

THE DUTCH SPIRIT OF PLACE. BRINGING SPIRIT OF PLACE TO CITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS*

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Abstract: For several centuries, the issue of urban development in The Netherlands was mainly left to private initiative. By the end of the 19th century, with industrialisation and the growth of the working classes, these ideas changed. Slowly the state government built up a framework to ensure reasonable housing for the entire population, later on widening into a legal framework for spatial planning as a whole. Around the same time, the concern for the protection of cultural and natural history started to increase as well. Legislation on the subject of monument care developed in the 20th century into a firm legal protection system, ensuring the protection of valuable cultural and natural historical sites.

However, as the legal framework is quite thoroughly written down, no law can bring spirit to a place. The beginning of the 21st century shows a development towards the inclusion of the existing cultural historic values of an area into the design for new developments. Three examples of this approach are given, each representing an approach to the creation of a spirit of place to a newly developed urban area. The first example is the Waalfront project in the city of Nijmegen. In the urban plan of the new neighbourhood several historic layers are being made visible. The second example is located in the town of Almere. This new town, situated on the bottom of the former Zuiderzee, is only a few decades old. One of the main points in the design for a large new neighbourhood are the many archaeological sites which are dotted around the area. The last example is a project in the city of Rotterdam. One of many recent developments is the building of the Market Hall, a large indoor market where the walls and roof consist of commercial shops and apartments.

Rezumat: În Olanda, secole la rând problema dezvoltării urbanistice a fost lăsată mai ales în seama inițiativei private. Pe la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, odată cu industrializarea și cu dezvoltarea clasei muncitorilor, aceste idei s-au schimbat. Treptat guvernul a construit un cadru normativ necesar pentru a asigura locuințe accesibile pentru întreaga populație. Acesta s-a transformat ulterior în cadru legal pentru planificarea spațială în întregul ei. Concomitent, preocuparea pentru protejarea istoriei naturale și culturale a început de asemenea să ia amploare. Legislația dedicată protejării monumentelor s-a transformat în cursul secolului XX într-un sistem ferm de protejare legislativă, care asigură protejarea siturilor naturale și culturale istorice valoroase.

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Totuși, indiferent cât de solid ar fi cadrul legislativ, nici o lege nu poate asigura spiritul locului. Începutul secolului XXI indică o evoluție spre includerea valorilor cultural-istorice existente ale oricărei zone în procesul de planificare și proiectare pentru noile investiții. Sunt oferite trei exemple ale acestei tendințe, fiecare reprezentând câte o atitudine referitoare la crearea spiritului locului într-o zonă urbană nou constituită. Primul exemplu este proiectul Waalfront, în orașul Nijmegen, unde Planul urbanistic al noului cartier dezvăluie câteva straturi istorice. Al doilea exemplu se găsește în orașul Almere. Acest oraș nou, situat pe fundul fostei Zuiderzee există de doar câteva decenii. Unul dintre principalele obiective ale proiectului pentru un nou mare cartier îl constituie numeroasele situri arheologice care sunt răspândite pe teritoriul său. Ultimul exemplu este un proiect pentru orașul Rotterdam. Una dintre numeroasele investiții recente este construirea unei mari piețe acoperite unde pereții și acoperirea constau din spații comerciale și apartamente.

Introduction

This article consists of two parts. First will be presented a short background to the situation in The Netherlands with regards to the legal framework of urban planning and cultural history. Following this introduction there will be a presentation of several examples of the way cultural history is represented in present day urban planning in The Netherlands.

The author is not in any way affiliated to either the design of the mentioned projects nor part of the execution or decision-making processes of the developments.

Laws and legislation against the cultural background of The Netherlands

Planning in The Netherlands has a long tradition. Over half of the present day country is in danger of flooding, either by sea or by rivers. Many areas in the lower (western and northern) parts of The Netherlands have been claimed from the sea. Many lakes have been dried and almost all natural swamps have been cultivated (Fig. 1). In the southern and eastern parts of the country woodlands, peatbogs and heather have been cultivated and transformed in agricultural land, pastures and urban landscapes as well.

Especially the battle against the sea has been a hard one. Many times the people claimed land from the sea, in many other cases the sea took back the land and the people inhabiting it. After long periods of more or less 'spontaneous' land use, around the year 1000 AD several reasons gave way to a development of more and more structured urban planning and land use systems. Ruling elites, merchants, entrepreneurs and religious authorities each had their own reasons for creating a structured way of planning the landscape. After several centuries large areas of The Netherlands were planned, designed and structured in a way that fitted the population best.¹

¹ Van der Cammen, De Klerk 1999.