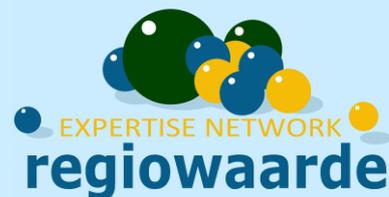


Headlines of a study tour report



Better regional coherence as future challenge for the peri-urban Rotterdam area

By: **Marien Sonneveld – Interactive Consult**
Juliet Fox and David Beurle – Future iQ Partners

23 November 2012

Understanding global dynamics to build vibrant regions

*The first decade of the twenty-first century has shown dramatic shifts in economies, politics and society to multilevel world systems. Increasing globalisation goes hand in hand with the countervailing trend of reinforcement of economic and political life at the regional level. **Regions are becoming the critical locus of economic and social order, shaping an emerging geographical mosaic of regional systems across administrative borders.** In the current world of elevated uncertainty and volatility, it is becoming critical for regions, communities and industries to understand general trends and adapt to future events. What are the economic logic and the social-political meaning of these developments? How does it affect local communities and how can they adapt and continue to build their future?*

Such issues were at the centre of the Windsor Castle consultation (see colophon). In addition, a study tour was commissioned to examine the common issues of a specific region in practice. This brochure highlights some of the findings and reflections by the participating experts. For more detailed information, see the study tour report.



Fig. 1: City development in Rotterdam's centre

Acquainting with the region

A study tour is the perfect tool to exchange views and expertise, and see how issues manifest in practice. As participants were all professionals in regional development, they also examined how local communities can be assisted to respond to changing dynamics and build their desired future. Such study tours, as Regiowaarde likes to stress, do not only provide visiting professionals the opportunity to enlarge their expertise, but help local key people from the region to re-think their future opportunities and approaches as well.

Characteristics of the Rotterdam area

The Rotterdam area was chosen to visit, as it is a vibrant region where global and local trends and issues manifest simultaneously. Together with the region's history and diversity of future opportunities, that would best show the complexity and the dynamics, many regions in the western world currently find themselves in.

Colophon

In October 2012, Future iQ Partners set up a global think tank consultation at the UK's Royal Windsor Castle for experts in regional development from all over the globe. They examined a series of key questions considered critical to building the future fabric of regional economies and communities. In addition Interactive Consult was commissioned to organise a Study Tour. This brochure on request of Regiowaarde provides easy access to the findings of the study tour report, available on the mentioned websites.

Regiowaarde

c/o Tilburg University
P.O. Box 90153
NL – 5000 LE Tilburg
The Netherlands
info@regiowaarde.nl
www.regiowaarde.nl

Future iQ Partners
www.future-iq.com



Interactive Consult
www.interactiveconsult.nl

The visited area of Rotterdam is a peri-urban region with:

- *one of Europe's biggest delta areas*, with fertile farmland, huge lakes, a long history in trade and fishery, excellent conditions for quality of life and the constant thread of flooding by the sea or the rivers;
- the Netherlands' *second largest city, the sixth largest urban area of Europe and Europe's largest port* with an industrial and harbour complex of global economic importance;
- *urban developments that are affecting the rural area*; housing and spatial planning have changed the landscape and the accessibility of the region. The global economy has influenced social life in the city as well as in surrounding towns, villages and the countryside;
- *a variety of local and global businesses*: process industry, transportation, coastal & port services, business services, as well as farming and leisure & tourism. The nearby areas with innovative greenhouse horticulture are the biggest in the world and as economic important as the harbour;
- *a range of local communities*; from multicultural districts in the millions' conurbation Randstad to small rural villages with only some hundreds of people, and all within a range of about 40 kilometres;

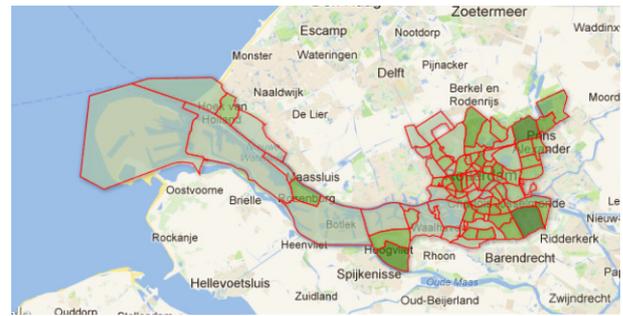


Fig. 2: Rotterdam, its boroughs and the harbour complex in the west.

