2000 Acta Structilia Vol 7 No 1

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Ideals behind Dutch urban planning

Abstract

The Netherlands urban planning has evolved until 1990 in coherence with the image of a harmonious, planable society, which has found its expression in, on the one side, the ideal of a fair social-economic distribution and, on the spatial side, which is the subject of this article, the ideal to create an aesthetically ordered environment. The *National Reports on Spatial Planning* indicate that since the 1960s these ideals have been envisaged in practice: the desire to keep urbanisation as compact as possible to spread a network of small cities, towns and villages throughout the country to prevent the growth of large metropolitan areas — together with the aim to protect open, green spaces from urbanisation and to restrain the growth of auto-mobility. Dutch planning ideals can be characterised by a strong regulation of the profile combined with clear, functional divisions in space. Since the end of the 1980s, Dutch urbanists and architects have criticised the monofunctionality and regulated aesthetics, and become interested in a more dynamic concept of urban planning, which accepts a degree of uncertainty and can produce a more differentiated space. However, the question is, whether this change of ideals implies a shift in paradigm, or whether changes have occurred within the same set of ideals.

Keywords: Urban planning, Netherlands, social-economic distribution, urbanisation

DIE IDEALE WAT DIE GRONDSLAG VORM VAN DIE NEDERLANDSE STADSBEPLANNING

Die Nederlandse stadsbeplanning was tot 1990 gebaseer op die gekombineerde gedagte van 'n harmonieuse en planmatige samelewing, aan die een kant, wat tot uitdrukking kom in die ideaal van 'n billike sosiaal-ekonomiese verdeling en, ten opsigte van die ruimtelike sy, aan die ander kant. Dié artikel konsentreer op die behoefte aan die daarstelling van 'n esteties-geordende omgewing. Die *Nederlandse Nasionale Verslag insake Ruimtelike Beplanning* dui aan dat sedert die 1960's hierdie doelwit in die praktyk daarop neergekom het dat die begeerte vir verstedeliking so kompak as moontlik gehou is tesame met die vestiging van 'n netwerk van stede en dorpe regoor die land. Die oogmerk was die bekamping van metropool-uitbreiding en motorweë om sodoende oop, groen ruimtes te help bewaar. Verdere ideale ten opsigte van beplanning in Nederland word gekenmerk deur 'n sterk regulering van hierdie vooropgesette beeld, gekombineer met 'n definitiewe funksionele ruimtelike verdeling. Sedert die einde van die 1980's het Nederlandse stad- en streeksbeplanners en argitekte kritiek gelewer op die monofunksionaliteit en die gereguleerde estetika. Hulle het ook begin aandag skenk aan 'n meer gedifferensieerde ruimtelikheid. Die vraag kan nou gevra word of hierdie nuwe uitganspunt verband hou met 'n paradigmaskuif en of die voorgestelde wysigings bloot binne die grense van die bestaande ideale geleë is.

Sleutelwoorde: Stadsbeplanning, Nederland, sosiaal-ekonomiese verdeling, verstedeliking.

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1. Introduction

It will not be so impossible, with a bit of goodwill, to create an earthly paradise. It cannot be done in a day, but by concentrating one's powers without taking account of time, one will not only achieve it in the end, but one will already live in a paradise now (Piet Mondriaan, 1927 in Van der Woud, 1983: 54).

This article is concerned with the Dutch perspective on urban planning. Based on the idea that urbanism and planning have various aims, motivations and ideals in different parts of the world, and that an exchange of these perspectives could start with an exploration of one's own frame of reference, this text aims to explore in general the specific character of the ideals behind the customs and traditions of Dutch urban planning. Basic to all this is the Dutch way of planning, in the sense that theirideals motivated their previous planning. Hence, as planning achievement was their primary goal, the physical structures followed suit. With this aspect in mind, this article aims to provide only a single perspective, which may serve as a vehicle for an open discussion on the various motivations for spatial planning.

Portas (Gall, 1993: 107-110) pointed out that Holland is a rather well-organised country with the doubtful delight to be spatially so structured that it is often perceived by foreigners as dull and over-planned. Even the Dutch people themselves believe that they have this need for order; an unconscious fear of the uncontrolled. In this context, I was surprised to read that in the past Dutch planning concepts acquired a status of 'example' in other parts of the world, as Rem Koolhaas (1995: 1027-1029) pointed out. In 1963 UN experts advised the city of Singapore to develop a leading concept for its urban development with the Dutch Ring City (*Randstad*) as example, which "has been found to have distinct advantages over other forms of conurbation". Peter Hall (De Boer, 1996: 9) also suggested in 'The World Cities' (1966) that the polycentric agglomeration such as the *Randstad* would be the best solution for fast-growing cities. Furthermore, our democratic process of planning, the different scales of plans, and the ordered ways of implementation have been studied internationally over the past 25 years to serve as an example for other areas.

The mood of professional complacency has changed over the past few years. Dutch planners have become interested in the way foreign countries operate. In the 1980's, municipal planners and politicians travelled to various cities, for example, Barcelona, to study the design of urban public space. They also became acquainted with modern cities, e.g. New York and Los Angeles. Recent visits to Asian and South American cities followed, in the quest to understand the 'new' forms of urbanisation (Meurs, 1998: 30).

