

THE NETHERLANDS IN MAPS

***SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE NETHERLANDS
INTRODUCTION TO THE 2001 MAPS***

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For the Netherlands, spatial planning is a must. It is a very well known fact that its population density (now 466 per square kilometer) is among the highest of all countries in this world. So space is tight, but at the same time the spatial claims of the still growing population are increasing at a quick rate, as a result of diminishing household sizes, a desire for larger houses, growing numbers of second homes, second cars etcetera. Also the ever growing mobility calls for more infrastructure. And more space will also be required for the accommodation of growing work and leisure functions: there is a gradually growing shortage of business sites and sites for new hotels, holiday resorts and campings, and space needed for the expansion or relocation of existing ones.

So far, a well-known story. But the pressure of spatial claims witnessed in the Netherlands nowadays definitely goes beyond what could be expected on the basis of extrapolation of existing trends. We now notice spatial claims of a totally new nature, which did not exist (or were not recognized) before. One example is the demand of a newly grown elite of very rich people for "large scale rural living" in the form of big mansions or estates. Another is the gradually increasing use of wind energy which requires vast areas around the many newly built high steel windmills (sometimes isolated, sometimes in the form of windmill-parks). But the most impressive and demanding new claim doesn't come from man, but from nature.

Development of "nature areas" became an important new spatial policy goal in the course of the past decade. Nature development aims to reclaim part of the vast nature areas which got lost in the processes of land reclamation for agriculture, infrastructure building, urbanisation, and suburbansation. In the Netherlands, water is the most emergent element of nature, and it doesn't come as a surprise that this element receives growing attention. For centuries, it seemed self-evident that water systems had to be adapted to the needs of man in terms of housing, working and leisure. Nevertheless, this adagium is now abandoned (CIW 2000). Reservation of space for the storage of surplus water is gradually acknowledged as one of the strongest spatial claims. Water connections are considered as the most important bases of ecological networks. More generally water is regarded as an important basis for spatial planning as such. Water management has been discovered as one of the major functions in spatial planning. First of all and historically pre-eminent, this concerns safety. But it also concerns the ecological and hydrological balance of the water system to prevent pollution and to find the balance between flooding and withering. A small but rather convincing evidence of the new respect for water systems is given by the choice of water management as a personal action field by his royal highness the prince of Orange, the future king of the Netherlands.

The spatial planning problems evoked by the spatial claims for housing, business, infrastructure, leisure, nature and water constitute the subject for the 2001 series of *The Netherlands in Maps*, starting with a first map in this edition which shows the growth and spatial distribution of the country's housing stock. Notwithstanding the impressive growth of this housing stock (each of the last four decades added more than a million houses to a stock which now comprises 6.5 million) there is still a shortage of houses, concentrated in the densely populated urban core area of the Randstad Holland, where it is increasingly difficult to find places for new development. A comparable task has to be performed for new business locations, which are becoming increasingly scarce (Ministerie EZ 1997) and to which we will dedicate a second map in this series. The spatial claims of leisure, nature and water will be highlighted in the ensuing third and fourth maps.

The choice of spatial planning as a theme for the 2001 series of *the Netherlands in Maps* was very much provoked by political opportunity. Finding new space for development is the key task for the national government's Fifth Memorandum on Spatial Planning which is to be published shortly before or after the turn of the year. The preceding Fourth Memorandum (published in 1988) succeeded with difficulty in finding sites (the so-called "VINEX-locations") for new urban development - especially housing projects - outside and between the existing cities in the Randstad's urban ring, without too severe inroads into the "Green Heart", the open space in the horseshoe-formed urban area around the agglomerations of Utrecht, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam which has been the holy cow in Dutch spatial planning in the past half century.

The Green Heart is considered as the "green lung" of the Randstad, a place where nature and leisure values can be accommodated and the rural landscape attractively contrasts with the surrounding urban milieu. Urban expansion should take place *in* and *outside* the urban ring of the Randstad, not inside it, not in the Green Heart. However, it will prove to be extremely difficult to find more suitable locations for urban expansion in or outside the urban ring, for the new decade. The *Startnota Ruimtelijke Ordening* which was published by the Ministry of Spatial Planning in 1999 as a foretaste for the Fifth Memorandum (Ministerie VROM 1999) launched the concept of "network cities" but did not yet indicate locations where these networks might expand. Urban development corridors, extending from the main conurbations in the West to the South, East, and North of the country have been suggested as another solution to accommodate the growth of residential and business functions, but were rejected by the Ministry. Also suggestions to transfer (part of) the growth of the Randstad to the rather empty North, or to the nearest neighbour province North Brabant in the South, have been debated but refused. The abiding axiom is that regions should solve their own (spatial) problems, and not try to export them to other regions. Considering this view, it seems inevitable that parts of the Green Heart are sacrificed for urban growth in the western part of the Netherlands. To combine such a defeat of a long lasting planning axiom with a firm anchoring of a new planning theory based on nature and water values will prove to be a hard task, and require large efforts of all those engaged in spatial planning in the Netherlands.

References

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