- *a diversity of regional identities*, based on geography and demographics, history and religion, traditional livelihoods as fishery or agriculture as well as on many temporary jobs for urban dwellers and expatriates etc.;
- *complex and entangled governmental issues*, like the right scales to cope with global issues and the local effects - like global warming or the rise of the sea level - and the according organising of public-public and public-private cooperation and partnerships;
- *meaningful historical developments*, allowing to oversee long-term perspectives and to draw lessons from, like moving and expanding the harbour area, and the planning and implementation of the Delta Works to defend the population from the sea.

Visited sites

The study tour's programme has been set up to get a good overview of the broad range of developments by visiting several sites and getting in touch with local organisations.

- Within the constraints of time the study tour went along the city of Rotterdam with focus on its developing skyline along the river Maas and port-related issues like expanding and moving activities to the periphery.
- Visiting Maasvlakte 2, the most recent and major project of land reclamation for expanding the harbour, was an impressive example of what mankind is capable of.



Fig. 3: Reclaiming land from the sea

- The group also paid a visit to several sites of the Delta Works showing the long-term investments in water & land engineering, improved accessibility of the islands and nature preservation in the delta area, and the economic opportunities for leisure & tourism.
- The expanded town of Spijkenisse with its former turbulent growth in housing and population clearly illustrated the need of the town's current consolidation and focus on improving the urban life's quality by investing in facilities and enlarging its centre function.
- The emerging diversification in agriculture was demonstrated by the discussion with a consumer instead of EU-markets oriented farmer and a tour through the world's biggest flower auction and a pot plants nursery, as representatives of the innovate and successful Dutch greenhouse horticulture.
- Finally, attention for the Dutch cuisine learned about taste and origin of Dutch food, with a diverse, however growing attention to local, sustainable produced and or organic food.

Against these backgrounds the study tour aimed at finding out about the coherence between global and local issues, and between urban and peri-urban developments.

General trends affecting regions

As all regions, the Rotterdam area is faced with macro trends like climate change, food provisioning, declining supplies of fossil fuels and technological advancements that are hardly to keep up with. The study tour did not explicitly focus on such issues, but explored the social fabric and how the regional society is adapting to handle these challenges. Such processes are complex because of their multi-disciplinary, multi-level and multi-stakeholder character.

Usually, the aim is an integrated approach, but in practice this turns out to be very difficult. Old patterns must be broken to achieve system-level innovations. Moreover, the expertise of building sustainable communities, able to cope with unfolding trends still is in its infancy. Little effort has been put in development of competencies for leaders, officials and professionals to fulfil a successful role in such processes.

At the same time the context changes constantly. The financial – and following economic and monetary – crisis, which started in 2008, showed that unthinkable events and changes can become reality "almost overnight". Despite the emphasis on transitions from the 1990s the world changed

more rapidly than the initiated transition programmes could facilitate. Most of these programmes have been ended now, budgets have been cut and the national policy to induce systems' changes has been abandoned. Many

governmental responsibilities are subsequently passed down and the long-term focus on transitions has been replaced by short-term objectives for tackling current crises. The consequences of the crisis are now becoming apparent, as reform policies are being translated into budgets on lower levels. Changing frameworks and less financial resources require more bottom-up initiatives from the regions that are becoming increasingly important entities.

This creates opportunities, but also brings along responsibility. Which scenarios can be distinguished? Who will take initiative? How can sectoral interests and local initiatives be aligned? Who will take care of the coherence on a more aggregated level?

It underlines the need for new leadership. Responsibility, innovative entrepreneurship, self-organization and collaboration in temporary alliances are becoming essential basics. Who are able and willing to invest in the development of a region's opportunities?

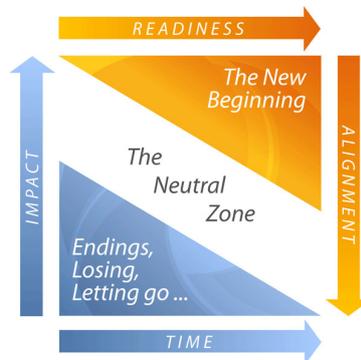


Fig. 4: Change over time

Findings and reflections from the study tour

Preparing for the future

A key recurrent theme throughout the study tour was the impact that decisions and events, either planned or sudden, can have over time. The history of the estuaries shows how nature gradually as well as overnight has changed the communities' future in the past. Also human activity has had profound consequences. Whether it be the recurring decisions to expand the port of Rotterdam or the initiating of the Delta Plan, today's economy, society and environment are the result of major decisions from the past, which impact and consequences were unforeseeable, but which underlying visionary perseverance grounded success.

