: it intensifies the use of space, it reduces mobility, et cetera. A very simple tool was created to help the municipalities to mix functions. One of the conclusions was: don't mix at the level of a building; mix at the level of a building block. Plan residential buildings next to office buildings, to hotels and to schools and don't mix them like

New York's Downtown Athletic Club, stacked on top of each other - that is very costly, and does not add many extra qualities. It is better to mix where people walk and meet each other at ground floor and at street level. The best way to make mixed-use neighborhoods is to - make a diverse plinth. The first layer can have multiple functions without disturbing the vertical infrastructure of the building and without disturbing ownership. To make it successful this plinth needs to be programmed with morning, afternoon and evening program, in order to make it lively always.

The same tool was used to reinvent Van Eesteren and Mondriaan with his Victory Boogie Woogie. Like Mondriaan being inspired by Manhattan, mixing functions must make use of existing, present different circumstances. It is a kind of zoning, but it is not zoning based on function, but zoning based on quality. We called it in Dutch 'Reuring, Ruis en Rust' and in English 'Buzz, Fuzz and Calm'. The Buzz forms the lively part, there are bars, theatres and a high level of services. On top there are offices and apartments. Around the corner, the Calm zone is situated, a quiet and peaceful green area with apartments for living and offices for working. The noise here is of a lower level. The Fuzz zone has light industry, logistics and unique housing types with a for example a music studio or food ateliers. This is the more experimental and innovative part of town. All these three zones come together in what is called a 'framework plan'. The zones follow the reinvented Van Eesteren scheme, not based on functions, but on qualities. With in each zone another maximum level of hindrance and danger. This is currently tested in a few cities and the plan is to make this happen.

Panorama NL paints a picture of what we should do and why we should do it. But the next question is: how do we actually do it?'

This led to the latest competition called 'Panorama Lokaal'<sup>8</sup> (the local panorama), which looks into the post-war residential neighborhoods at a city's fringe, facing the countryside. These are places mostly built in the 60s, 70s, and 80s where a lot of baby boomers still live quite happily. These areas all are the same: row houses, lots of green, not very high quality. They are getting rundown and are quite monotonous.

The municipalities were challenged to think about how the global and national challenges could help to improve these areas qualitatively. 'How can the countryside help suburbs and how can the suburbs help the countryside? Think about things like loneliness and rejuvenation in these neighborhoods. How about the identity and orientation of both the landscape and these suburbs? How about the biodiversity in the countryside? How can we improve?' The competition is inviting municipalities in coalition with housing corporations, Water Authorities, countryside organizations, or local citizens group. Seven sites were chosen nicely spread throughout the country and in a way that they represented different eras of the Dutch history of urbanization. For each site a more specific question was formulated which was then set up as a design competition. From the 147 entries we selected three winning teams per site to continue on the assignment. The 21 teams are building up experience in addressing all these issues in this way, can be hired throughout the Netherlands. Other municipalities can call on these seven cities to share their experience, explain what they have learned, the do's and the don'ts. That really is the

purpose of the competition: it is not only about the best plan, but also that different disciplines work together in these new proposals, which are not only spatially oriented.

To think about the future of a country or a region, is also to think about how to govern it, how to organize it. Dutch national government had a tradition to work top down. The national government gave the orders but in the past 20 years, the intention of the national government was to not be at the table at all. They went to a planning strategy that invited input from local and private partners: in Dutch called 'uitnodigings planologie'. But by now, the challenges are so big that national government actually needs to return to the table, and start to collaborate with the other stakeholders. This is a new situation again: national government is no more just providing funding but also needs to participate with a vision, be able to organize partnerships. The most important scale to operate on is the regional scale. That is not the scale for local authorities only; the national government needs to represent the national interest there as well. For spatial reasons, the national government has to look for example for collaboration with neighboring countries on how to use the North Sea for renewable energy, how do deal with climate change, make mobility networks work. And, of course, the national government needs to collaborate in projects and they really tend to forget about it. But four recent projects show that the national government can still be very successful: A2 tunnel Maastricht<sup>9</sup>, Room for the River<sup>10</sup>, Rotterdam Centraal train station<sup>11</sup> and Dune Parking Garage in Katwijk<sup>11</sup> (see figures 03a and 03b). All of them address very different topics. However, most knowledge around these projects is lost in national government bodies, so they need to be reminded that they were there and that they can still do it.

This also means that we need to educate people differently; at the ministry at the national government level, but also at the university. Training should aim for T-shaped skills: a specialist in their profession and to represent it, and to know all about it, but they also need to be able to communicate their knowledge with people from totally different backgrounds, like economists or sociologists; or laymen or politicians. That is the way we approach Dutch designed soft power.

- 9 <https://a2maastricht.nl/en>
- 10 <https://youtu.be/slmkG93SH3Q>
- 11 <https://www.archdaily.com/588218/rotterdam-central-station-benthem-crouwel-architects-mvsa-meyer-en-van-schooten-architecten-and-west-8>
- 12 <https://www.flooddefences.org/katwijk-aan-zee.html>  
<https://www.archdaily.com/791812/underground-parking-katwijk-aan-zee-royal-haskoningdhv>

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