

The Randstad : symbiosis between town and country

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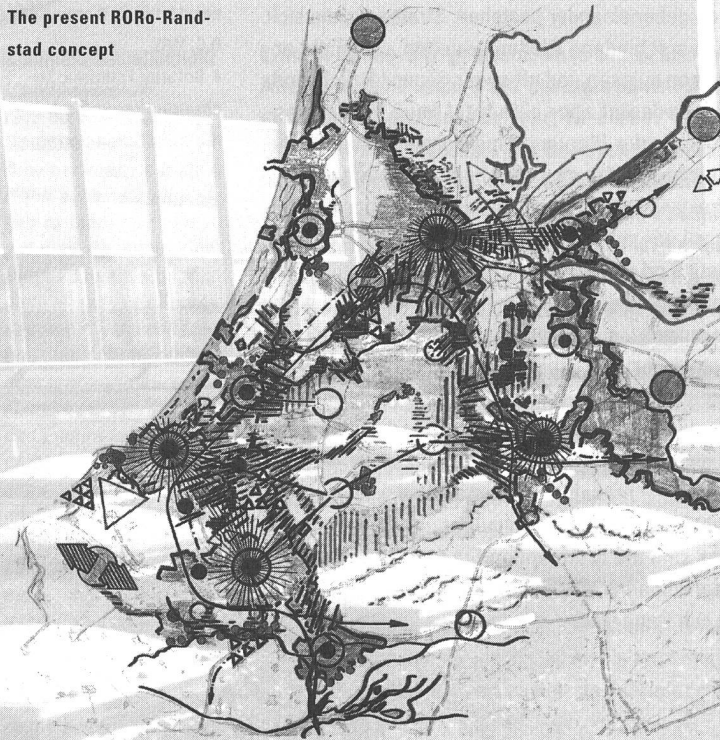
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The Randstad: symbiosis between town and country

► Prof. M. van den Berg

The present RORo-Randstad concept



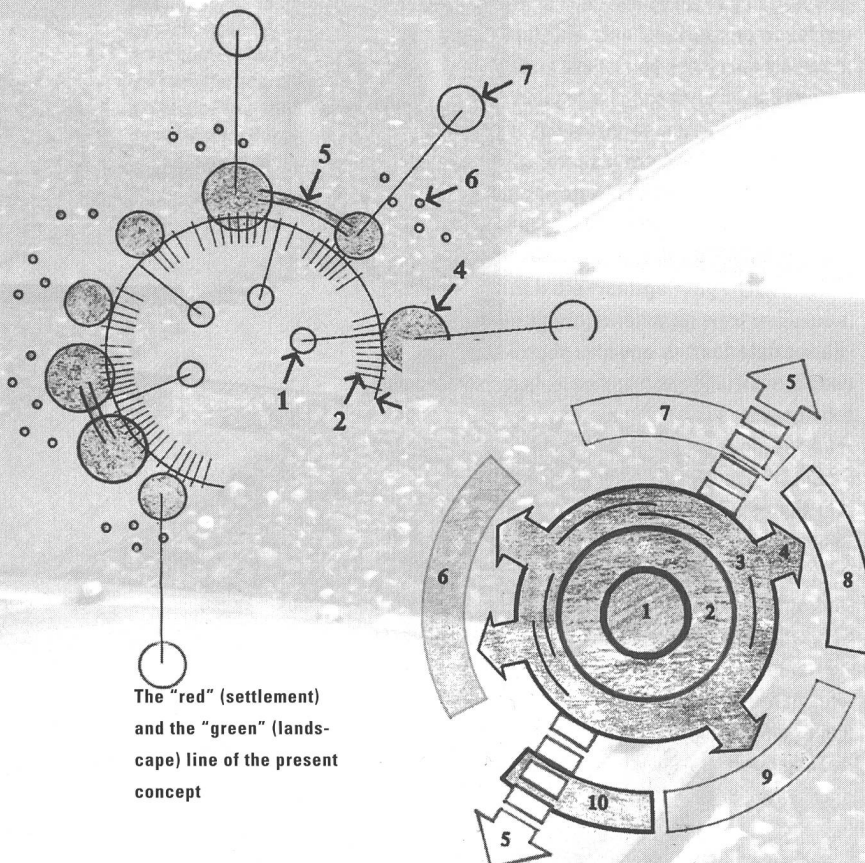
The future of the Western Netherlands depends on whether society is willing and able to use space wisely on a regional scale and keep it liveable. In the fifties, with the support and expertise of organized interest groups and top Dutch urban planners, they developed the concept of the Randstad for Western Holland, which is still instrumental today. The 1958 report entitled "The Development of the Western Netherlands" served as the foundation for the policy developed by the national government and the most involved western provinces, as was formulated in the 1960 Memorandum on Urban Planning in the Netherlands.

