

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN MANAGING URBAN REGIONS

Illustrated by the case of a new regional plan for a medium-sized Dutch urban region within the emergent North West European Metropolis

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SUMMARY

The urban region of today is very different from the city region of fifty years ago. The daily urban system of Dutch citizens – and of many other Europeans – has expanded enormously and continues to grow as rapid transport links are created between cities and regions. The scope of social activity and spatial development is also increasing at the European and global scales, with important consequences for the management of urban regions. These developments are illustrated by the case of a medium-sized urban region in the east of the Netherlands: the Arnhem–Nijmegen region (700,000 inhabitants; 1000 square kilometres). The region is preparing its Second Regional Plan.

The urban region of the 21st century requires a drastically revised policy agenda. Accessibility at different scales is essential for maintaining their positions. Other new issues are the transformation of agricultural areas into regional landscape parks and restructuring of the urban area. Blueprint planning on the regional scale is definitely a thing of the past. Plans increasingly take on the form of attractive perspectives within which multiple, often public-private, implementation scenarios are possible. To implement their plans government authorities increasingly rely on the support of the public, market players and civil society institutions. Governance is the key word. This approach to planning the urban region places increasing demands on the skills of planners and administrators in steering development processes. These skills are particularly important at the regional level because adequate institutional and instrumental implementation frameworks are often lacking. The Arnhem–Nijmegen region is working with policy issue maps at different scales. Each scale requires a different managerial role and the planning tasks vary considerably between scales.

The urban region is here to stay and it requires a new form of regional administration – a ‘new regionalism’. One of the first priorities for a new regionalism is to mobilise a regional audience sensitive to the regional mission. The identity of the region is an important success factor, as is a policy agenda with a clear sense of urgency. Above all, we need committed regionalists. The planning style of new regionalism is consistent with the idea of governance: communicative, cooperative and transparent.

• My contribution is about the different shape and character of the emergent urban region, a new type that has emerged during the last fifty years and that's now making a quantum leap. My reference is Europe and my case a medium size urban region in the Netherlands. It's the Arnhem Nijmegen region, two cities and 19 towns and villages, and it's brand name is KAN. After having stated something about the traits of the new urban region I will translate these to three themes:

- planning issues, what's new and different ?
- planning approach, what's the necessary approach ?
- planning tasks, what's to be done ?

I will make some general remarks on each theme before illustrating them on the basis of the region where I work as chairman of the regional board. My central statement will be that the new urban region of the 21st century requires a drastically revised policy agenda which asks for another planning style which I will indicate as new regionalism. Let's start with a picture of the Netherlands some 50 years ago. In the Netherlands of the 21st century the majority of the working population live in a different municipality from where they work. In 1950 this proportion was just 15% (and then there were twice as many municipalities as now). This is just one example of the enormous increase in scale of the "daily urban system" of the average Dutch citizen over the last 50 years. Of course, the planners of the 1960s also worked with regional maps, but the big difference between the city regions of those days and urban regions today is the breakdown of the hierarchical structure of the central city and surrounding towns and villages. The modern urban region is a larger-scale urban network, a regional city, with many more economic and social interactions and a greater distribution of facilities, but above all a more dispersed pattern of central areas. This last feature is expressed in the emerging pattern of tangential links within a less dominant radial infrastructure.

The Netherlands contains six urban regions – varying from 500,000 to two million inhabitants and varying in size from 30 by 30 to 60 by 60 kilometres – which may be considered medium-sized by European standards. With the introduction of the High Speed Train in the Netherlands (the Amsterdam–Paris line is under construction) Randstad Holland will gradually assume the identity of a single interconnected urban region (a single employment and consumer market) of more than five million people, thanks mainly to the rapid new European rail connection between Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Randstad Holland will not become a major international city on the scale of Paris or London, but rather an extended metropolitan area that can function like a major compact city because of its rapid rail connections and dense motorway network.

• Let's scale up a little bit and look at the new map of Europe. Because urban regions are emerging all across Europe. The central cities in these regions have become an integral part of their surroundings. Their success in almost all spatial-economic fields now depends on regional cooperation. But there is more to it than that. Besides the growth in the scale of urban activity driven by growing living standards and expanding mobility, an increase in scale can also be seen at the European level. The prime stimulus for this is the progressive

economic integration in the European Union, facilitated by improvements to the physical – and virtual – infrastructure and the growing importance of the nodes in these networks. The development of these nodes provides an opportunity for the central cities in these city regions to regain lost ground within the hierarchy. The HST network has created a new order, a new map of Europe with city centre locations of European significance: the stations in the high speed rail network. These nodes link the urban regions at the European scale.