1.1 History and tradition of Dutch planning in the 20th century

According to European standards, Holland only recently developed and implemented urban plans. Its four main towns, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht, developed independently in a competitive way. They shared the main functions, hence the national government is seated in The Hague, and not in the capital of Amsterdam. One may conclude that resistance arose against the idea of a national metropolis in contrast with other European countries that have a centralised political system (De Boer, 1996: 22-38, 51-53). At the time when Paris was reshaped by Haussmann, and major plans were carried out in cities such as London and Berlin, the spatial ordering of the city was not the main issue for Holland. Railways were built with private resources and, for fear of epidemics in workers' districts, concerned groups and wealthy individuals in Amsterdam and Rotterdam promoted plans to build large parks.

Niek de Boer (1996: 55) states that the 19th century did not see the development of the Ring City (the more usual view), but rather the non-development of a national capital or a non-metropolis, leading to the inability to give form to any metropolitan urbanity. It is evident that the Dutch people dislike a large city, since they consider this 'harmful to body and spirit'. This forms the basis for one of the oldest Dutch planning ideals (Van der Cammen, 1993: 109).

The liberal, utilitarian tradition changed with the *Housing Law* of 1901, which obliged the rapidly growing or larger municipalities (>10 000 inhabitants) to make zoning plans for their extensions. This law laid the foundation for Dutch urban planning of this century, with the basic idea that planning could shape our society. This concept, formulated at the start of this century, comprises two main ideals, which are still important today. The first ideal is the desire for ordered appearance, or in other words, aesthetic control. The second ideal is to shape a social welfare state (Van der Cammen, 1993: 41).

The second ideal is associated with the fact that no other country in the world has worked collectively on a national housing program for such a long time. The forerunner, England, for example, curtailed its social building program in the seventies. Between 1900 and 1940, municipalities and non-profit corporations in The Netherlands built nearly 20% of all new houses (Van der Cammen, 1993: 45). Carl Weeber (1998: 10) indicates that after the Second World War, this figure increased to 90%. Nowadays, the State is still responsible for 30% of all housing.

In his book *The Wild Dwelling*, the architect Weeber (1998: 10-14) protests against the Dutch government's enormous influence on the housing sector, and its direct influence on private homes and on the lives of the Dutch people. Weeber compares the social building program with that in other countries. He concludes that at present 43% of all homes in Holland are rented in the social sector, while in the United States the figure is a mere 1%. In its neighbouring country, Belgium, 5% of all houses are state-owned. It is only natural that ongoing development of traditionally large-scale housing projects for the working class had a substantial effect on urban planning in the country. Between 1950 and 1975, but to a lesser extent in the 1920s and 1930s, entire districts were built by certain municipal governments, in collaboration with the housing corporations, hence the detailed planning of these residential areas.

The remarkable influence of the state and municipal governments has imposed functional and visual order on most urban developments over the past 100 years. The concern with aesthetics is especially noticeable in that every region has a commission that judges the aesthetic qualities of new building plans to ascertain whether they will 'fit' into the environment. The commissions for 'external appearance' (*Welstand*) were founded at the end of the 19th century. Several Amsterdam architects met in order to review building plans. The idea was to prevent non-professionals from constructing 'inferior architecture'. By the 1920s many municipal and regional commissions had emerged and in 1962 the aesthetic review became obligatory by law (Van Beek, 1985: 13-15, 66, 109).

However, since the 1990s the commissions for aesthetics have been the subject of discussion and reconsideration, mainly due to their subjective and sometimes arbitrary judgements of beauty and fitness in terms of the environment (Van Campen, 1999). *Welstand* has also been criticised openly for being too patronising (Weeber, 1998).

1.2 The structure of Dutch spatial planning

The high level of spatial control developed gradually throughout the previous century, and found its practical structure in the 1960s. This still forms the basis for the present planning structure in the Netherlands. In general, planning is organised on various governmental levels. The national government publishes *National Reports on Spatial Planning* that set the context; the regional government draws up regional plans, which refine the goals for its particular region; and the municipalities design two types of plans. The first plan is a 'structure' plan, giving direction to the aims and means of urban planning on municipal level, while the second plan deals with all zoning aspects, and has legal status, which is based on a set of participative procedures.

A brief explanation is essential in order to understand the Dutch government's legal rights and the procedures to be followed before a new plan for a neighbourhood or a new building is accepted. In general, the urban outline plan for an extension or inner city area is designed by, or in co-operation with the municipality's urbanist. These outlines form part of the zoning plan following several rounds of public presentations where the public have a say. Their objections to the plan may in some cases lead to a change in the design. The architect(s) who designed the building must then submit the plans to the municipality for approval. The plans are assessed in the light of the following (Van der Cammen, 1993: 130, 174-175, 221):

- *The zoning plan*. Rules are laid down according to function, the constructible area within the lots, maximum height and global forms.
- *The building* code. The standardised norms of interior spatial organisation (e.g. a bathroom must always be accessible via a hall or corridor); spatial lay-out (all types of rooms for houses should have minimum dimensions); requirements regarding natural lighting (window size); sound- and thermo-insulation are taken into account, while certain safety requirements have to be met, etc.
- *The role of the 'commission on external appearance'*. The commission assesses the plan in terms of its aesthetics and suitability in the existing environment.

A detailed review of the plan follows the above assessments, before the building is erected. This indicates the general ideals in Dutch planning in terms of safety, functionality and aesthetic orderliness.

1.3 National plans after 1960

The development of practical Dutch urban planning ideals can be better understood from the national reports on spatial planning. These point out that from the start many of the historically developed ideals were circulated to the public, in order to prevent the formation of a single large metropolitan area. Five reports on spatial planning have been published since 1960.