The Randstad concept was characterized by:

- Segmented urbanization in an "urban ring" around a central open space that was not precisely delineated
- Segmented urbanization in a system of metropolitan districts with buffer zones consisting of recreational sites, woods, nature and so forth
- The central open space with a primarily agricultural purpose for local consumption and export
- A hierarchy of central urban areas and amenities with a function of their own and dependent on each other (the coherence of the urban ring)
- Outward urbanization (radiation) and a limited inward tendency.

The basic idea was to have regions with different forms of land use (agricultural and urban) "impede each other as little as possible". In other words, the separation of urban and rural, giving each of them free rein. What is more, there was a growing symbiosis between the intensive agrarian sectors and the urban economy. But not completely so, since the metropolitan districts and centres in the urban ring were to be separated by buffer zones (segmentation); "to a certain extent," the central area was to be involved in the urbanization; lastly, harbour and industrial yards were to be given ample access to deep waterways at the expense of every other type of land use.

The Randstad with central open spaces, wings and outward radiation was to be defined and redefined any number of times in an ever more polynuclear fashion and with additions such as inner



and outer flanks and a shifting hierarchy of nuclei. Separation made way for a mixture of farming, nature, recreation and landscape. There was ever more blending of town and country aspects. The Randstad appeared on the map like when you develop a photograph, but the fixative had no staying power. The concept was open and susceptible to influences.

Very generally speaking, it was an effort to allow society as a whole to benefit from the growth and prosperity by dividing and redividing the space (public housing), by providing new recreational sites and opening up the landscape to the public. But without anyone being all too concerned about the effects of the growth and the changes in the use of space. Now we are facing the consequences of all that spatial planning. Does the Randstad concept still have its merits? What are the new opportunities and the new hazards?

Opportunities and Hazards Nowadays

A few of the threats to the further development of the Randstad and the international position are:

- *Tunnel Vision*

National, provincial and municipal authorities are moving up into each other's scale level, into the districts, regions and parts of the country. In addition to cooperation, there is competition. The policy density is becoming excessive. Rivalry among the sectors only serves to impede an integral approach to societal and spatial development. There is also the matter of territorial egoism: with luxury flats, nicely priced industrial yards, and the latest in cultural innovations, cities make each other green with envy.

- *Effects of Hyper-mobility*

Today's infrastructure is not adequate to meet the eager needs of the free-moving modern-day city dweller. A new infrastructure system and a specific ancillary policy are required to enable the Randstad to function internally as an open unit and truly link it to the surroundings, including the urban districts.

- *Preservation and Protection*

A lot of people are living quite a comfortable life in the Netherlands. Yet many of them feel threatened and unsure of the future. In the face of liberating individualism, solidarity and a sense of community are no longer what they used to be. Increasing numbers of people have had their fill of that permanent urge for change.

But the opportunities for the Randstad are also sizeable:

- *Unique Location*

The large river and the industrious hinterland are even more important than at the time of the Memorandum on the West of the Country. The economic and geographical position in the European

setting is another potential that can be utilized.

- *The Supply of Developed Space*

The supply of space in the widest sense of the word is in mint condition. The historical legacy has been renovated and is being dynamically used. The housing supply is skillfully managed and its quality rates with the best in Europe. The countryside as well is continually being redesigned and put to effective use. Attention devoted to the quality of scenic and recreational sites has been productive as regards the meaning of the cultivated countryside in the Netherlands.