This upscaling is also expressed in the growing number of social interactions and transnational activities in the urbanised North West Europe zone, the area enclosed by Randstad Holland, the Flemish Diamond (Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent) and the Ruhr. This North West European metropolis in the making contains about 30 million people (for comparison, the Boston–Washington corridor contains 39 million people). The globalisation of the world economy will also contribute to growth in the scale of urban processes. The challenge is to win a prominent place in the new world order, and the desire to meet it will speed up the formation of ‘super-regions’. The success of the new super-regions, however, will depend primarily on the performance of the interconnected parts, the urban regions. In short, the European urban regions of the 21st century will become incorporated within a tightly linked network of central areas. The NWE metropolis presents opportunities for raising the performance of this global super-region.

- I'll descend now to the scale of the urban region, in fact the Arnhem Nijmegen region situated comfortably in this developing super-region. The Arnhem–Nijmegen urban region – the area I use to illustrate my observations – lies in the middle of this emerging MWE metropolis. It is a region of 700,000 inhabitants in the east of the Netherlands near the German border. Its almost entirely national orientation emphasises its peripheral location, a position which is gradually changing as a result of the spatial-economic developments I have just outlined. In about 20 years or so this medium-sized urban region will look to the NWE metropolis for its spatial context.
- Now what happened to the city-region and what is this new urban region about? The expansion of the daily urban system to the regional scale has brought an end to the separation of town and country. In the Netherlands, too, the still largely agricultural countryside is falling increasingly within the urban sphere. In these ‘hybrid landscapes’ farming activities are being replaced by urban uses, such as recreational areas, rural homes, major retail outlets, etc. The green areas of the urban region are increasingly the playground of the urban population. In some urban regions of Europe these trends have been used as arguments for their transformation into regional landscape parks.

The spatial dynamics, upscaling and changing orientation of the regional economy make it increasingly important to have an up-to-date regional spatial and economic strategy and to coordinate regional investments. Often, though, the legislative and institutional frameworks for such a strategy are overtaken by events. The Netherlands is no exception. The Dutch system of government is still based on a 19th century doctrine which has been adjusted

piecemeal to meet the needs of a changing society. The Netherlands is currently preparing new legislation to enable these regions to guide spatial development at an appropriate level to ensure environmental quality, adequate infrastructure, a well educated labour market and a competitive economic profile. No additional tier of government will be created. Instead, the legislation is based on municipal partnerships, with a regional executive responsible for selected statutory tasks in the field of spatial planning, infrastructure and the regional economy. This can be considered a minimum level of steering given the increasingly dynamic social and economic environment at this scale.

The emerging urban region also performs poorly when it comes to identity. A regional identity is not just important for residents, entrepreneurs and visitors, but particularly for projecting a recognisable profile at home and abroad. Identity is both inherited and created. Physical features play a fundamental role, but the culture and economy of a region are core components.

- Let me illustrate this on the basis of my case, the Arnhem-Nijmegen region. In physical terms, the Arnhem–Nijmegen region is unique, at least within the Netherlands. Various large landscape units come together here to create a varied topography: an extensive river plain squeezed between two forested glacial ridges, protruding from the north and south. Here the Rhine splits on its way to the North Sea. The medium-sized old cities on the banks of each river are the two dominant elements in this landscape. The region has a rich history, dating from the first Roman settlements, and has seen many battles. Economically, the region fits the same general profile as the other Dutch regions (reduction in manufacturing industry, increase in services), but it is distinctly diverse, with scientific research taking a prominent place (food and health technology). Among small and medium sized businesses the creative industries have a high profile. The tourism sector is also significant. The region's identity can be summed up in three words: Nature, Culture and Science.

The region is currently working on a Second Regional Plan, which reflects a number of changes since the first plan (1998). These changes can be grouped under the themes of planning issues, planning approach and planning tasks. In what follows, I attempt to sketch the general trends within each theme, illustrating them with examples from the Second Regional Plan for our region.

