



ALMERE BETWEEN LAND AND WATER

lecture by Dirk Frieling, INTA Summer Institute, Sorrento, Italy, September 20th 2008
(the numbers refer to the sheets in the power point presentation)

Almere between land and water

(1) In this course on managing urban change I will tell you about the development policy for Almere. Originally, Almere was developed to accommodate the urban expansion of Amsterdam. Now, 40 years later and for the same reason, again it has to double its population from 180.000 at present to 350.000 in 2030.

(2) I shall start with some introductions: first of all the International New Town Institute that I represent here. Then Almere, the case we will look at. And thirdly the policy context of this growth scenario for Almere.

Then this lecture will dwell on four aspects of this urban development: a historical perspective, present programmes, dilemmas of this development and the organisation of the decision processes.

the International New Town Institute (INTI)

(3) Almere, by far the biggest new town in the Netherlands, has decided to establish an international research institute on new town development, as part of its own development programme.

(4) The mission of this new institute will be to acquire, activate and disseminate knowledge, experience and insights in the field of new towns; serving those who have to develop new towns or transform existing ones under conditions of growth, stabilisation or decline.

(5) Founding fathers of the institute are the University of Amsterdam, the Technical University of Delft, the Amsterdam Centre for Vocational Training, New Land in Lelystad (a centre that combines the functions of regional museum and archives with scientific research on the Zuiderzee project), the Public Library of Almere and, of course, the initiator of INTI, the city of Almere.

(6) INTI will do what all scientific institutes do: combine research and education. As such, it will also play a role in the cultural activities in Almere. The basic facilities it will offer to researchers, students and professionals are a documentary centre and a studio for simulation modelling.

territorial development of Almere 1967 – 2007

The title of this lecture has to be taken quite literally, in space as well as in time Almere develops between water and land.

(7) Forty years ago the site of Almere was water, part of the fresh water basin created by the Zuiderzee project. The Zuiderzee project is a huge water management and land reclamation project, that started in the 1920's. The former Zuiderzee (Southern Sea, a branch of the North Sea) gave the project its name. A Barrier Dam in 1932 transformed this former sea in a fresh water lake, called IJsselmeer. Since then, the land has been reclaimed in successive polders of on average 45.000 ha.

(8–11) Building of Almere started in the seventies and this new town now has more than 180.000 inhabitants.

policy context

(12) The policy context of this second growth programme for Almere is the area, called Randstad (that is: Rim City) in the Netherlands, with Schiphol Airport as its intercontinental Central Station. In this area, approximately 20 % of Dutch territory, live some 5 million people, that is 30% of the Dutch population. The Randstad is the core of the Dutch economy, an international centre of traffic and trade.

(13) For various reasons the position of the Randstad in the international economical competition is threatened. This triggered a Randstad Priority Programme of the national government. As Amsterdam is the main metropolitan centre of this area, many of the priority projects aim to strengthen the capital. Among these are three, that are directly related to Almere: (a) ecological improvement of Markermeer and IJmeer, (b) doubling Almere and (c) major improvement of public transport between Schiphol Airport–Amsterdam–Almere–Lelystad (where a secondary airport is situated).

(14) Getting to agreements between different levels of government always takes a very long time. For the priority programme the cabinet introduced a management experiment. For each of the 33 projects of the programme two politicians were made responsible: one on national level, the other on regional level. Together, they have to see to it that all necessary decisions to get their project really started will be taken next year.

(15) We will focus now on the IJsselmeer area, where Almere is situated. (16) An important part of the policy context for Almere is also the present discussion on Dutch water management in the perspective of climate change and potential accelerated rise of the sea level. The Netherlands are the delta of Rhine and Meuse. These two rivers provide three quarters of all fresh water in our country. As rainfall and evaporation are in balance, we have to get rid of all this water, before we drown.

The physical survival of the country is more threatened from the east than from the west.

(17) To keep water management under control (that is: prevention of flooding and provision of fresh water, especially for agriculture) the Netherlands is physically organised as a huge, flat and open air water machine. Thousands kilometres of dykes and dams and hundreds of locks, sluices, barrages and water pumps are in use to maintain hundreds of different water levels.