The *First National Report* (1960) primarily deals with the distribution of economic benefits throughout the country, because it assumed that the strong economic and spatial development of the Ring City would threaten the development of the country as a whole. The northern and southern regions of the country were labelled 'problem areas' and incentives were introduced to strengthen their economic positions by attracting industrial developments, in particular, and by relocating certain government activities to these areas. This first report formulated the protection of the central green space between the four main cities, the so-called 'Green Heart' (Van der Cammen, 1993: 122-125).

As De Boer (1996: 7 4-75, 182) suggested, this problem-analysis was based on an anti-metropolitan view of urban development, which remained explicit in the second report of 1996 (Figure 1). In this report the government feared a large population growth in the Ring City, from about 5 million inhabitants in 1996 to 9 million inhabitants in 2000 (in fact, there are at present about 6,2 million inhabitants in the Ring City). The solution could be found in what is called 'bundled deconcentration', a term that reigned (in various versions) for about twenty years in Dutch planning. In practice, this meant that urban development was preferred in villages and small towns, thus deconcentrating the larger cities. The term 'bundled' refers to the wish to realise urbanisation in as compact a manner as possible in order not to waste agricultural land and other open spaces (Van der Cammen, 1993: 137-138).

Compactness was relatively easy to realise, due to the large proportion of government-aligned construction of housing in particular, so that new residential areas could be planned as desired. New housing districts developed in the 1960s. These were built in line with the modernist tradition, which includes high-rise apartment blocks. In the 1970s the style changed to suburban neighbourhoods, with their distinctive two- or three-storied rows of houses.

Deconcentration was to be achieved by identifying certain 'fit' areas i.e. small towns located near large towns, the so-called 'overspill' or satellite towns. Existing towns, such as Almere and Lelystad, were planned in the new large polder of Flevoland. Zoetermeer, in turn, was built near The Hague, following the English 'New Town' example. Taking into account economic policies, the aim was to relocate one million people to the north of the country (Van der Cammen, 1993: 134-136, 147).

The *Third National Report* (1973-1985)(Figure 2) continued the anti-metropolitan tendency in some ways. The idea of 'overspill areas' survived, although these were now called 'growth cores'. Public transport was explicitly preferred to private cars, leading to the ideal of the 'compact city' where urban services could be efficiently reached by public transport.

By the end of the 1970s the centres of existing large towns had developed into problem areas due to economic, social and spatial impoverishment. The problem was a direct result of the population's movement to smaller and suburban communities. The government stimulated urban renewal within the centres of the four larger towns of the Ring City to prevent the old cores from emptying, and at the same time used this policy to build housing at relatively low rents. In the structure plans, many municipalities tried to spatially deconcentrate their economic activities, in order to create 'polynuclear cityforming'. The current policies in each of the Ring City towns, and in several secondary business and shopping centres are based on these actions (Van der Cammen, 1993:174-220; De Boer, 1996: 88-89).

The late 1960s were characterised by a protest against the former blueprint planning. The process of planning was adapted to that which is still in place today. Longer and more participative procedures developed. This increasingly enabled the general public to participate in and to object to plans (Van der Cammen, 1993: 172-17 4). This process is presently being reviewed, mainly because it entailed time delays and economic inertia (Frieling, 1998: 15-17).

During the 1960s, urbanism underwent considerable changes in Holland. Whereas previously architects predominantly designed urban plans, now with the introduction of process planning, architects left the planning scene, and, as Rem Koolhaas (Koolhaas, 1995: 961-967; Taylor, 1998: 65-70) indicated, 'ridiculed' urbanism out of existence, so that the urban discipline was left in the hands of municipal offices, and hence acquired a bureaucratic image.

The *Fourth National Report* (Figure 3) of 1988 and its addendum of 1991 were published at the time when the main ideal was to create a harmonious society, both functional as well as aesthetic. Since then, Dutch thought on urban planning has altered. The government feared that the relatively small cities of the *Randstad* did not offer, in a global sense, attractive business locations. Each of the cities was reviewed and its advantages and future possibilities were compared. The need for city marketing became evident. Locations for new urbanisation were determined according to the principle of the previous report regarding proximity to public transport and existing urban services in the ideal of the 'compact city' (Van der Cammen, 1993: 222-230; De Boer, 1996: 92-93).

1.4 Accumulated ideals into the 1980s

Between 1900 and 1980 basic ideals were pursued. The reason for the gradual transformation of ideals cannot be pinpointed, but a definite change in perspective (Doevendans, 1999) became evident. According to most of the literature on the history of Dutch planning, various changes in terms of form and architectural styles occurred before 1990. The first period seems to be a continuum of an interrelated set of ideals.

The main ideal can be described as the 'designable society', in other words planners and governments believed that the society could be given form by applying spatial planning and designing the environment. This assumption has not been seriously disputed until recently (I.P.A., 2000: 6). Two meanings were attached to the term 'designable society', namely the social welfare state and the spatial and aesthetic ordering of activities. Both influenced the more practical ideals of urban planning.

Initially, the social aims of urban planning were linked to an anti-metropolitan spirit. The early 20th century worker was envisaged as living in a 'green' neighbourhood, preferably a small town. The ideal situation was one where the state provided rented housing for the majority of the population. Within this framework, rational standards of design and minimum norms for building were developed, which would eventually lead to the feeling of safety and security for the population as a whole.

Within the larger context of city planning, it was believed that a distinct differentiation between the functions of housing, industry and traffic could improve the social environment by preventing noise and air pollution in the 'green' residential neighbourhood (Vanstiphout, 1998: 68-71; Van der Woud, 1983).