- *The Space Itself*

The change-in-use potential of the intensively used rural area is still enormous. The urban area itself has also expanded and become too thinly populated, presenting opportunities to become considerably more compact.

Models

New policies for the development of the Randstad are being prepared now. The present policies, mainly based on the Fourth Report on Physical Planning, are not sufficient to cope with the new challenges: a lasting need for new housing and economic developments, responses to the pressure of suburbanisation, etc. Cities, provinces and the national authorities are taking positions now. The following models, drawn up by the RORO team of the four western provinces in 1995, were designed to take the policy discussion a step further. The models are made as an instrument in the discussion on urbanisation-patterns.

What is involved here, roughly speaking, is the planning for 700,000 housing units, 5,000 hectares of industrial premises and three million square metres of commercial and office space for 1995-2015, and the main infrastructure, and greenery. Almost half of this has already been agreed upon in contracts and investment plans.

The models are:

The Los Angeles Model

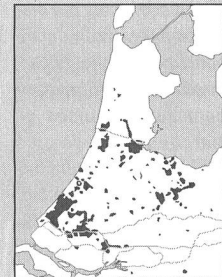
The Los Angeles model works on the assumption of a continuing de-regulation of government intervention. Spatial developments in keeping with the market's demands set the tone. A far-reaching diffuse expansion of urbanization determines the lay of the land.

The Zandstad Model

The point of departure for the Zandstad model is a permanent government role in the restrictive policy on the rural region and efforts to conduct mobility towards the public transport system. The Randstad is to remain green and accessible. A joint overflow of the urbanization drive is called for from the Randstad to the Central Netherlands Urban Ring (Zandstad), linked to an autonomous international and socio-economic orientation in a southeastern direction.



1850



1950



1995



2015

The stages of development of the Randstad

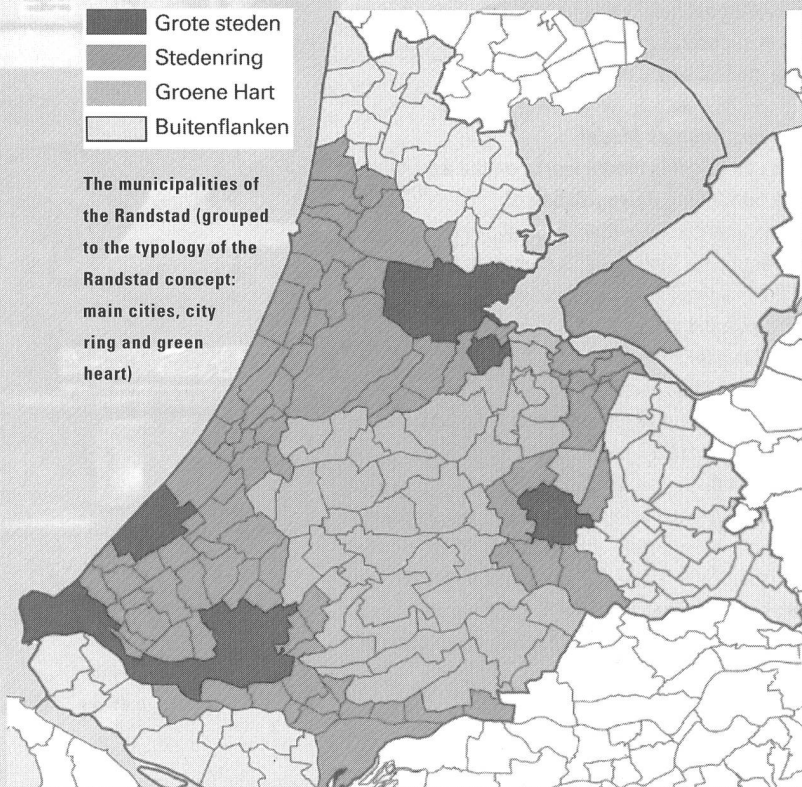
Randstad: une symbiose entre la ville et la campagne

Le concept de l'ensemble urbain de Randstad est né de l'effort de contrôler sur le plan spatial la croissance économique et l'essor de la construction qui ont suivi la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Cinq modèles ont été élaborés pour vérifier si ce concept est toujours pertinent. Ceux qui répondent aux exigences du marché posent de gros problèmes de nature sociale, économique et culturelle. Les modèles retenus sont ceux qui tiennent compte de la structure polycentrique des villes et de leurs différentes fonctions.

