

## Rapperswiler Tag vom 2. Februar 2007: Pärke, Regionen, Landschaften

### Renewing Dutch Landscapes

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To understand the Dutch design tradition one has to understand the Dutch landscape. Almost half of the surface of the Netherlands is man-made land, the so called 'polders', land gained from the water. The 'unspoiled' nature is a romantic notion unknown to the Dutch. The Dutch expression "God created earth, but the Dutch created the Netherlands" is a telling illustration of this attitude.

The Dutch have to live with the continuous threat of the water. If the dikes weren't there to protect them, half of the Netherlands would be under water. Not only the rising of the water level in the sea forms a threat, but also the rising water levels in the rivers, heavier rainfall and the rising of the groundwater level. This makes the Dutch aware of the fact that you have to work with the landscape and, if needed, change it. The landscape is not seen as a static system, but rather as extremely dynamic.

Illustrative for this typical Dutch approach are two projects: Almere in the Southern Flevopolder and Meerstad (Lakecity) eastern of Groningen.

The landscape architect Alle Hosper (1943-1997), the founder of the multi-disciplined so called Bureau Alle Hosper, had a career spanning three decades. During that time, Dutch landscape architecture and garden design evolved from a profession largely aimed at laying out gardens and other green space into a scientifically grounded discipline whose subject is organizing and designing urban and rural areas alike. Alle Hosper was in the forefront of this development, as a designer, guiding spirit, inventor and teacher.

In 1975 Alle Hosper joined the ranks of Projektbureau Almere, an agency specially set up to develop a new city in Zuidelijk Flevoland, the recently reclaimed polder east of Amsterdam. This was work under exceptional circumstances: the central government was simultaneously landowner, developer, engineer and manager of a city that needed designing from scratch.

Almere was to be a poly nuclear city that could grow to seven non-hierarchical cores with their own identity and quota of inhabitants and separated from each other by broad green zones that could also take up the infrastructure. For these belts of green space Alle Hosper advanced the notion of landscape development zones, urban green areas between the built cores of the future Almere and differing from these cores in lacking specific future land use forms. This would allow the city's unpredictable dynamic to develop naturally.

'Landscape architects are used to work with the time factor', wrote Hosper. 'Trees and bushes need time to grow. So usually the design is only shown off to full effect much later. It's because of this awareness that landscape architects, as a rule, work differently from architects. They are more committed to make something that is timeless and not just fashionable now. They realize too that the design is first and foremost about creating conditions for patterns of use that can scarcely be envisaged at the design and layout stage.'

More recent, the approach of building new landscapes for changing social wishes is continuing. The tradition to make land from water is inversed: now the Dutch are making water from land. This change of mind is based on a combination of reasons: the need for high-quality residential areas, declining agriculture and the need to prevent areas from flooding by creating space for the storage of water. A good example of one of these new developments is Meerstad: an area of 3.500 hectares to the east of the city of Groningen. The design for the Master Plan is recently designed by the Office Alle Hosper and KCAP.

The Master Plan provides a blueprint for the 20-year, step-by-step transformation of the present farming landscape into a healthily functioning, multifunctional landscape with different residential areas. The new designed landscape exists of a lake of 600 ha, 350 ha ecological main structure and 450 ha green areas. On different spots in this new landscape there's space for 10.000 dwellings and 135 ha companies. The development of Meerstad represents a typical Dutch approach. Instead of consuming the landscape by adding new urban rings to the existing urban structures, a new landscape is being created and instead of relating to nature in a defensive way, new nature is being created in harmony with or in contrast to the new buildings. This results in a healthy, well functioning landscape with a huge diversity of possibilities and closely associated with the city of Groningen.