

Theme: Heritage in an urban context. Threats and opportunities
European Heritage Heads Forum (EHHF) in Leuven, Belgium
May 2014

The Benefits of Heritage in an urban context

Cees van 't Veen

Director Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands

Dear 'Heads' and colleagues,

Everytime I return home from an EHHF-meeting, I feel informed and inspired. Informed about the latest developments in Europe; inspired because of new ideas or research done. For example that time when Simon Thurley presented the report "Heritage Counts". Instantly, I was wondering, why didn't we initiate such a research? Finally we did. We analysed the economic value of built heritage in the Netherlands. Now we have a better understanding of the benefits of our heritage.

Before I am going to reveal some brandnew facts and figures, I would like to take you by the hand and lead you through a rough sketch of urban developments in the Netherlands.

The density of historical cities in the Netherlands is unprecedented (sheet). After a long history of living in mostly fortified settlements, a pattern of small and mid-sized cities developed at a rapid pace in the late Middle Ages. Distances between them were short and they maintained an intensive relationship with the surrounding countryside.

Most Dutch cities are beautiful display pieces of history (sheet), from the oldest archaeological vestiges, via expressions of our typical civil culture, to the 20th century's large-scale, planned urban expansions.

Due to the explosive growth in the population and prosperity following World War II, the preservation of this 'small town character' became a part of conscious government policy.

The challenge facing us is today, is to keep the habitation and urbanisation history recognisable and liveable, within all urban transformations. Moreover, we have to include cultural-historical values in the regional development. And finally, we have to take due care in the consideration of heritage of national significance, in the event of urban compaction and population decrease in the Netherlands.

The designation of 450 protected conservation areas (sheet) was a useful governmental instrument for a long time. All were designed, developed and organised before 1940. Recently, we have pinpointed almost 30 urban regions (sheet) from World War II and the Period of Reconstruction 1940-1965. These young urban heritage sites are of national importance. Unlike the conservation areas, these regions are embedded in spatial planning, thus no longer protected by law and listing. This is an important cornerstone of modernised preservation of our cultural heritage.

By the way, we published recently some books (sheet) on postwar heritage. Actually today, the 'Atlas on urbanisation in the Netherlands' (sheet), of the last 1000 years, will be released. It is the first Atlas of this kind *in the world*, we think.

Let us have a look now at this research we have initiated.

All of us gathered here in Leuven deeply care for heritage. We all invest in a bright future of our past. But do we know what the real effect is of our investment in monuments *and* its surrounding? Is it worth to invest public money in heritage?

To find out, we ordered for an academic research with *facts and effects*. We needed some more certainties in order to stimulate the discussion in Parliament and society on the meaning of cultural heritage in urban context. The report is not officially published yet, but I am glad to have the opportunity to present some first results and insights.

Let's look at some basic facts and figures (sheet 3). The Netherlands has about 60.000 national monuments and 40.000 municipal listed buildings. In total 100.000 protected objects. This is less than 1% of the total building stock. Each year, our government invests almost 80 million euro in cultural heritage and our Minister of Finance gives tax reduction on restoration of another 80 million euro.

For the years 1995-2010 our government made a Strategic Plan. Our goal was to reduce the backlog in maintenance of monuments from almost 30% to only 10%; in the meantime we have reached this goal. During these 15 years a total of 1,2 billion euro was invested.

For long, our starting point was that investing 1 euro by the government would lead to a multiplier effect of about 2.5, due to the private investments in restoration costs. Then we found out that this theory of tax- and investment-multiplier was not accepted by the new generation of most economists.

What is the economic value of monuments?

Due to public and private investments, the benefits for the owners of historic buildings was calculated: about 6,6 billion euro economic value. At the same time, owners of non-monumental buildings, in the vicinity, so their neighbours, did profit *too* from these nearby monuments. This is increased value of the surrounding real estate in the cities. This is a calculated benefit of about 5 billion euro. Which is huge (especially for dwellings, less for non-dwellings).

Moreover, if you would add the benefits from national tourists (0,7 billion euro) and foreign tourists (1,4 billion euro) visiting our historic centres, you get a total of at least 13,7 billion euro. That means that half of the economic value of monuments goes to the owners and the other half goes to the neighbours and the tourist industry (Yes, 'also if you are *not* a economist, you can experience the benefits of cultural heritage').

