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Cultivating Urgencies

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Chapter 14

Cultivating Urgencies



Rob Roggema and Winy Maas

Abstract

Cultivating and stirring up urgencies: wait and plan.
Spotlighting the jewels of North-Holland.
Formulating new tasks to speed up housing construction.
Quicker, cheaper, nicer, and more adaptive living through changeable and modular thinking, and becoming more sustainable by lengthening the time chain (prefab to the max).
Architecture students are explorers of new practical and technical products that contribute to housing development.
Calculate and estimate the effect of technical innovation of one million homes in terms of carbon, ecology, and materials.
Consideration of ecological, social, and aesthetic aspects of urban planning and landscape.
Do not abandon the landscape: we need a bigger voice on this from architects and landscape architects.
Conduct the conversations on the future on a yearly basis.
Strengthen bonds with industry.

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Fig. 14.1 Seoul. (Credit: Ossip van Duivenbode)

14.1 Introduction

When people hear the name “Winy Maas,” they often first think of the architect, but he is first and foremost a landscape architect. Educated in Boskoop, it explains his love for green, plants, and nature in the city. This is reflected in his projects (A+U, 2020; Hannema, 2021a); every plant species found in Korea can be seen on a bridge in the heart of Seoul (Fig. 14.1), the Valley on the Zuidas in Amsterdam is draped in plants and trees (Fig. 14.2), and on top of the recently opened Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen, a green rooftop park can be found (Fig. 14.3). Winy combines conceptual leaps in thinking with data-driven research and an eye for detail. Buildings have appeared in every corner of the world, which often stand out, because they deviate from the usual. This confuses and invites opposition, but above all: it inspires.

14.2 The Confluence

In thinking about urban planning in the Netherlands, fundamental aspects are often absent: besides the ecological, social, and aesthetic ones. This is fairly dramatic, because a lot of thinking is being done from the legal and planning, the flat plane, while the influence on the experience for the people is found lacking. There is an



Fig. 14.2 The Valley. (Credit: EDGE)

absence of program at universities of applied sciences for urban planning (with landscape incorporated into it), which can focus on those aspects that might be best targeted from a technical perspective. The issue would then be what a certain functional, technical-spatial procedure would mean for the beauty of, and life in, the city and the region. If there was a titillating and poetic school like there was in France in 'l'école de Paysage de Versailles' on the rue Hardy under, among others, Yves Brunier, in which there was space to think outside of the here-and-now pragmatism, it would be a real addition to the Dutch palette of educational programs. An institute à la the Confluence (Institute for Innovation and Creative Strategies in Architecture), in the heart of Paris, is another example.



Fig. 14.3 Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen. (Credit: Ossip van Duivenbode)

14.3 Triplet

- Firstly. In reality, there are three classic terrains on which our cities and landscapes must be designed. Social, economic, and ecological. They come together in the spatial, through which that knowledge actually becomes the alma mater of the arts and sciences. The social drama that occurs is about the increasing social separation, the polarization. In the social domain, we will thus have to bring back the sense of community, bring people back together, and create the spaces and environments needed for this. The economic domain desires ecologization and the means to make space. The ecological domain contains airs, soils, animals, and plants.
- Secondly. How can we use and increase the necessary techniques to clarify and expand the above issues, from a/our technocratic approach (the malleability of architecture and urban planning)? How can we enable economic laws to lead to environments that are affordable and possess quality of life? How can we, for example, through laws, force margins to be used by developers in service of that quality improvement? In this way, the calculation model must come together with the visualization model, a connection that will become increasingly more important.
- Thirdly. It is reasonable to give meaning to these questions at all scales (Maas et al., 1998), by staging the space. We need to realize that the small scale often



Fig. 14.4 Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen. (Credit: Ossip van Duivenbode)

has much bigger consequences than planning can comprehend (Hannema, 2021b). From the smallest screw that keeps bio-based materials together, and thus cannot rust, to the toilets that are flushed with rainwater like in Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen (Fig. 14.4); when these are translated to the city, region, and country, their effect is immense. So too nano-scale thinking, in which, for example, material can be broken down in situ in a natural way and adapt itself to use. Or in which it can offer a capacity for solutions for a healthy air, water, and soil, our living environment.

There is a great lack of thinking when it comes to sustainability at a landscape level. In the planning of wind turbines, expansions are planned in every direction.

With disastrous consequences for the leveling of the landscape. Luckily, it can happen that a judge in south France allocates compensation to a couple that experienced trouble with a nearby wind turbine at a kilometer from their home. The leveling of our landscape is a form of hopelessness and helplessness, so that eventually, the judge must decide. Would we as architects and landscape architects not be able to do a much better job? We are absent and are (politically) abandoning our landscape (Maas et al., 2014).