(18) Holland, on the border of land and sea is also an important hub for migratory birds. Thousands and thousands of birds use the wetlands of the Netherlands as a stepping stone on their annual long travels from Siberia to Spain and further down to Africa. (19) For this

reason, the IJsselmeer area as well as the so-called Waddenzee up north are special protection zones according to the European Natura 2000 programme. This means that the maintenance of the natural quality of IJsselmeer, Markermeer and IJmeer is conditional for any urbanisation programme of Almere.

historical perspective

(20) A summary of the history of Almere in the context of the Zuiderzee project may be helpful to understand better the various dilemma's of the present growth programme.

(21) The Zuiderzee was the main entrance to the harbour of Amsterdam in the 17th century, the time that Amsterdam was the main commercial centre of Europe and the Dutch commercial fleet was as large as the fleets of all other European countries put together. However, this entrance silted up and the harbour of Amsterdam became less and less accessible. It took more than a century before in 1824 a canal was made to the northern entrance of the Zuiderzee and only halfway the 19th century an agreement was reached on digging a canal directly to the sea in the west.

(22) As the Zuiderzee lost its function as entrance to the harbour of Amsterdam, the negative aspects of the long coastline and its ever present danger of flooding the surrounding lowlands behind the dikes became more apparent. So from the middle of the 19th century several proposals, by various people, were made to enclose the sea and reclaim part of it for agriculture. At the end of the century a plan of Cornelis Lely was approved by a State Committee. It took another 20 years however, before in 1918 Parliament passed an Act to enclose and reclaim the Zuiderzee. The project had four aims: (a) improve safety, (b) provide fresh water for the surrounding provinces, (c) reclaim land for agriculture and (d) improve connections between different parts of the country.

(23) In 1958, 40 year later, new functions were added to the use of the land. Growth of population and wealth promoted urbanisation. National policy aimed to prevent concentration of population and employment in the randstad. So urbanisation was planned outwards. (24) A few years later the new urbanisation policy for the new land was clarified in a structure plan for the Southern IJsselmeerpolders. In the south-western corner of the polders one can already see the reservation for a later urbanisation in a green, recreational setting.

(25) The nineteen sixties were a period that all over the world architects and urban planners proposed mega-structures to accommodate ongoing urbanisation. Sometimes near then existing metropolises, like in Japan, sometimes just as conceptual studies. In the Netherlands, van den Broek and Bakema, then a pair of internationally renowned architects, did propose a mega-structure for the eastern extension of Amsterdam. (26) More or less at the same time, Cornelis van Eesteren, then head of the urban design department of Amsterdam, made a sketch of the north-eastern expansion of Amsterdam. That was at a time that population forecasts were that the Netherlands would have 20 million inhabitants by the year 2000 (actually, there are 16 million). (27) During the sixties also, a combination of private associations for nature and landscape conservation did publish a sketch of a more recreational concept for the last polder to be reclaimed, enlarging the border lakes and reserving large areas along these lakes and inside the polder for nature and recreation. All of this is setting the scene for Almere.

(28) The map of Almere from the policy document of 1970 on which Parliament decided to develop the new town shows a regional setting in a relatively fine-meshed network of highway connections that resemble the van Eesteren sketch of a few years earlier. (29) Almere is conceived as a poly-centered city. Nowadays that is a rather common concept of regional urban patterns (and indeed, Patrick Geddes foresaw this pattern already a century ago), but at the time it was relatively new and articles appeared to decry it as Los Almeros. Right at the start the interaction between city structure and main infrastructure is explored by looking at various alternatives. As you will see later on, the new growth programme gives rise to the exactly same kind of discussion 35 years later.

(30) A major rupture in the reclamation and development of the IJsselmeerpolders was triggered by a national report on the growth of air traffic. Its conclusion was that a second international airport should be built in the Markerwaard, the last polder of the project, not yet reclaimed at that time. Immediately several local action groups opposed this proposal and they killed two birds with one stone by opposing the reclamation of the polder at the same time. Also the famous report on the Limits to Growth of the Club of Rome triggered debate on the necessity of ongoing expansion of farmland in Europe. And last but not least, influential people suggested that a bright future, in which wealth and free time would grow, the remaining water should be reserved for recreation. (31) In the wake of the political events in Paris and Amsterdam at the end of the sixties, central government decided to introduce 'national planning decisions' that needed formal public debate, before the cabinet and parliament would decide. The eventual reclamation of the Markerwaard became the first of this type of planning decisions. After four years of debate a compromise seemed to be reached by a polder of 40.000 ha, leaving border lakes of 30.000 ha. (32) Various scenarios for future developments were presented during the decision process. One example of these that may still be of some interest is a recreational scenario, with a mix of water, nature, recreation and agriculture.