How do local leaders and the regional community anticipate on future events? What ambitions does the regional society have, regarding compelling global issues and challenging opportunities like for instance inclusive and resilient communities, non-institutionalised cooperation, a bio-based



Fig. 5: Experiencing the region by e.g. sports builds the social fabric

economy, sustainable tourism? There are many studies, reports and visions for parts of the whole region that are also frequently revised. Are such revisions due to more volatility and uncertainty of major global trends and their probable future impact? Or are these just incremental



Fig. 6: Vision reports for the region are piling up

attempts to simplify the complex reality into clear themes that we can plan as we used to do?

The rich history and the diversity of the region offer many opportunities, as became clear during the study tour. However, efforts seem to be fragmented; every municipality and interest group has its own priorities and strategy. Platforms for joint action just add extra objectives to the pile. A coherent vision for the region with corresponding ambitions, a cohesive approach and engaged communities are missing. Time for a new Delta Plan that can mobilise the same lasting spirit?

Civic Engagement & Networks

Local authorities in the Rotterdam area respond on shrunken public funding and passed down governmental responsibilities by up-scaling their administrative power. Would that be sufficient? Is not that a defensive strategy, induced by shortage of finances and skilled staff? At least it does not seem not to be a visionary strategy to build a more resilient society, able to shape its desired future. What role is expected from the business sector and local communities? Where do the current merging efforts leave their capabilities?

The merging of municipalities on Goeree-Overflakkee and Vorne-Putten comes with strong opposition from some groups of citizens. No matter the need and urgency, both processes were top-down initiated by (national, respectively local) authorities. A more inclusive and open process might have build more engagement from the citizenry, especially when local informal leaders could have been identified and involved in the process. After all, in a network society, coming together as regional communities offers the ideal course of action. It challenges to combine efforts and resources to plan for the future and start actions that will create sustained prosperity.

What does it take? It requires definable social networks that build the right environment and engage businesses and the citizenry in new partnerships. Such networks are not institutionalised platforms, nor the social media networks. Successful regional development depends on the strength of people's connections. Visualising the informal networks, identifying key players and improving the connectedness are conditional for building stronger communities.

There are good examples of local initiatives, for instance taking over the exploi-

tation of public facilities like a swimming pool or a cultural centre. Better promotion of such examples and an analysis of the social networks might be a good starting point for intended initiatives like community building in Spijkenisse's massive neighbourhoods.

Language & Culture

It is very commendable that for instance the municipality of Spijkenisse is very aware of the need to enable their youth to identify themselves as being from Spijkenisse, and try to install their pride in being from that community. The fact that this is a concern, suggests that the rapid growth of Spijkenisse has resulted in an inability to develop a uniqueness of community what would create that natural link between the youth of the community and the community itself. Capture of its history and the remaining heritage could offer Spijkenisse familiarity with the town's roots. That is – apart from the nowadays' built urban image – the basis for building a community's identity and civic pride in such a commuters' town.



Fig. 7: Utilising people's connections is the basis for community building

Also in the smaller communities in the more rural parts of the region difficulties with young people occur. Do they have sufficient opportunities for education and sports, and some years later: employment and housing? With what aspects of the regional cultural identity can youngsters identify themselves? Are there some relevant role models available with whom they can identify?

No matter the causes, to attract young people to stay in the area and become part of the future workforce, solutions need to be found for bonding them to the local communities at early age.

New economies

Regarding tourism, water sports and other recreational activities, the region seems to envy the Province of Zeeland. Repeatedly, plans are constructed and initiatives taken to promote leisure on (parts of) Goeree-Overflakkee and Vorne-Putten. Why such a fragmented approach? Most (of the foreign) visitors on one of the islands in the delta area might not even know what island they are on. Joining forces in promoting leisure on the scale of the southwest delta of the Netherlands could be a starter to attract investors. Funding is needed for the reconstruction of the old-fashioned Brielse Maas and Bernisse areas, for increasing the accommodation capacity and for concepts for better, sustainable exploitation of the many beaches and lakes.



Fig. 8: Industrial tourism as opportunity

Apart from Spijkenisse's ambitions to offer good conditions for living and working, and attract businesses to settle, the town could distinguish itself regarding touristic attractiveness by developing "industrial tourism", in cooperation with the businesses in the harbour and industrial area. That would not only contribute to the local economy, but also create a better public awareness and understanding of the economic cores of the region.

Regional food provisioning could be another topic for reinforcement of the local economy. The region already has a variety of farming and fishery, and regional and global traders nearby. Usually, food production in the Netherlands is seen as an activity in more "remote" rural areas for the global markets. However, the consumers' increasing interest in local food offers opportunities for especially peri-urban regions with lots of consumers nearby. Moreover, the city of Rotterdam counts several initiatives for urban farming, e.g. on temporarily fallow industrial areas. Connecting urban farming initiatives with traditional and diversifying farming in the peri-urban areas could very well contribute to community building and better understanding of the regions needs and opportunities.

