

Structure plan as an instrument of urban management.

Translation and revision of an article in the Netherlands Municipals Management Magazine
Stadswerk, The Hague, 1997.

Local government in the Netherlands will have to work at the item "headlines of governance", as a part of the renewal of local management. Besides the scaling up of the urban planning profession, (e.g. regional coherence, internationalising) an increasing attention should be given to liveability and vitality of villages, neighbourhoods and urban districts, by the use of integral improvement plans for this lowest level of planning. But they cannot renovate all urban districts, together forming a city, at the same time. This is why the steering of those district plans happens at local (municipal) level through a *strategic priority statement* and the *sector programming* on municipal level. The execution occurs mostly on that lower district or project level. Planning and managing at municipal level needs a professional development of the belonging instruments and managing skills. These elements have been subject of investigation in the PhD-thesis "Panning and managing the city of the future", Jan Bredenoord, December 1996 (*1):

- The use of the municipal structure plan (Masterplan) was investigated in 29 large and medium-sized municipalities, and furthermore the belonging instruments like strategic research and investment strategies.
- The urbanisation policy in two municipalities (Utrecht and Enschede) was investigated and the therefore used planning type, the municipal management and some main organisational aspects.

The practice.

The research results indicate that the having of the structure plan, or a city vision for the future, is not a guarantee for the right use thereof. It happens often that a realised structure plan is not being kept actual. So, after some years, the value of such a plan is limited then. In 20% of the investigated cases the municipalities used a structure plan in accordance with the Dutch Spatial Planning Act (WRO). You could say that in those cases the management around the plan is regularly very adequate. In another 20% of the investigated cases the municipalities don't have an actual plan for the future city. The remaining 60% disposes of a future vision, a structure vision or a policy document for spatial development, or is busy developing such a plan. In most of the last mentioned cases it is possible to deal with this plan at a distanced way, more or less free of obligations.

In general you can say that a structure plan or a Masterplan for the city as a whole needs an adequate urban management to define concrete projects that make the city vision realisable. You could also say that the having of a structure plan is mostly of little importance when an adequate urban management is missing.

The following points are now under discussion:

- What's the most ideal structure plan form and which developments can you find ?
- What's good urban management and what could be said about the quality of existing urban management ?
- What is the future perspective of the urban planning profession ?

The municipal structure plan.

The municipal structure plan in the Netherlands in general did not play an prominent role in urban planning in the Netherlands, with the City Plan of Amsterdam as a very good exception (*2). The municipal government is not obligated to elaborate a structure plan for the city as a whole, or for parts of it. The practice of local spatial planning was in a large number of cases mainly based on sector plans. Within this sector approach, the planning practice was dominated for example with public housing policy plans, infrastructure plans, public transportation plans or green structure plans. However, the municipal sectors could come into a competing role, or worked in an isolated position. A structure plan normally was started when the daily practice got jammed, which happened when a large number of projects was in execution and the urban coherence was lacking. Meanwhile there was a growing knowledge about the necessity of coherence of urban structures, elements, sector plans and strategic projects. The Fourth National Spatial Document (later: VINEX) gave an impulse to the development of visions and integrated plans for cities/municipalities and urban regions.

Around 1996 structure planning became a booming business in The Netherlands, but it led to different forms of plans such as: structure plans (more or less traditional), rough sketches, future visions and spatial policy documents. So the plan forms were not unambiguous and the status was in general not strong. When, however, a municipal counsel chose a formal status in accordance with the National Spatial Planning Act, there was always a more normalised structure plan, thus with a bigger political impact.

When the feasibility of the structure plan is under discussion, you can discover that this plan often shows a wishful image. Over more, it is a plan which indicates the new urban expansions for the years to come and it's infrastructure consequences.

In general the structure plan should have a more important status in the future (so it can't be only a spatial plan) and be an integrated Masterplan for the future development of cities or coherent urban areas. The municipal management should work actively with such a plan, and not only when formal testing of project proposals and building permits is under discussion.

A good structure plan, or Masterplan, or City plan, could be a main instrument of the urban management, and the steering instrument for strategic activities and projects. Eventually the development of a new type of structure plan or Master plan could be developed, which is based on:

- An long term development vision (for the city of the future).
- An integrated approach, and cooperation between the various municipal sectors: physical, infrastructural, environmental, social and economical.
- A flexible plan form, however without being free of obligations, preferably with the legal status (WRO).
- A clear position for urban research and a periodic evaluation as a part of a cyclic planning process.
- Public support of inhabitants, entrepreneurs, the private sector and NGO's.
- The linking of the aspect "willing" (vision and plan) with the aspect "can be achieved" (organisational aspects, span of control, public land policy, municipal and private investment strategies).
- A short term execution plan with a financial chapter and public private convenience. The public private convenience for example with housing-corporations are here very important.

Municipal (urban) management.

Questions are: what is urban management really and what are its main tasks ? In general you could say that that urban (municipal) management must be executed with a high quality standard. But: by whom is this management formed ? In general they are the local political rulers and the managers of the sectors of the municipals organisations. Together, they have to elaborate the headlines of an integrated local policy and to cooperate with each other, while working at the communal Masterplan. Furthermore they have to manage the execution of the plan and the definition of strategic projects and sector programmes. Until so far everything seems to be very logical, but in local government practice you find some problems; sometimes between the politicians and the officials, sometimes within municipal organisations. An improvement can be achieved by a better cooperation between the different political rulers. Sometimes this is not the easiest part. But an optimal cooperation between the managers of the sectors and the politicians is crucial. Within a communal atmosphere they have to develop and elaborate spatial development visions, within a city-wide approach, showing opportunities for the future urban development. In managerial terms they have to steer the practice of planning by strategic priority statements and the definition of strategic projects.