But first, the main differences between the first and second plan. The first plan was geared particularly to identifying locations for major new housing developments around the cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen and the area in between. Now these are being built, the designation of locations for new housing is no longer an issue. Mobility has taken its place as a dominant theme. The accessibility of the region as a whole and within the region is an important new theme. The other is the future of the countryside. This was not even a topic in the first regional plan because it was left to lower tier authorities. Now that the rural area has entered a period of flux (declining agricultural activity) – and especially because of the emergence of hybrid landscapes with a mix of urban and rural activities – it has become an issue for the

region. All these changes draw attention to the issue of the region's identity, which itself is a reflection of the economic and cultural priorities in the region.

- My first theme is about the new planning issues of the urban region. As the world of the urban region expands, greater attention has to be paid to ensuring good access to the region as a whole and good accessibility within the region. Participating in the global community means having good air connections and, for medium-sized regions, fast interregional connections to international airports. Access to the European high-speed train and motorway networks is vital for accessibility within Europe. And, as the radial networks give way to more criss-cross patterns, the region itself needs to redefine its own accessibility profile. What is needed in the rural areas is a reorganisation of the 'slow network' of transport infrastructure. Recent research has shown that when choosing where to live, people tend to look for places with access to both the fast and slow transport networks. A further shift in planning thinking at this scale is the growing emphasis on urban restructuring. The period of major urban extensions seems to be coming to an end.

- Now, how do we translate these issues in our new regional plan for the Arnhem Nijmegen region? The Second Regional Plan goes much further than its predecessor in forming a balanced strategy for both the urban areas and the less urbanised countryside around and between the cities. The agricultural production area is changing character, evolving into a playground and garden for city dwellers; a park landscape. Such a transformation requires new concepts and, above all, new actors, to give the area a whole new direction. The essence is to provide a good quality network of cycleways and footpaths linking attractive places and leisure and cultural amenities.

A second difference is the nature of urban expansion. The first regional plan put greater emphasis on large greenfield developments: the surrounding rural area was annexed. The Second Regional Plan adopts a strategy of transforming the existing urban area (intensification, change of use, restructuring). This urban development strategy reinforces the need for a better regional transport system. The regional rail network now carries mainly intercity services. The Second Regional Plan builds on plans to make the network available for more regional rail and light rail services, including new stations. In addition, the supraregional road infrastructure needs to be expanded, both to make the region more accessible and to ease the flow of national and international traffic. The High Speed Train station at Arnhem is crucial for the region. Current rail capacity is totally inadequate on both the Arnhem–Utrecht and the Arnhem–Dusseldorf stretches of the line.

- Let's now turn to planning approaches. The time for making blueprint plans for the city region is long gone. It is now more a question of shaping development perspectives that are flexible enough to accommodate projects in all combinations of public-private involvement. Attention has shifted from plans to projects – especially programmes of urban intensification – in which decision making on plans and projects includes ample opportunities for public participation (citizens, market players and institutional parties). The planning and

implementation process is more accurately described in terms of governance than government.

- What do we learn from this new approaches in the management of our region? The process of preparing the Second Regional Plan is still in its early stages (an initial statement of outline policy has been adopted following public consultation). The situation I have just sketched will form the basis for further work. A regional laboratory is being set up to establish the regional transport system, with an input from private parties. The proposed concept for the development of the regional landscape park, which has drawn much inspiration from German regions like Rhein Mainz and Escher park, involves tying together all the various local and private initiatives.
- After having said this about planning issues and planning approaches I now turn to my third theme, regional planning tasks. The mission for urban regions in general may be condensed into creating the right conditions for ‘the good life’ and for optimal accessibility at all levels. The possibilities for leading the good life – for high living standards – are determined by many variables. In essence, it boils down to a well educated and trained workforce and a competitive labour market; but a green living and working environment, cultural amenities and prestigious educational institutes are important too. The regional planning assignment is always in the service of this mission.

Regional planning is often ‘something else’ – an unusual and complex task – because the institutional framework and available instruments are often inadequate for working on this scale. This puts considerable demands on the skills of regional planners in guiding the process. Although there is much to be said for a governance type approach even without this constraint, it can be very useful indeed in compensating for the absence of proper institutional and instrumental arrangements. Another key element of the regional planning objectives involve thinking and action on various scales and in different roles (often also varying in time and from place to place). And, as the European context gains in importance, the need for a European agenda becomes more pressing. The core business will remain, of course, the regional level itself, which requires many different roles: coordination, direction, development, etc. But in the end all politics is local, and many regional objectives are derived from the bottom up. For regional administrators and planners this means not only having a good ear for local concerns, but also adopting a facilitating role.