Sustainable development

There are some initiatives and apparently many intentions for more sustainable development. However, for a region as a whole, it is not convincing at all. The region – and all communities within – could distinguish itself by radically creating some real sustainable development and become a show piece for that. The impressions now are that the region's idea of sustainability is "doing less harm" rather than actually going beyond that. It seems that real sustainable development is missing. After all, there is a difference between "sustainable development" and "sustaining development". Nevertheless, high tech knowledge, expertise and innovative businesses are present in the region. The missing link for real sustainable development seems to be social innovation: creating new business concepts and partnerships in a multi-stakeholder community, aiming at realising social value. Research has demonstrated that such an approach improves financial revenues as well.

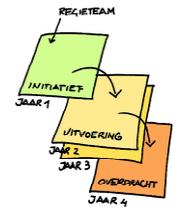
The Rotterdam Climate Initiative might be a useful "vehicle" for joint actions towards more real sustainable initiatives. Why not broaden it to the whole region, including the industrial and rural areas? There is criticism as the initiative would just be another advocacy group for port related businesses. Nevertheless, the initiative as its website states is open for cooperation with whomever. Taking that invitation could stimulate better understanding of neighbouring business and civic communities. The region has lots of values and sites worth to sustain for a better quality of life, environmentally as well as socially and economically. The success factors of the horticultural sector (as described in the study tour report in chapter 4.4) and its ambition to be world leading in sustainable food security by 2020 could also be applied to the Rotterdam area as a whole: entrepreneurial spirit and focus on social and technical innovation, clustering related businesses, building partnerships, and combining being local based while focused on an international market.



Fig. 9: Urban farming in the centre of Rotterdam

Recommendations and conclusions

In short, we are facing an uncertain but challenging future. Local leaders are aware of the need to adapt to changes in economy and society. At the same time, the current initiatives for future planning seem fragmented and originated from old ways of thinking. Several municipalities have developed promotional and investment plans, some in cooperation and some on their own. Also many private initiatives and advocacy organisations have ambitions for realising future prospects. *How are these plans related?* We apparently still need to learn how to partner and join forces when exploring future challenges.



Joint exploring, related views

The Port of Rotterdam authority did collaborate with its network partners when defining its ambitions for 2030. The planned actions are related to other stakeholders, like citizens (being part of the workforce), public authorities (for improved decisiveness) or societal institutions like education (for better skilled future workforce). Nevertheless, it remains *unclear how the future vision is mutually related to other future visions*, ambitions, policy plans or strategies of



regional parties. Is there a sense of urgency to better cohere these views and plans?

Despite of what have been effected so far, it is obvious that *only a small part of the many plans from the past have been realised*. Every three to five years new long-term visions and plans are being developed, as not only circumstances have changed, but also *the executing of plans has turned out to be far more difficult than expected*.

Lasting ambitions, local engagement

Historical cases from the region like the plan for the Delta Works illustrate that successful regional development is not depending on the number of plans. *A region's future is based on visionary, lasting ambitions and strong personal engagement from society*, that are maintained despite unforeseen change of context or operational difficulties. Learning from a region's history – or from other (European) regions with similar challenges – can be helpful to anticipate on current issues, to think in plausible scenarios and to adapt to unexpected and even unthinkable events.



Coherence and alternative scenarios

On a certain high level, the many plans have similarities in the objectives as all claim to strive for prosperity and sustainability. However, when elaborating future visions in strategic priorities, action plans and in investment budgets, the ambitions usually start diverging either due thoughtful decisions or, more likely, to a lack of understanding or for budget reasons. Though it might seem harmless if future visions and strategies of different parties in a region are not coherent, they all affect that same region: its citizens, companies, institutions et cetera. *Without coherence, many intentions might not be effected, become implausible or – even worse – have opposite effects*.

Leadership, adaptiveness and local ownership

Cases like the merging of municipalities within the region definitely illustrate the importance of 1) a regionally shared future vision, 2) creating scenarios for different, sometimes emerging situations and 3) last but not least: to engage the local communities in an early stage for avoiding (legal) opposition in later stages, and to stimulate and use their creativity and ability to get things done on their own. After all, also the consultation at Windsor Castle showed that *the very nature of a regional society demands for more adaptive and comprehensive approaches based on local ownership*, although it is not a path well trodden.



Relating external trends, promising local initiatives and strategic ambitions from the region's vision reports could be a starting point. Such an exercise could very well lay a basis for community-based scenario planning, resulting in involvement and input from large numbers of locals. That would at least create local awareness and probably engage people to take initiatives and bear joint responsibility. Perhaps better coherence in current plans, visualising the network of key players and engaging local communities are the best investments for the region's future.