L'option essentielle consiste à déplacer le développement à partir du «cœur vert» vers cette ensemble pour utiliser les avantages des régions situées le long des principaux axes d'équipement. L'intervention des pouvoirs publics est indispensable pour protéger les qualités du concept de l'ensemble urbain de Randstad. Les provinces devraient guider dans ce sens les différents acteurs de ce processus.

■ Grote steden
 ■ Stedenring
 ■ Groene Hart
 ■ Buitenflanken

The municipalities of the Randstad (grouped to the typology of the Randstad concept: main cities, city ring and green heart)



The Ring / Outward Model

In this model, the housing, employment and recreational needs of the population are met with as much as possible inside the Randstad. The preservation and further improvement of the Green Heart is given absolute priority and is valued more highly than the agrarian perspectives and the quality of the areas between the metropolitan districts on the Ring and in the outer flanks of the Randstad.

The Ring / Inward Model

As was the case with the Ring / outward model, this one meets the needs of the Randstad population. To do so, the restrictive policy on the rural region was partially re-formulated. The emphasis here is on preserving the buffer zones and the scenic openness of the outer flanks. A certain inward tendency in the Green Heart is accepted because that is where the best possibilities lie to link up with the railway infrastructure and employment opportunities.

The Hong Kong Model

The Hong Kong model calls for a far greater density in the existing urban area to prevent a further onslaught from affecting the surrounding rural vicinity and to restrict the advancing consumption of space. New instruments are developed to optimize the use of the existing supply: greater density and stacking, multi-functional use of space, and perhaps building underground.

Assessing the Models

Poly-nuclear city patterns with sizeable function differentiation are now assessed extremely positively. Accessible commercial and industrial clusters that reinforce each other are

even viewed as a prerequisite for international competition assertivity.

It is from this perspective that the models have been assessed. Judged by these criteria, quite surprisingly the Randstad outward and inward models both score quite well. With a few amendments and provided with new motivations and instruments, the Randstad concept still seems to "hold its own" today. Certainly if it is taken into consideration that the government, as by far the most important creator and designer of the country's space, does not play as dominant a role as forty years ago. The Los Angeles and the Zandstad model, geared as they are towards residential preferences, are the ones that focus most on the demands of the market, but nonetheless involve unsurmountable obstacles in a social, economic and cultural sense. The Hong Kong model scores high on social and ecological aspects, but is barely attractive in view of the residential preference for a detached house in rural surroundings, and is expensive from the viewpoint of collective government investments.

None of the models score well as regards all the desired policy criteria. Further studies will have to show whether a higher score can be achieved on all the points, for example by way of a combination of the models.

The scenarios described above can establish some manner of order in the social debate and the formation of official opinions. This is how they can demonstrate their usefulness. In addition, certain themes can be derived from the models that will have to be addressed on the Randstad level.

Provinces Doing the Directing

The potency of the Randstad lies in the interaction between town and country, in poly-nuclear and spatial differentiation. We should treat the space in the Randstad as carefully as our life savings. Because the reinforcement of the metropolitan nature of the Randstad will have to be accompanied by an exploitation of the options for gardening and relaxing amidst grass and trees. With an administrative density bordering on the ridiculous on the part of relatively autonomous but democratic authorities, a more directed collaboration between the authorities involved and potential social parties is an urgent necessity. The cooperating provinces might be the ones to take the initiative.

Green Heart Metropolis: the challenge still consists of the utilization of the symbiosis between town and country.

The preservation of the morphological contrast between town and country within the confines of the urban ring constructed of metropolitan districts and cities, the Green Heart, buffer zones and so forth, that is what the true mission is all about.