(33) In the meantime, work on Almere started. A sketch of 1972 by Teun Koolhaas, the main urban designer on the team, showing 'a view from the bridge' shows an urban landscape that looks very much like what you may see today from that same bridge. (34) While building of the first of the urban centres of Almere had already started in that same year, five years later the Development Agency presented a structure plan for the city as a whole. This structure plan included urban development to the west, in the IJmeer, as well as direct connections via this lake with Amsterdam.

(35) The development of Almere (in combination with expectations that political discussion on reclamation of the Markerwaard would drag on) influenced also the urban development policy of Amsterdam. For 40 years, up till 1974, Amsterdam had planned a new recreational area in the water of the IJmeer at the eastside of the city. But by 1985, they had changed that into a housing area. (36) This eastern extension (first named New East, presently called IJburg) was then developed with an eye on an eventual urban development in Almere, at the other side of the lake. (37) Halfway the eighties, a final bid for reclamation of the Markerwaard with ever larger border lakes was made by a private group. But the decision process had come to a dead end and a year later central government

decided to stop the procedure, stating that an eventual reclamation later on should not be made impossible.

present programmes

(38) I now come to the present programmes of the Randstad priority programme that are related to Almere. (39) In the nineties, government decided to abandon the idea of reclamation of the Markerwaard altogether, and at the beginning of the 21st century is published a new vision on the IJsselmeer region, distinguishing three zones. From south to north: IJmeer as a dynamic urban zone between Amsterdam and Almere, Markermeer as a vast recreational area in the middle, IJsselmeer up north as a regulating basin for water management and important nature reserve.

(40) I will focus on the ecological programme for Markermeer and IJmeer, as that programme conditions all other interventions in the area. As I already mentioned, the whole water area is a nature reserve, protected by the EU. So any transformation of the existing situation has to be assessed with regard to eventual negative effects on protected ecological values, mainly some twenty bird species. A major problem however is that the fish and freshwater mussels these birds feed on are in decline. So first of all the ecological quality has to be improved, before anything else can be considered. (41) Sailing and boating are another important use of these lakes. Major routes are along the coast and in crossing zones between the coasts. (42) With an eye to the urban development of Almere, a working group has analysed the various functions of the IJmeer, taking stock of various proposals and alternatives that may be considered. A foundation promoting regional design two years ago organised a design competition for the IJmeer. I will show two entries to show the extremes in the present debate. (43) One of the entries proposes to improve the ecological quality of the lake by including the surrounding land area in the nature reserve and introducing new water areas and wetlands there. (44) Another entry combined urban expansion of Almere along the dike (Italians will directly recognise the map of Venice) with a wetland directly north of it, to improve the natural quality of the Markermeer. (45) Almere and Amsterdam commissioned a design for a maritime Almere, that can be seen as a variation of the Almere structure plan of 30 years earlier.

dilemmas

(46) Apart from the ecological restrictions that condition urban development of Almere, what are the main dilemma's that the growth programme of Almere generates?

(47) Some of them are of a national character. Mostly, these consist of infrastructural dilemmas: the accessibility of Almere and its position in the national network. An example of this is the choice between various alternatives for the main highway connection between Schiphol and Amsterdam with Almere. (48) Another example is the periodical discussion about the expansion of Schiphol Airport. At the moment, the cabinet has chosen to expand a minor airport near Lelystad to accommodate ongoing growth of air traffic. But this solution will suffice for a few years only, so we can expect the dilemma to come back quite soon.

(49) Other dilemma's have a local character. Like 40 years ago, again a main dilemma is in how and which direction Almere should be developed. Each alternative has its own set of consequences for the regional infrastructure and is thus linked to regional dilemmas. At present local government is preparing three alternatives to discuss with regional and national government and enable a careful choice. One, called City of Water and Green, conditions Almere for an ongoing growth to east and west, presupposing a regional infrastructure to accommodate it. (50) Another, called Polder City, shows Almere developing in an eastern direction, in accordance with regional growth in cities nearby, like Utrecht and Amersfoort. (51) The third one, called Water City, directs urban development to the west, connecting Almere directly to Amsterdam.