Regional planning protected larger open or agricultural spaces, such as the Green Heart, against urbanisation, and provided recreational space for the inhabitants of the surrounding towns. From a collectivist point of view, providing public transport, be it rail, bus or tram (and the use of the bicycle), was considered to be more beneficial than developing a large auto-mobility by car, except for the period between 1950 and 1965 when the older centres and historic buildings were preserved in response to the population's preferences. In general, from the 1960s significant attention was paid to the democratic process of planning, allowing inhabitants to participate in planning and urban design.

In the spatial field, a desire for order was obvious from the start and this was expressed in the wish to plan all new urban developments in detail and to limit urban growth spatially in order to avoid the urbanisation of the countryside. Landscape and city were viewed as two opposite poles. It was believed that the city should be restrained, and this led to the current ideal of a compact city. Strong feelings were expressed about protecting the 'green' (man-made) landscape, and ideally limiting transport infrastructure to the minimum in order to minimise the risk of 'spoiling' the natural surroundings.

In accordance with the anti-metropolitan ideal (De Boer, 1996), the Dutch aim in regional planning was an equal distribution of smaller towns and medium-sized cities around the countryside. This aim was motivated by the ideal of an economic development of all regions. The tradition of collective housing led to the belief in a strong control of the aesthetics of the spatial environment. Firstly, governments and corporations experimented with large apartment blocks, while the real estate market indicated that, in general, the Dutch family preferred a house with a garden. Large suburban extensions with rows of smallish homes were built under the supervision of municipal urbanists. The ideal to regulate the image of the built environment was introduced in the Commissions of External Appearance.

2. The national reports following 1990

In the 1980s criticism was levelled at the spatial results of planning, in particular regarding the visual and functional monotony of the newer built-up areas. Magazines published articles on the lack of urbanity, the rigid mono-functionality of suburban areas and the monotonous urban and architectural designs. Criticism was also levelled at the slow and bureaucratic planning processes.

The *Fourth National Report* of 1988 mentions the need for differentiation of public space in its market-oriented aim to provide more attractive city locations for international businesses (Van der Cammen, 1993: 222). Using urbanism as the aim of city marketing, various municipalities introduced glamorous plans to convince people and businesses of the attractiveness of their urban area. The national government paid special attention to public urban space and provided subsidies for projects ranging from improving streets and squares to large-scale urban renewal projects (developed under private-public partnership), in particular in the Ring City. Many municipalities organised visits to foreign cities in the early 1990s in order to find new ways to enhance the appearance of their own cities.

In the 1998 report, positive attention was paid for the first time to the nine larger cities regarding the so-called 'urban junction policy'. This policy deals with the improvement of the infrastructure, public transport, environmental, educational and other services. The publication of the addendum in 1991 confirmed this policy and made provision for budgets for urban and environmental enhancement (Reijndorp, 1996: 34-35).

The research project, *The Metropolitan Debate*, criticises current planning procedures for being too slow and for having unpredictable outcomes to implement larger urban projects. The authors oppose democratisation and propose concepts for 'faster and better' decisions on urban planning (Frieling, 1998: 15-17).

Several national policy documents have been published over the past two years. The *Startnota* (VROM, 1999) combines the starting points for the recent report, as far as certain issues are concerned. This document confirms the above-mentioned changes in our urban planning culture, and emphasises the need for an international perspective on planning. The introduction of the 'corridor' concept indicates the importance of urban dynamics and acknowledges the organising potential of traffic-infrastructure. The need to create more differentiation and variation in our spatial environment is envisaged, thus drawing the attention to the design (VROM, 1999: 10, 27, 35).

However, on the other hand, the *Startnota* indicates that the aims of our national spatial policy have not changed drastically. The compact city is still the primary goal (which, in practice, is hard to reconcile with the corridor-concept), and residential districts are still planned close to public transport and other services in larger and medium-sized towns, since mobility is still considered to be a threat. The spatial-economical support to the north of the country continues, and is aimed at the harmonious distribution of economical and urban development. The countryside and urban space still remain two distinct issues that should be delimited (VROM, 1999: 3-7, 42-54).

The *Startnota* stresses the need to shape cultural and historical identity and to create spatial quality by differentiating architecture and urban design. Another policy-document, the *Belvedere Report* (1999), mentions the need to re-introduce 'the historical dimension' into urban and regional planning, stating that 'cultural-historical identity is gaining prominence as a guideline for organizing space' (Bosma, 1999: 72). Although Dutch planning has a long tradition in terms of the conservation of historical monuments, this report proposes to extend the conservation policy to include a cultural and architectural dimension.

Since the early 1990s the national government has published several policy documents on architecture and urban designs, taking into account the enhancement of the quality of public space. The last architecture report proposes its intentions regarding architectural and landscape qualities by commissioning nine large projects, where designers work in co-operation with the government, thus setting an example for other commissioners (I.P.A., 2000: 41-42).

The policy documents released after 1990 seem to indicate a broadening of aesthetic ideals, and a reconsideration of traditional welfare ideas. The *Architecture Report* indicates that in 1970 and 1980 attention was paid to social and functional aspects, while at present attention is directed at a 'livelier' design of the public environment (I.P.A., 2000: 27).

2.1 Urban planning ideals following 1990

After 1990, the ideal of 'differentiation' became the central concept of Dutch planning. Doevendans (1999) indicates that it replaced the ideal of the harmonious society. In a social-economic sense, the government favours the creation of conditions and possibilities for commercial development. On the spatial side, the monotony of the environment is criticised and an urban landscape is proposed consisting of differentiated fragments combined in a collage landscape (Doevendans, 1999).

