

MADE IN HOLLAND

Keynote speech Cees van 't Veen, 26 May 2011

1. MAN MADE LANDSCAPE

God created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands (dia).

Does anyone know this saying? These words were written down by the famous French philosopher René Descartes, who spent most of his adult life in the Dutch republic. He has been dubbed as the father of modern philosophy.

The Netherlands is a man-made landscape. Land made by hand: *Made in Holland*. Till today, the Dutch have been locked in a battle with the water coming from the rivers or the sea. We have found a way to deal with our situation in the middle of a big river delta, the delta of Europe. It refers mainly to the low-lying (dia), western, part of the country where people used dikes, dunes, ditches, windmills and pumping stations to reclaim land from the sea. Half of our surface area is less than one meter above sea level. A quarter of it is actually below sea level.

2. POLDER

Water management tools like dikes and polders did not only shape contemporary Netherlands, but they also created parts of our neighbouring countries. Starting from the sixteenth century, this expertise was exported throughout Europe and beyond to, for example: Poland, Denmark, France, Germany and Italy. In total about 6.000 polders can be distinguished worldwide; half of them are situated in the Netherlands. It is an exported rural landscape. To me, a polder is a piece of art: it is simple and efficient, rationally structured, systematically shaped.

I would like to present two examples of these artificial polders; one is 400 years old, the other only seventy.

The first one is the **Beemster** (dia), a special polder (droogmakerij) that was built at the bottom of a lake from which the water has first been drained. If there is one place where you can experience the poetry of a straight line, it is in the Beemster (dia), 40 km north of Amsterdam. Therefore, it has rightly been put in 1999 on UNESCO's list of world heritage sites.

In the sixteenth century, the increasing water problems threatened the nearby cities. Moreover, the growing city population created an ever-increasing need for agricultural land for food. A group of wealthy merchants from Amsterdam were looking for sites for investment.

The construction of the dikes and the reclaiming of the land was done by forty windmills (dia) and completed in 1612. The layout imposed on the empty land, was one of straight fields and a perfectly symmetrical grid of roads and canals. It emphasized that man was now in charge here. With its strict geometric landscape, the Beemster (dia) is still a masterpiece of seventeenth century technology and landscaping.

The second example I like to mention is the **Northeast polder**. It is an ultimate example of the belief in a 'self-making society'. Designed on the drawing board,

shaped and executed in 1941 (like the Victory Boogie Woogie). About 500 square kilometres. Based on sociological research, guidelines were executed for the right parcelling of the land. But also of the exact amount of shops, houses and churches etc. Even the 'right inhabitants' were selected as truthful pioneers. They had to shape the identity of the polder in a socio-economic way. The Northeast polder (dia) is an important development in the Dutch history of architecture, parcelling and urban design. Recently, the polder as a total concept, was put on the Tentative List of UNESCO.

3. CHANGES IN RURAL HERITAGE IN THE NETHERLANDS

It might be obvious that the theme of the EHHF 2011 is well chosen for the Netherlands. It is connected to our identity and fits well into the way the Dutch countryside is shaped. I like to mention how this is done, on three levels: depopulation, re use and archaeology.

In earlier times, mayor most parts of the Dutch countryside were used for farming. This hasn't changed much, although the contribution to regional economy is diminishing. Just after the Second World War we did have 500.000 farmers, now only 69.000 farmers left.

This development is not typical for the Netherlands. Everywhere in Europe the total amount of farming companies is getting less (dia). In 2003 they counted 15 million agricultural enterprises 2005.

In 2007 only 13,7 million were left. Most of the enterprises are situated in the eastern parts of Europe, like Rumania (3,9 million), Poland (2,4 million), Hungary (0,6 million). From the western European countries, Italy has the most farming companies (1,7 million), Spain (1 million), Greece (0,8 million), France 0,5 million). And 70% of the companies were smaller than 5 hectares.

That is probably why the TV-programme: *Farmer seeks a wife* is so popular and is broadcasted in ten different countries. Also in the Netherlands. Here it attracts almost 5 million viewers (sic). And yes, we do have a BBC-series like *Escape to the country*. Definitely, this is what I call **romanticising the countryside**.

The **archaeological heritage in the Netherlands is under constant pressure**, as a result of the growing population, the total usable land area in the country, and the constant drive for development. Farming poses two threats to archaeology. The first is that this type of land use such as intensification, the application of fertiliser, ploughing, crop rotation etc, constantly damage buried archaeological remains. The second concerns the unseen erosion that occurs mainly as a result of changes to the water table, often for the benefit of farming. We have only limited data on the scale and implications of these two types of damage.

The last 60 years, the Dutch countryside is changing faster than the city. People don't see the countryside anymore as a quiet place to relax and enjoy nature. Instead they see the countryside as an *agri-experience* and look desperately for *agritainment*. (dia) In the meantime, farmsteads are changed into second homes, meadows are transformed golf courts, and you see more horses than cows nowadays. 'Today there are more city folks living on the countryside than there are farmers left'... *How can we involve people / citizens to participate in the discussion over the future of the countryside?*

These rural changing's on the countryside have big consequences.

Every day one farmhouse loses its function! Till 2017 another 15.000 farmhouses will stand empty. What do we do with them? Re use? Into what?

Housing, restaurants or B&B's? And how do you give a building a new suitable function and how can this transformation be realised in a sustainable way? Does the government has a role? Therefore, the Netherlands Cultural Heritage Agency published a booklet on this topic. It is in your yellow bag. It was written in Dutch, but we added an English summary. Hopefully it will inspire you in the way to handle your own farmsteads with care.

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