- What does this all mean for the planning tasks in the Arnhem Nijmegen region? In our region the idea that spatial development must be placed within a gradually changing context is gaining ground. The peripheral position of our region in the Netherlands will in time be replaced by a position in the middle of the North West European metropolis. One indication of this is the growing intensity of contacts with our German neighbours to the east. There is also a growing awareness that regional planning, first and foremost, must be instrumental in creating the qualities that reinforce the region’s main strengths. Such quality is not just measured in kilometres of road or area of business parks. The quality of the labour market

and tapping this resource in national and international marketing campaigns is more important in attracting companies than old style acquisition exercises geared to selling industrial land as fast as possible. Assets such as green space, leisure opportunities and cultural amenities are increasingly looked for by potential residents and businesses alike. They are the cornerstones of regional identity. The importance of identity building at an international level, coupled with regional marketing, is receiving increasing recognition in our region as well.

In preparing for the Second Regional Plan we have identified our task at three scales, and for each scale we have defined our steering and managerial role. These tasks are illustrated on three policy issue maps. The international scale map shows the importance we place on being linked into the European High Speed Network. Another key feature of this map is the increased water storage capacity of our river system. Meeting this challenge will depend to a large extent on the type of measures taken upstream in Germany. The role we see for ourselves at this scale can be summed up as 'Initiating and Agenda-setting'. Lobbying for the region on other levels is gaining importance. The substance of our task I would call 'Connect and Distinguish'. We need better connections with our national and international environments, and at the same time we need to develop our own identity, our own set of distinctive qualities.

Most of the planning goals can be seen on the second policy map. This is, after all, our core business. Our role can be summed up as 'Coordination and Development': managing our urban region. The guiding motto is 'Strong Cities in a Strong Region'. Our efforts will be focused on two projects. The first is to transform the existing rail system into a smooth-running regional light rail network (including new stations). The other is to transform the agricultural area into a regional landscape park. Work on this scale, and particularly on these two 'grand projets', will involve new forms of regional governance.

At the local scale we see a task for local government in particular. The motto here is 'Celebrate Variety!' Differences add more to the quality of a region than uniformity. But some local requirements do require intervention by the region, such as restructuring village environments. The region's role is largely 'Stimulating and Facilitating'.

Our strategy for the further development of the Second Regional Plan will be to 'keep the planning process short and move on to practical projects'. Managing urban regions is more about doing than making paper plans.

- Let me finish with some observations on the nature and character of regional planning, the management of the new urban region. For me regional planning is "something else". The urban region that has developed over the last few decades is ripe for a new type of planning, a different sort of management. We need a 'new regionalism' to replace the inadequate traditional approaches. And we need it desperately because people's lives are increasingly played out on this spatial scale.

There is much to be done on the road to a new regionalism. We often lack a regional audience because social life is still largely organised at the local level (the market, institutions and clubs and societies). The regional community still has to be built and so regional planning has to work with a vision and a mission. All this makes considerable demands on the communication skills of regional planners and administrators. They must ensure that local communities identify with the vision. Concrete regional goals must also be shared. The local level often provides sufficient opportunities to secure the implementation of plans. At the regional level much more active consensus building is often required to guarantee action on the ground.

Against this background, I see four success factors for managing urban regions:

1. A shared and clearly defined idea of the region's identity as a distinctive area within its geographical context
2. The presence of an urgent agenda (seize opportunities, avert threats) and a widely supported consensus on the action needed to complete this agenda
3. Strong regional institutions and committed regionalists (planners, administrators and social actors)
4. A communicative, cooperative and transparent planning style

The urban region is not a temporary phenomenon and the importance of steering on this scale will only increase. At the same time, the phenomenon of the regional city (a city on a regional scale) is still quite new. The planning profession will have to make an enormous effort to develop an adequate and reliable set of planning and management tools.

I congratulate ISOCARP on their choice of topic for this congress and I wish you all (and myself) a highly instructive meeting.