Various concepts in urban planning and design developed from an international perspective in which foreign examples inspired Dutch planners to change their vocabulary. It should be added that since the 1980s architects have become interested in urban design and urban planning was revived as an aesthetic tool after an absence of almost twenty years from the planning scene. In architectural and urban design, concepts such as chaos, network, fragment, mobility and urban field have become more popular and suit the revived interest in urban and landscape design. At this point, various disciplines start merging: Architects, practical landscape architecture urbanism by landscape architects, infrastructure by urbanists and architects, and so on.

In creating conditions for market-oriented development, the infrastructure of the city has evolved as a focal point of discussion, giving more space to economic dynamics. After a long period during which traffic infrastructure was considered a necessary evil, architects and planners are now using concepts of mobility for aesthetic form, designing 'corridors', 'infra-bodies'and 'network-cities'. Highways and auto-mobility have acquired a new image as a result of these (mostly conceptual) projects (Tilman, 1999: 32-43). The concept of 'lite urbanism' is evaluated. Should the heavy structure of the present planning system be redrawn by an intervention, it may provide possibilities, without too many operational restrictions. Within this framework, the idea of an urbanism, carried out by projects, is elaborated as an antidote to the large body of standardised legal procedures that still characterise our planning vocabulary.

On the spatial level, municipalities strive for a mixture of functions in order to create multiple usage of space, and want to avoid suburban 'bedroom' towns and, by evening, deserted commercial centres. The urban landscape, and its details such as the paving of public spaces are now focal points drawing attention to the aesthetic form of urban space.

3. The Fifth National Report

The *Fifth National Report* on spatial planning was published in January 2001. At first, the contents of this report confirm the relative insignificance of the change in the existing planning ideals. The fifth report (Figure 4) retains some of the newer ideas expressed in the previous report namely an international perspective. The Netherlands is regarded as a region of North-Western Europe. There is a renewed interest in urbanity and dynamics since differentiation and mixed functions are considered important. The reconcile with the corridor-concept), and residential districts are still planned close to public transport and other services in larger and medium-sized towns, since mobility is still considered to be a threat. The spatial-economical support to the north of the country continues, and is aimed at the harmonious distribution of economical and urban development. The countryside and urban space still remain two distinct issues that should be delimited (VROM, 1999: 3-7, 42-54).

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More attention is paid to natural processes and to the quality of the open landscape, for example, green areas are interconnected with ecological axes, rivers are allowed more space for occasional overflowing and the North Sea is introduced as a planning area (VROM, 2001: 45-49; 285-286). Cartography shows a keen interest in the sub-soil and the existing landscape, namely less schematic, more layered and more detailed.

The introductory statement of the recent report mentions that Holland is becoming a multicultural society. This may open new discussions in terms of planning, urbanity and the existing anti-metropolitan tradition, and offer possibilities for a continuous change in traditions. Due to international migration over the past 30 years, about ten percent of the population in large cities are foreigners. The report describes this new pluriform of the urban society in contrast to our 'old' monoculture based on harmony and unanimity, and at the same time recognises the importance of contrasting cultures and plurality in terms of social dynamics that lend an urban character to the Delta metropolis (VROM, 2001: 5; 15,53-55; 101-103)[2] (Figure 5).

However, the report also confirms that these changes may to some extent be superficial. The regulative document attached to

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2 In writing the *Fifth Report*, the department of Spatial Planning (VROM) asked the sociologist, A C Zijderveld, to research those elements contributing to 'urbanity' in reaction to the widespread criticism that the Dutch urban landscape resembles an outspread suburban 'patchwork', and lacks real urbanity even in the large cities. Zijderveld reports that urbanity is associated with four main aspects (VROM 2001:101-103):

- A clear center with a diversity of functions
- A culturally pluriform population accepting the disharmony, contrasts and dynamics implied (the city as home for churches and brothels)
- The ability to maintain a balance between 'clean' and 'dirty', between stability and dynamics
- A strong municipal government (also a center in urban management terms).

the report (called 'draft of national planning decisions'), in particular, seems to contain practical regulation proposals based on the older planning paradigm. As in the very first report, the somewhat smaller Green Heart must have clear boundaries. The tradition of dividing space sharply between countryside and urban areas is now formalised by proposing 'red contours' that may delimit further urbanisation. The ideal to urbanise in groups of compact cities and smaller towns, each surrounded by a green open space, is literally a reformulation of the 'bundled deconcentration' and the 'compact city' of early national planning reports (VROM, 2001: 280-283). The proposed set of restrictive regulations reflects the traditional ideal of pre-organising a well-formulated order, leaving less room for urban dynamics.

4. A shift in paradigm?

The changes in urban planning concepts are described by Kees Doevendans as a shift in paradigm. There is no doubt that notions such as 'urban field' point to a totally different reality to that in traditional Dutch planning. However, a question arises as to whether different or international concepts will be realised in The Netherlands.

One of the remarkable issues in our tradition is the idea of 'makeability': at first, the makeability of a harmonious ordered society, and now the makeability of the difference of an attractive, varied city. Within this tradition of makeability, a new variant on the urban plan develops that describes desired image qualities and is used as a guideline for urban projects. The government's concern with the quality of architectural image is evident in the publication of various reports on architectural policy. Ultimately, aesthetic control has not relaxed; it has simply changed — instead of planning harmony, the idea of difference is being carefully planned. Weeber (1998: 16) indicates, in a cynical manner, that differentiation is realised by the invented 'themes' of municipal urbanists, with the help of the Commissions of External Appearance, to produce predefined images. Although these commissions have been criticised over the past years, the public need for aesthetic control is not seriously questioned (Van Campen, 1999: 26).