As you al know, heritage is a *value added* industry. Heritage and tourism are collaborative industries. Heritage converts locations into destinations and tourism makes them economically viable as exhibits of themselves (Once sites, buildings, objects, technologies or ways of life, can no longer sustain themselves as they formerly did, they 'survive' as representatives of themselves).

Therefore historical city centres should accentuate their DNA, their identity, in a more profound way. Especially in shopping areas the historical sensation must be presented in a more attractive way, so you can distinct yourself. Then urban heritage is a great opportunity; then it is *a benefit, and not a burden*.

We also figured out that of the ten best cities people liked, eight were big monument-cities. And opposite, of the ten *less liked* cities, only two were monument-cities. People appreciate historical cities, whether it is authentic or not... There is a trend in the Netherlands to re-open old canals and fill them with water again, like in the historical centres of Utrecht and Leiden. A reversal action of what we did in the seventies. People prefer now this kind of authentic atmospheres. The presence of a historical city centre is one of the urban amenities that make a living environment appealing and the urban environment attractive. This urban centre is necessary for a creative and innovative economy.

I would like to remind you, as I elaborated in France during the EHHF-meeting in 2010, that there should be an *optima forma* in tourism in order to keep the innercity in balance. Thus not letting tourists overrun historic cities, like Amsterdam or Bruges or Venice. In summertime in my city Amsterdam, there are two hundred events (per year) in the centre district only. One third of the citizens living in this historic centre don't accept this kind of pressure anymore. (Of course, more people came to live in the city centre in the last ten years and more terrasses, more bikes and canal boats popped up). The Canal Zone, which is a World Heritage site since 2010, and its crucial fundamentals of authenticity and integrity, comes under severe pressure. Then tourism becomes a threat to urban heritage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now that the Dutch rural landscape is changing dramatically (the theme of the EHHF-meeting in Amsterdam in 2011) and urbanization continues, local governments tend to invest in historic city centres. Like in the city of Eindhoven (sheet), not far from here. This middle-sized city was once enriched by the nineteenth centuries industry of the Philips-company. Now those daylight factories and 'industrial streets' have become anchors for re-investment. First the transformation process was re-charged in a classic, old fashioned way. Then the crisis came and new ways were explored. Urban heritage has become a frequent used vehicle to involve local communities, citizens and tourists. This crowd funding, organised bottom up, can really work. It can keep the historical industrial character alive, it is an unique selling point!

It works the same in Utrecht (sheet), where the biggest indoor shopping mall of Europe of the seventies, is now being transformed into a modern multi culti area. A new theater, concert hall and library are realised. Water is put back in the medieval Canal. Last year the United Nations

mentioned Utrecht as one of the happiest cities in the world.

Another megaproject in Utrecht is *DOMunder* (sheet) which will be opened within two weeks by our Minister of Culture. Visitors experience deep under the central Domsquare five different layers of history, including the oldest one: a Roman fortress. This archaeological, underground attraction shows the tension between conservation in situ and sharing heritage (more/better) with the public. Our Agency has played a stimulating role in achieving this development.

The program of re-use of urban heritage is a focal point in our national heritage management. In our role as facilitator, we stimulate owners and parties and inspire them with best practices. Of course we try to speed up the process through subsidies. In the last two years 800 big and smaller projects were financed through 'seed-money' / oil in the machine (about 25.000-30.000 euro each) by our Agency. Almost 60% of them have been executed successfully within two years. Although these projects are a big success, they don't come easy. *Re use is a verb!* You have to work hard, together with all the other partners involved.

An interesting last example is Zwolle, an old hanseatic trading city along the river Ijssel. Half year ago this historic city became a regional hotspot after a famous Dutch architect designed a so-called 'egg' of ceramic tiles and glass on top of the Museum de Fundatie, a former Palace of Justice. Suddenly, it attracted twice as many visitors. By the way, we signed too for this permit. Would you? (Comparing to Museum M in Louvain?).

But let's face it, the best way to give your city-marketing a boost, is by inviting president Obama to your favorite museum... (sheet).

I hope these first results of this research will be inspirational for you. At the end of the year our Minister will make this research public. If you are interested I can send you an English summary.

Thank you for your attention.