

Polis 30 years

Agglomeration-programs, station districts, magistralen

When I was in the board of Polis in 1997, with Jan-Pieter Romijn and Marjolein Peters, we organized a debate lecture with David Jokinen, a celebrated American urban traffic planner, who advised The Hague and Amsterdam in the 1960s. He was invited at another event nearby and was interested to come to Delft for a lecture before flying back to the USA. As the issue of traffic in the city was one of my main interests, I thought it was a great occasion to organize an event about the fascinating interaction between urbanism and mobility. It was just striking that, except for Jan-Pieter, Marjolein and some lost students, nobody came. Obviously no-one else was interested in this topic. Even more striking were Jokinen's ideas about urbanism and traffic. His vision were motorways crossing through beautiful landscapes and dense cities, still proud about the Utrechtsebaan, a realised part of his "Jokinin-Plan" for The Hague. It was the complete opposite of what I had in mind.

Interdisciplinary teamwork

This brings me to Lakshmi's request of writing, on the occasion of Polis' 30th birthday (congratulations!), about my practice and the work I do. Since 18 years I live and work in Zurich in Switzerland, where I have, since 12 years, an urban design office with 7 collaborators from different disciplines (urbanism, architecture, landscape design, traffic planning, sociology). Thanks to this interdisciplinary teamwork we have won over 20 urban design competitions, for housing districts, business and urban transformation sites, cooperative housing developments, touristic alpine areas, town centers and public space design. However, the integral planning of urbanism and traffic, and doing it in a complete different way than David Jokinen, is still a personal interest where I and my office are often working on. At least in Switzerland, a paradise for future-oriented urban mobility, it has priority on the political agenda.

Sophisticated Agglomeration-programs

As the challenge begins at regional scale, we develop strategies for many urban regions. We have worked on so-called Agglomeration-programs, a sophisticated innovative Swiss planning instrument dealing with integral urban development and mobility projects and combining ambitious overall urban visions with fast, cost-efficient, high quality realisations. When these programs were introduced in 2007 we developed the agglomeration program for the French and Swiss urban region of „Grand Genève“, which won the 8th European Urbanism Award in 2010. Since, we are asked for many



similar projects. Not only in Switzerland, where we made visions and programs for regions such as Basel, Berne, St. Gallen and Neuchâtel, but also in other European countries, from Cologne in Germany to Lviv in Ukraine.

Referendum and participation

As traffic needs lots of space, integrally planning urbanism and mobility also plays a central role at urban densification strategies, which cities and communities in Switzerland have to develop since the Swiss population voted against urban sprawl in a referendum in 2013. For the city of Zug we developed a strategy for a compact city with a minimal role for car traffic. This does not only create space for large urban infill potentials, but also makes possible new parks, playgrounds and green streets with lots of trees, supporting a pleasant city climate. As participation is an integral part of urban development projects in Switzerland, we work with well-understandable and inspiring images, which at the same time make possible personal interpretations. Despite new technologies and media, the old and proved hand drawings, learned in Delft, turn out to be most successful.

Swiss Urbanism Award

On a more local district scale, we often work on the urban revaluation of station areas and main traffic arteries. We developed masterplans for the central station districts of Geneva, Fribourg and Berne, with 250'000 passengers/day even larger than Amsterdam Central Station. We also designed new tram lines in the suburbs of Geneva, Berne and Zürich, mostly projects defined by the Agglomeration-Programs. In Bregenz we turned a boring access road into an urban life line and with our project „urban boulevard“ for a main traffic road in Dietikon, a suburb of Zürich, we won the Swiss Urbanism Award (Stadtlandpreis) in 2018. This was one of the reasons why our office was invited at the International Bauforum in Hamburg last August, a much talked-about architecture

1. The communal urban densification strategy of Zug (Stadtraumkonzept Zug) reduces the role of car traffic. This creates large potentials for qualitative urban infill developments, with many new green public spaces. Thanks to understandable hand-drawings a constructive participation was possible (source: Van de Wetering, City of Zug).

2. During the International Bauforum in Hamburg last August we worked on new concepts for the Magistralen, the main traffic arteries of the city. We proposed an iterative process with a 10 meter long working model (image: Van de Wetering).

3. This year we won the urban design competition for the station district of Kehrsatz, a small town near Berne (image: Van de Wetering).

4. Urbanism and mobility, we also do other things. This year for instance we made the masterplan for the new international "Museumsquartier" in Berne, with an investment of about 250 million euros (source: Van de Wetering, City of Berne).

5. Unfortunately the Dutch urban planning market is very closed, introverted and not accessible for foreign offices. Maybe this is one of the reasons why abroad Dutch urbanism is not much talked about. At the moment we only advise the "Rotterdamse Woongenootschap" about cooperative housing (image: Rotterdamse Woongenootschap).

event, taking place about every 10 years. This time it dealt with the future of the „Magistralen“. These main streets structure the city, but are dominated by car traffic. We were one of the 13 specialized foreign offices defining new integral guidelines for the revaluation of these urban spaces. The event, during one week, was full of international urbanism prominence. It showed that, even in Germany, dealing with sustainable and future-oriented mobility in the city is a main urban planning issue now.

No more Jokinen-Plan

When I visited Holland last year and saw all these new motorways, I had to think about Jokinen again. Either he got active again in urban and traffic planning in Holland, thinking new motorways can solve our mobility problems. Or still nobody is interested in an innovative handling of mobility and urbanism. So, I hope in the future Polis and the TU Delft will have more success to draw attention to the issue of urban mobility. And maybe it is not such a good idea to talk about the Jokinin-Plan as best practice example. I could rather advice the Swiss approach.

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Polis Board Member, 1997

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