Nevertheless, neither the traditional hierarchic structure of planning and its participative process nor the planning instruments have changed. The main traditional ideals, such as the protective attitude towards green areas, the ideal to delimit the city and compact urbanisation, have to some extent, kept the anti-metropolitan tradition alive. It seems that changes after 1990 point more towards a shift in focus than towards a shift in paradigm. While, initially, the notion of coherence and makeability was directed at social-economic aims, the idea of makeability refers to the skin of public space and to aesthetic makeability.

4.1 Two sets of planning concepts

In a comparative research on the development of the harbour cities of London, New York, Barcelona and Rotterdam over the past two centuries, Han Meyer (1996: 381-387, 393-398) concludes that two basically different concepts of urban planning have evolved. He found two 'arrangements' at different periods in the histories of these cities. In some cases, the first concept and in other cases the second concept is more strongly developed.

The first set of concepts is described by an ideal for coherence. This concept is based on the aim of realising a specific program for buildings and places. To organise a "safe, secure and planned future was paramount. The emphasis in this arrangement was on far-reaching regulation of the image and clear-cut fragments of the city" in which strong divisions were created "between various types of public spaces with particular functions and significance. The traffic function of the city is treated as a threatening, deregulating factor for the ultimate image desired". This leads to a "strict division between 'social' public space and traffic infrastructure or 'functional' public space" (Meyer, 1996: 397). Meyer considers this concept to be strongly developed in London, and points out that the Dutch planning system is also based on this arrangement, although to a lesser extent in the city of Rotterdam. The traditional division envisaged between green landscape and urban space could be read as an example of Meyer's strict division on a larger scale.

The other urbanistic concepts are more strongly developed in Barcelona and New York. This arrangement "is based on the acceptance of the uncertainty and changeability inherent to the traffic function of the city. Modern urban life is regarded as challenging, creating possibilities for innovations. This arrangement therefore aims to create conditions for a further development of urban dynamics. The emphasis is on a large measure of freedom in the ultimate development of the image and use of the city. The urban design paradigm employed implies the creation of a network of multifunctional and 'intermediary' public spaces, which integrate networks of disparate urban fragments with that of the modern traffic infrastructure" (Meyer, 1996: 397).

By 'intermediary' Meyer means public spaces and infrastructure that do not have a fixed program for future use so that traffic infrastructure need not be separated so distinctly from social space. Ultimately the difference between the two concepts is based on either fixing the image and the functional use of spaces, the city, or allowing the image and function to emerge from urban dynamics.

Urban planners and architects in the Netherlands are interested in the second possibility, and are planning to use an aesthetic interpretation of this 'dynamic' arrangement, while elaborating on concepts such as mobility, infra-bodies, fragments and collage.

4.2 Planned images of dynamics

The concepts of the second arrangement can be viewed as part of a planning ideal which is basically unlike the traditional one. Contrary to the wish to provide a safe future in a visually ordered and a functionally regulated space, foreign examples made a different type of urbanism possible: a concept that accepts uncertainty and the dynamics of the city. This alternative set of ideals enables urbanists to create conditions for new developments, without the need to regulate every detail, so that a more differentiated urban landscape and a more multifunctional space can develop. This attaches positive value to the traffic function of the city as the intermediary that creates conditions for increasing dynamics.

However, the content of our planning practice is opposed to the dynamic arrangement; the image qualities are predefined, the planning procedures require present programs and our instruments are built for the 'coherence' arrangement, due to a long tradition of planned 'makeability' and a culture of 'neatness'.

At present the new concepts, including dynamics, have been mostly applied as an aesthetic tool which enhances dynamics in architectural form and urban design. The need for a more differentiated and less monotonous space lies in planning and a variety in designs. As our planning system and its instruments have not changed, and as every new plan is controlled by zoning plans — the large set of building standards and strict aesthetic reviews — there is in fact not much room for the devleopment of urban dynamics. The question is whether these imaginary dynamics would not function as a form of 'anaesthetics' soothing our need for differentiation by offering solutions that are more concerned with image than with the content of urbanity (Leach, 1999).

Before 1990, the main ideal was the 'orderly planning' of the 'plannable', while at present the ideal may be called the 'orderly planning' of the 'unplannable'. For our govemmental planning offices, for other urbanists and for architects, other countries and other cultures could benefit from the realisation that not everything should be visually and functionally ordered, and appreciate different perspectives which have evolved in time and the need for other tools that accompany the various degrees of control between the extreme situations of 'total plan'and a total 'lack of plan'.

5. Conclusion

The development of Dutch spatial planning in the 20th century resulted in a detailed planning system which critically reviewed the functional and aesthetic aspects of new elements before their introduction in the existing environment. National and municipal governments have considerably influenced the spatial developments, due to a large set of regulations and the tradition of national mass-housing programs. The guiding ideals behind national planning are expressed in the reports on spatial planning (five since 1960). The aim of the first report was to protect the central 'green space' and to distribute the population evenly throughout the country. The second report reformulated the distribution as 'bundled deconcentration'. The third report introduced 'overspill' areas, to which the population of larger cities could migrate, with the intention of guiding the process of suburbanisation while the countryside was protected by the so-called 'green barriers'.

These three reports reflect a tradition of the designable society, with the intention of providing a secure future to its inhabitants and of regulating its spatial changes. Urbanisation in small and medium towns was preferred to metropolitanisation. In practice, this set of ideals was accompanied by the government's responsibility for housing and spatial order, an order that was based on definite functional divisions and aesthetic harmony.