14.4 Cultivating Urgencies

In one of our design studios “Apocalypse Now,” we investigated how we can stir up urgencies. In this laboratory experiment, we sort of waited until problems manifested themselves more and more emphatically until the necessary action is inevitable and felt by all. Often, this already happens, such as with the flooding in Limburg, the Dutch housing construction coming too late, or the earthquakes in Groningen. A clearly observable and tangible problem is then a breeding ground for true transformation. You construct, as it were, the future together, via a strategy of “wait and plan.” What if we wait, watch the problem grow, and anticipate and make plans for it? Thinking in scenarios is necessary and helpful, and possibly a core subject in the new program, but it must be through continually updating and adapting a scenario (Maas et al., 2015), and by thinking in parameters that can be scripted, and can be digitally altered, by shifting sliders. In this way, we can play with the future and use software as the frame for design teaching.

14.5 Self-Conscious Region

You can then consciously go out looking for the great transition themes as an alternative model for current practice in which the desire for change is few and far between. The sense of urgency is minimal and must therefore be awakened. The University is an excellent place to initiate that debate. Municipalities can also take on a much more self-conscious role in that context, making use of the competition between developers who can push each other to new heights in tenders. In those tenders, there is space to demand greater ambition, but it is advisable to get the sense of change broadly accepted. Just like an ecosystem is constantly renewing itself to survive, so too must a peripheral region drive itself onwards. Compare this to Rotterdam, which has set up a local Building Code in which roofs on buildings must have a greater carrying capacity to be prepared for green roofs, solar panels, and water storage. Rotterdam has 18 square km of flat roofs, and the plans for them are celebrated each year with a roof award and roof festival.

14.6 Jewels

The most beautiful places in North-Holland are often not appreciated enough.

- It has one of the most beautiful coasts in Europe, the sea is so close, and the people are the first to oppose too many wind-turbines too close by at sea. That is a quality. But perhaps it needs to be wider.
- The region should demonstrate the ecological problem much more clearly. The dunes, the inner dune edge, the water problems with freshwater supply, the salinization and its impact on agriculture and drinking water require much larger and more visible measures. A waterpark.
- Why are there so many logistic ‘boxes’ in this part of the country? It is not for nothing that there is so much resistance against the google-boxes in the Wieringermeer, so would an alternative plan not be welcome here?
- Is agriculture in North-Holland not becoming alien? Around the beautiful UNESCO polders, a horticulture area has been created, and it is questionable how well this fits between dunes, polders, and more. And if has to be there, could we not come up with alternative spatial models for it?
- 15% of the IJsselmeer belongs to North-Holland, but very little thinking is done about it. What kind of lake should it be? What type of coast does it need? How can we increase the cosmic qualities, strengthen the ecology, and accept its use?
- North-Holland loves provincial roads and roundabouts, the majority of which turned out too big. Could we not design and calculate this better? So that slimmer roads are built that are a jewel in the landscape?

We could work on Apocalypse North-Holland, and organize a political manifestation in which BizarNHNow is presented, with suggestions and spatial proposals for the languishing provincial jewels. North-Holland becomes Peril-Holland.

14.7 Faster, Nicer, Cheaper

There is a great and beautiful amount of emptiness available north of the MRA (Metropolitan Region Amsterdam). It would be very interesting to think about the accelerated realization of housing construction there and thus offer a helpful addition to the difficult realization in the MRA area. Could we set in motion a new movement by formulating ambitious quality criteria and an acceleration of construction in inner-city environments or reuse of existing buildings? Could the fringes of the midsize cities and towns become the most interesting areas to live and work, or to be? To achieve that, we cannot do the same as we have been doing in Amsterdam, but we must develop a unique niche, and an acceleration mechanism, through which we can build faster, cheaper, and nicer. This is a new task, which still needs to be formulated. For example, by exploring the possibilities of prefab construction at every scale, by sourcing local materials, and by accelerating procedures via clever legal approaches. And by proposing shrewd locations.

14.8 Pixel Planet

If we are smart, we invest in researching, designing, and prefabricating modules and units that we can assemble and disassemble in the region in many ways. If we can provide a focus to the region, together with local builders and contractors and architecture students, on investigating how this can be done technically, that would be an innovation that contributes to the acceleration of housing construction. For example, we could visualize the calculation of the value when limiting carbon emissions by applying certain technologies, or what the ecological value is of different modules that can be fitted into the technical design and building process. Inclusive of later adaptation options. Because then, the “dismantlable transition building” could be compared to the “chain building” and the advantages in terms of costs, speed, and nature and environment can be seen. Architecture students could play a realistic role in visualizing the possibilities and the potential profits by acting like scouts who pick up the knowledge and practical context from regional industries. Every (mini) thesis then contributes to the greater whole and can fill a blind spot that we currently have at the TU Delft: real technical and practical knowledge in the hypothetical solutions that we come up with in The Why Factory (Fig. 14.5). These detailed discoveries are a nice opportunity to communicate about in a way that links the outcome to the bigger issue. What is the “discovery” and what effect does it have



Fig. 14.5 The Why Factory

when applied to all the one million new homes, such as in terms of carbon, ecology, water, and material use. The collection of ideas then shows the urgency. Supercool.

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