(52) One of the Randstad priority projects, a major improvement in public transport, might be considered of a more regional importance. The main dilemma here is how national, regional and local systems may be connected and integrated. (53) Anticipating a bit on the last part of this lecture, the organisation of the decision process, I ask your attention for the proposal to divide that process in three periods:

asking decisions on investments till 2013, already preparing decisions for the next period till 2020 and exploring potential developments for the long term. This method should lead to 'no regret' decisions and thus enable politicians to make partial decisions. (54) The long term alternatives show two 'families' of alternatives: either enlarging the capacity of the existing railway lines or building a new line directly to Amsterdam through the lake. The method should prevent that short term decisions are postponed because of uncertainties about long term alternatives: the short term decisions fit into any of these alternatives.

(55) The dilemma's I have just mentioned all are of a more or less traditional kind. In any major urban development there are variants of infrastructure networks and variants of urban structure that interact. And environmental dilemma's are about as old as Vitruvius, though Almere offers a special case with regard to having to double its size while being surrounded by a protected nature reserve. But in urban development, be it regeneration or expansion, socio-economical programmes in a way are the main drivers of government action. In the growth programme for Almere, a 100.000 new jobs have to be created there in the next 20 years. That is 5.000 per year. The average annual job growth up till now has been some 2.500. A few graphs on employment in various Dutch municipalities may illustrate the kind of dilemma this double speed development poses. The first graph offers an overview of all Dutch municipalities over a recent 10-year period with regard to the density of inhabitants, jobs and visitors per ha of urbanized land, divided in ten categories of density. The 'orange ladder' shows the situation in 1997. The green rectangles show how much some of these municipalities have grown in density, dark grey rectangles how much some have declined. Almere is still part of the group of low density on the left hand site and in this 10-year period its density did not grow. (56) Another way of showing the dilemma is a graph that compares Almere with other municipalities in the relation between jobs and inhabitants. In the Netherlands there are on average 450 jobs per 1000 inhabitants. In Almere this proportion is still only 400 jobs per 1000 inhabitants. However, if you compare the proportions of employment with other cities in the northern wing of the Randstad or with the main big cities of the Netherlands, one sees that nearly all

of them have 500 to 700 jobs per 1000 inhabitants. So the dilemma for Almere is: is it reasonable to expect, that Almere will also show such a surplus of jobs? Or is it more rational to expect that it will keep its present suburban profile? And if the aim is to engage in a double speed economical programme, what kind of policies does this ask for, also in other aspects of development, such as education and a variety of urban facilities one finds in big cities.

decision process

(57) With regard to the main theme of this INTA summer course, I think the way this urban change of Almere is managed, needs some elaboration. I will start with a bit of theory on planning policy and follow up with how this works out for Almere.

(58) Let me start with a very general scheme of civic society in Western Europe. If you will later on remember just one thing of this lecture, I will be happy if it is this scheme. The scheme shows the three main virtues of civic society, its three main values: Liberty of the mind, equality before the law and brotherhood in the realm of survival, such as production and distribution of goods and services. The central idea of this model of civic society is that there is no hierarchy between these values and that each has its own realm of existence. In western civic society there is not only a separation between state (equality before the law) and church (liberty of the mind), but also between each of these and the market (brotherhood in survival). Citizens participate in each of these realms and by doing so have to keep the social system in a continuously dynamic balance. This separation of social realms of action in civic society makes citizens responsible for this social balance by giving them freedom of choice. The colours of the scheme refer to the three main politic parties in the Netherlands: the Liberty Democrats (blue), the Social Democrats (red) and the Christian Democrats (green).

(59) In the Netherlands, central government periodically publishes a policy document on spatial planning. This is based on an analysis of different perspectives for the future. For example, the preparation of the most recent planning document, that parliament decided on in 2006, started in 1997 by publishing a 'Discussion Paper on the Netherlands in 2030'. It presented four perspectives:

Flowland, the perspective of the Ministries of Public Works and of Economical Affairs, in the spirit of the Liberal Democrats,

Cityland, the perspective of the Ministry of Housing, Planning and Environment, in the spirit of the Social Democrats,

Parkland, the perspective of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Supply, in the spirit of the Christian Democrats,

Palette, the perspective of a non-directional territorial development in which all municipalities follow their own policies. It might be considered to be the perspective of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The main issue of territorial planning is always the choice between concentration and dispersal of population on a national as well as on a regional level. So these perspectives offer choices between the four possible combinations of choices on these two questions.