The fourth report has altered these ideals somewhat. It recognises the importance of international networks, as well as the need for attractive and dynamic large cities as main ports and urban junctions for economic activity. Consequently, spatial and especially aesthetic differentiation were pursued. The fifth report emphasises international perspective and the quest for a metropolitan character of the Ring City. However, traditional ideals persist, prescribing a clear division between countryside and urban development, protecting landscapes of cultural and historical importance, and focusing on aesthetic qualities of architectural and urban design. It seems that the traditional idea of makeability has shifted from social-economic aims to aesthetic and representative makeability. The regulative section of the fifth report proposes a concept of urbanisation similar to the bundled deconcentration of an even distribution of the population of the first three reports.

The Dutch appear to insist on Meyer's 'first set of planning concepts', which strictly regulates the image and the spatial organisation of the country. Although there is an increasing need for differentiation, variation, dynamics and the metropolis, the planning tradition in Holland seems to be unable to create conditions for the further development of urban dynamics. According to Zijderveld (2001) and Meyer (1996), this may be due to the fact that such urbanity, which depends on changeability of space and its functions, will provoke an inherent uncertainty about the future and a lowering of (governmental) control. These elements are hard to reconcile with our tradition of thorough makeability within a largely anti-metropolitan framework.

One may conclude that Dutch planners and urbanists could benefit from experiences and practices in other countries, where urbanisation is less strictly regulated and not as perfectly controlled as in our country, if we are seriously interested in an urbanity of 'real' dynamics (which may include a certain amount of chaos and uncertainty) instead of 'anaesthetic' solutions.

It may be useful to study urban practices and ideals in urban societies which are traditionally open to change and differentiation, not only on the level of urban appearance, but also in terms of the way in which cities are built with less governmental regulations and their capacity to organise and structure space in other ways. According to this perspective, the connection between metropolitan urbanity and the pluriformity of the population, or traditions of immigration, can be interesting. As the fifth report suggests, Holland is becoming a multicultural society, a situation that can perhaps afford an opportunity for a better understanding of urbanity. Both Zijderveld (VROM, 2001: 101-103) and Scheider (1995) point to a link between metropolitan urbanity and cultural pluriformity.

Research on the 'self-aggregating city' as a version of urbanisation, with minimal state interference, is the next step. At the moment various Latin American cities are explored regarding the different possibilities and the forces behind urbanism, with less regulation in a context of a pluriform urban tradition, and its application in the Netherlands.

A wider exchange between urbanists of various countries, cultures and traditions would entail an understanding of one's own perspectives as part of a specific culture. Unlike the present tradition of the international CIAM, which seeks universal urbanism, this kind of interchange could enhance the various cultures, reactivate an appreciation of one's own traditions, and provide a platform from which other communities can learn by an interchange of views and practices.

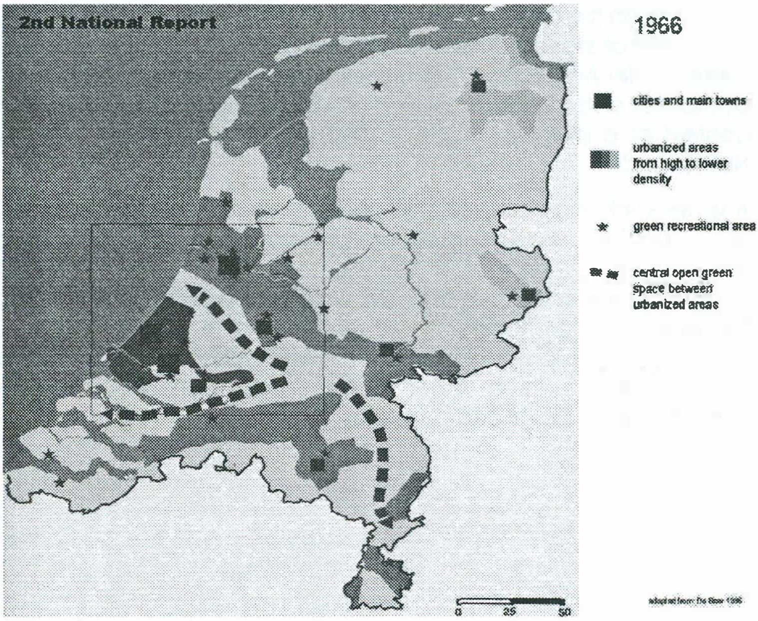

Figure 1: The *Second National Report* had the deconcentration of the larger cities in mind