All this seems to be a very logical way of managing the city, but in within local the government practice there are problems in relation to the described planning system; and the problems can be political or organisational (or both). Improvements can be achieved by an optimal relationship between the local political rulers and between the politicians (which have to form a "union") at one hand and the urban managers at the other hand. The making and maintaining of a common vision for the city of the future is necessary, and must be the main guide for all activities, plans and actions. A written status could describe the positions of all local actors and the procedures to be followed. Furthermore a intensified cooperation between the developing part and the maintaining part of the municipals organisation can be achieved. Furthermore the cooperation between the physical aspects and welfare/economic aspects could be achieved.

I described the following indicators for good local management (as part of good local governance):

- To work with a common vision for the development of the city of the future and a periodic priority statement.
- To make measurable the political goals.
- The permanent monitoring of the : "state of the city" (*3) and its dynamics.
- An unequivocal steering of urban management and the execution of strategic projects.
- A professional managerial management of planning processes, sector programmes and strategic projects.
- A periodic evaluation and actualisation of the vision of the future.

Perspectives for the future.

The perspective of the profession of urban planning should be served by the improvement of urban management and its instruments. In some cases new communication and decision making systems can be necessary in order to improve (at first: internal) communication and cooperation. You could think of a managerial group of political rulers and officials, coming together once or twice per month. However a more difficult challenge (the second one) is appearing. While improving the internal municipals organisation, much attention should be given to the necessary cooperation between the municipality and the private sector. This cooperation does not occur by itself and does not bring the various interests of private actors automatically together within a communal cooperation. In the Netherlands the role of the housing-corporations is very important because they possess half of all the housing-stock in the country. The housing-corporations can

play an independent role nowadays, and can act as a housing-NGO. (In the past the financing of these organisations took place by the national government). Each housing-corporation should make a vision for its housing-stock in the long term and should cooperate with the local management. Local government should give opportunities for the housing-corporations to participate in urban planning. They should give each other the opportunity to compare their programmes once per year. It's evident that various housing-corporations within the municipals borders should cooperate also, both for long term planning and short term execution. The municipals priorities in district revitalisation should form part of the negotiations. (*4) Furthermore, local trade and industry, the Chambers of Commerce, project developers and investors should be involved in a yearly "public-private conference" with the intention to gear all main activities to one another. Until so far this article speaks about planning and management on municipal level. Concrete public support should be realised at the (lower) district and neighbourhood level, where inhabitants and entrepreneurs can be involved.

The perspective of the future of the city includes also a further development of the planning and managing instruments. The vision for the future city (long term) or structure plan (this is the term in the Netherlands; in other countries you can meet the term Masterplan or Municipal Development Plan) can play an important role in integral policy making and urban management. Preferably it will be a compact written and presented vision for the future and a road-map to come to that. So there is sufficient attention for the making of the plan (the vision for the future can be developed and changed during the passage of time) through actions, sector programmes and the execution thereof. The vision, structure plan or Masterplan, can also be the integration frame work for new areas of attention, such as municipal water management plans and ecological urban structure plans. Aspects of welfare and economic development can be added to these plans. In the future those integrated Master plans can be developed as real City plans.

New style Master planning.

The result of the research work was that the physical planning profession can be improved by the development of a new style structure plan or Masterplan, for cities a whole. Such a plan is always very specific for any city, which have its own history and social cultural identity. The vision for the future gives strong indications for the development, as well as the maintenance of the city. However, a too static character must be prevented, so it must be possible to evaluate and to adapt the vision, with a cyclic planning process as a most important consequence. Constant monitoring of urban dynamics and situations of social and economic deprivation was in the investigated municipalities greatly necessary. Within the new style Masterplan for municipalities the research of liveability and the quality of neighbourhoods, residential districts, urban centres and economic districts, gets a prominent place. (*5) Municipal strategic research and the investment strategy, were mentioned as very important items. Municipal representatives responded about this item at a very similar way: both aspects of the local planning system were neglected in the Netherlands during the last decade, but should form part of a renovated municipal planning system.

Notes:

(*1) The research took place during the years 1995 and 1996 under supervision of prof. dr. Paul Drewe, Urban and Regional Design&Planning, Delft University of Technology.

(*2) The Amsterdam Structure Plan has a long history. Within a period of 70 years nine structure plans were draw up. However, the Amsterdam Structure Plan was not a subject of investigation in this PhD-research. Other (positive) exceptions in the Netherlands were Deventer, Groningen and Tilburg (1996).

(*3) The project "the state of the city" was developed in the Municipality of Enschede (Title: De staat van de stad; Municipality of Enschede, 1994) and can be seen as an example of the constant monitoring of the state of cities. (The research part of the urban planning in Netherlands municipalities was a weak factor, which was one of the results of the writer's PhD-thesis in 1996).

(*4) The New Charter of Athens 2003. The European Council of Town Planners' Vision for Cities in the 21th century (Lisbon, 20 November 2003) gives a clear understanding of the importance of cities and a city-wide integrated approach in planning and management. The key item in this charter is "the connected city". Full attention is given to the different scales of planning and acting, the different social, economical and spatial developments in society and the growing importance of cities within (inter)national networks of cities and regions.

(*5) The New Charter of Athens indicates that the planner's role is to convince all involved parties to share a common and long term vision for their city or region, beyond their individual interests and objectives.