(60) Political parties, of course, base their policies on the interests of their constituencies. In the Netherlands, the Liberal Democrats have their power base mainly in the western part of

the country, the Social Democrats in the larger cities (say with a 100.000 inhabitants or more), the Christian Democrats everywhere else.

As no party ever gets a majority, coalitions are necessary. This leads to three possible policies:

Liberal-Christian: national concentration, regional dispersal

Social-Christian : national dispersal, regional concentration

Social-Liberal : national and regional concentration.

But as no coalition will hold for more than eight years and any successful planning policy needs continuity for at least twice that period, what happens is in reality is national and regional dispersal. Municipalities will follow their own policies as they get contradictory policy signals from different ministries and from different coalitions.

(61) From this analysis we must conclude that long term planning of governments is not very useful. Different political parties will have different perspectives on the future. Coalition governments can better concentrate on coming to consensus on projects, that is on public investments. Political parties than may use their perspectives to test government proposals for projects. Projects that fit into more of the political perspectives then are more 'robust' than those that fit only a few or even just one. (this testing of major investments to different scenarios was introduced by Shell in the seventies, after the first energy crisis; public authorities can learn from this).

(62) Now then to the management of projects. Any project will interfere with an existing situation and thus generates a conflict between continuity and change, in which different actors will take different actions to solve this conflict and bend it to their interests. In analysing this process it is helpful to distinguish four categories of actors. All people that spend time in doing whatsoever –that is all of us– are by necessity also users of space. Our collective daily life then can be considered as a 'programme' of a wide variety of desires for continuity as well as for change. It needs initiators –that is public or private developers– to select from this programme those desires for change that make feasible 'projects'. For these projects, one needs 'sites', provided by public or private landowners, that have to agree on selling or leasing their land for this purpose. And one needs also 'permits' of government authorities, that are responsible for continuity, and so have to be convinced that change is necessary or useful and doesn't damage other interests.

(63) Keeping this planning theory in mind, how does this work out in the project Doubling Almere? (64) First of all, a map of municipal and provincial boundaries may clarify part of the public actors involved in the three programmes of the Randstad Priority Programme related to Almere. That is 3 water boards (water boards are a part of Dutch government on the same level as municipalities), 14 municipalities,

2 provinces and 5 ministries, that is a total of 24 more or less autonomous public authorities. (65) Territorial development of Almere then introduces the four categories of actors I just mentioned. The 24 authorities belong to several of them: selecting programmes, defining projects, dealing in land transactions and delivering permits.

But far more actors are included. In the Netherlands, of all investments in real estate (infrastructure and landscaping included) 80% is done by private parties (40% in housing and 40% in all other buildings) and 20% by public bodies, mainly municipalities. And private investment in dwellings and other kinds of buildings will be influenced by the market. In this

case central government is a special actor because it is landowner of all the water areas surrounding Almere and quite a part of the land within its municipal boundaries. It is responsible for its water management, and as such responsible for nature conservation. And at the same time it is the initiator of the growth programme for Almere.

(66) The organisation scheme for the project 'improving public transport between Schiphol and Lelystad' shows that according to the rules of the Randstad Priority Program, central and regional government are formally made responsible *together* for the project. For Holland, that is unusual. It opens up new perspectives on managing this kind of large projects. (67) Meanwhile, this project has to deal with a wide circle of participating and otherwise interested actors of the various categories mentioned earlier.

(68) An interesting scheme with regard to managing urban change is about how funding the project 'doubling Almere' is organised. Three levels of funding are distinguished. On top is the business case of Almere, that focuses on land development and basic local facilities, calculating and balancing expenditures and receipts. In the middle are the additional investments of provincial and national government in regional and national infrastructure and facilities (for instance in education). And the base consists of exploitation and maintenance of municipal services, that are financed by various general funds and municipal income.

(69) And let me conclude this lecture on urban management with two schemes of how the decision process on the third project 'ecological improvement of Markermeer and IJmeer' is organised. The first one shows how government selects projects by professional criteria and parliament by political criteria and both sets of criteria are then input to come to agreement to citizens and authorities. (70) The second one visualizes this procedure for the various proposals for the IJmeer development that are presently available.

(71) Two final remarks about Almere as an interesting case of urban management.

One: the fact that Almere is a new town on new land makes the natural environment more explicitly conditional for urban development than elsewhere.

Two: The development of Almere has been explicitly embedded in regional development right from the start; so one can learn from it, how this interaction works.

DHF

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