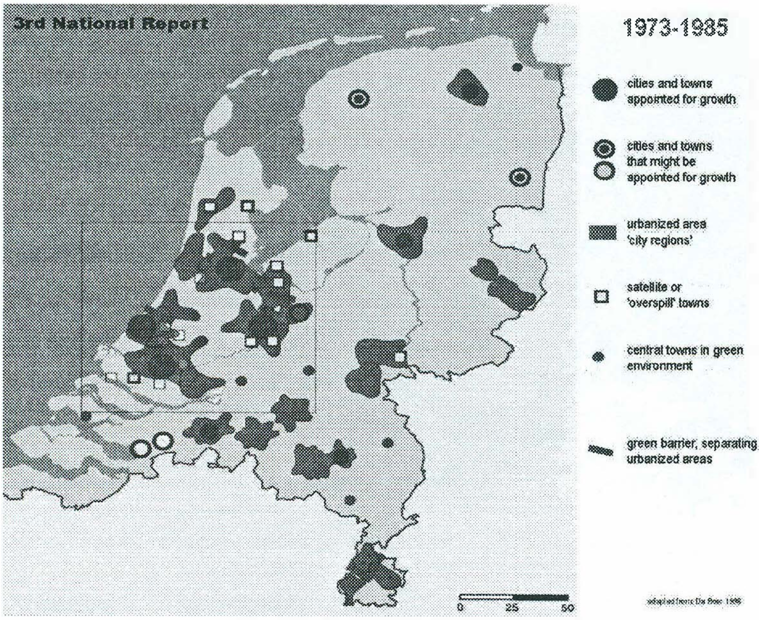

Figure 2: The *Third National Report* proceeds with an antimetropolitan tendency

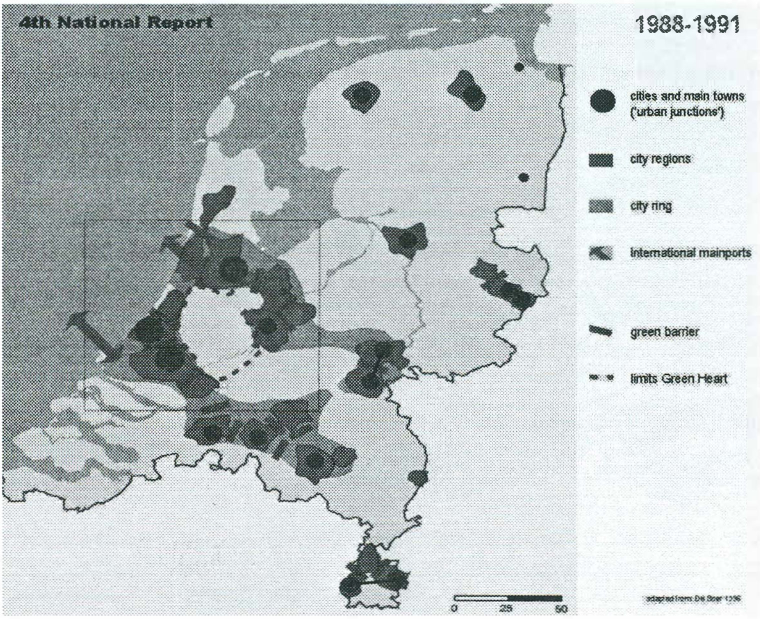

Figure 3: The *Fourth National Report* envisaged a harmonious society: functional as well as aesthetic

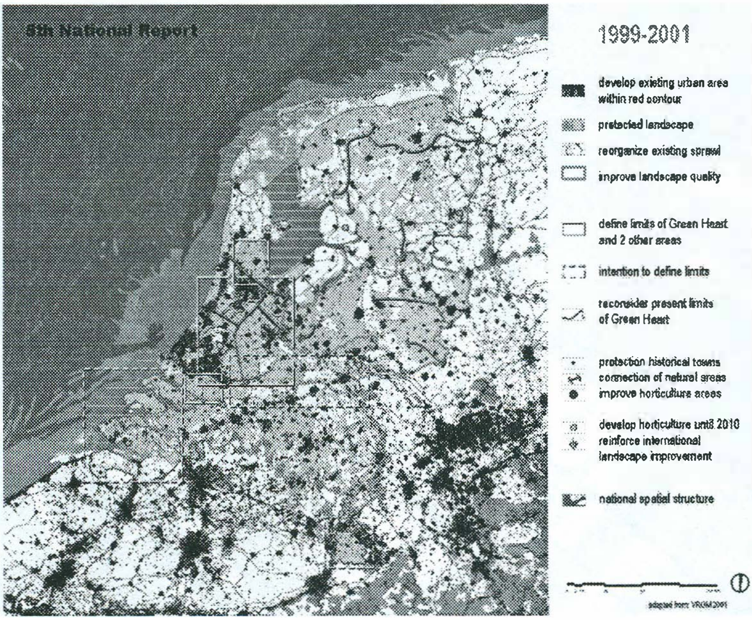

Figure 4: The *Fifth National Report* retained some of the newer ideas with an international perspective

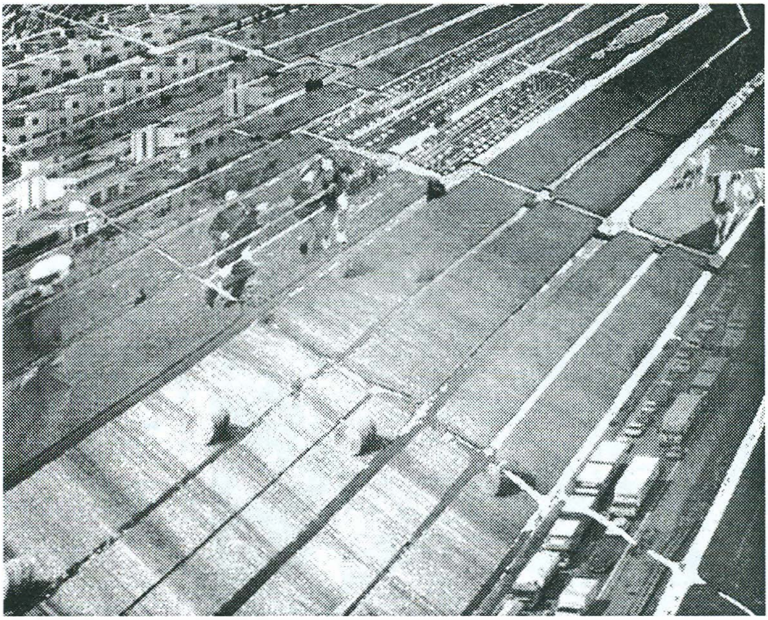

Figure 5: An example of the strict way in which Dutch urbanisation is being regulated

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