



# PART 2

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# Deltametropolis, a strategic concept

In February 1998, the aldermen for land use planning of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht issued the Deltametropolis Declaration. In this declaration they stated that the success of the Netherlands within the European Union would be determined by our ability to develop and sustain a successful European “megacity” – an urban constellation of international stature and impact. As a constant reminder of the natural framework of all human endeavours historically on this spot on Earth – the delta of the Rhine – this prospective “megacity” was called Deltametropolis.

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In February 2000, the Deltametropolis Association was founded. Its members are cities, regions, water boards, chambers of commerce, housing corporations, employer associations, and environmental organisations. In its fifth national report on planning policy, issued in January 2002, the Dutch cabinet adopted our concept, projecting Deltametropolis as a world-class Dutch urban network able to compete with other megacities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Within a few years’ time, Deltametropolis apparently has become part of the national political agenda.

Formally, this may be true. There is serious reason, however, to doubt that the views of our national and provincial governments correspond to the full concept of Deltametropolis as the concept’s initiators and the members of the Deltametropolis Association conceive it. In a way, this is to be expected when any new concept is introduced. A few years ago, the initiators themselves had only vague notions about what they were after. Moreover, it is positive evidence of the metaphorical and poetical power of a word if it associates easily with all kinds of interpretations.

New ideas should liberate entrenched mindsets, do away with mental constraints, and promote a free flow of innovative ideas. Thus enriched, the original idea can grow,

flourish, and bear fruit. If, however, traditional mindsets remain stuck in place, and mental constraints are not broken down, the idea of Deltametropolis will degenerate into merely a new label used to sell an old product (that is, the Randstad).

To prevent this from happening and to enhance a creative approach to the concept, it may help to clarify what Deltametropolis was meant to be – a strategic concept to transform the region; and what Deltametropolis has grown into – a set of proposals for strategic interventions to transform a loose collection of cities, towns, villages and landscapes into an integrated urban system, a coordinated Deltametropolis.

## **STRATEGIC CONCEPT**

From elementary school onward, we Dutch have become indoctrinated with the idea that we live in the country with the world's highest population density. With over 16 million people spread out over 41,000 square kilometres, the Netherlands has a density of almost 400 persons per square kilometre.

This doctrine, however, is true neither literally nor in spirit. Singapore, for example has some 3.3 million inhabitants in a country of less than 700 square kilometres, so its population density is twelve times higher than ours. Egypt, not counting the desert that is as uninhabitable as the North Sea, is approximately the same size as the Netherlands. More than 65 million people live there, over four times the Dutch population. Nearer to home, viewing it as the independent country it once was, the population density of Nordrhein-Westfalen (with 18 million people on 34,000 square kilometres) is also higher than ours.

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Learned in childhood, this false doctrine is carried over unconsciously into adulthood. Land use policy in the Netherlands is presented as an unending struggle for space in an overcrowded country. Meanwhile, even in the most densely populated western provinces, more than half of their 7,800 square kilometres is used for agriculture, mainly meadowland for cattle. The national cabinet claims that it needs another 1,000 square kilometres for additional nature reserves, more than three times the space needed for ongoing urbanization in this most urbanized part of the country. Nor does the cabinet see a need to reclaim the Markerwaardpolder that would add 400 square kilometres of new land to this country with “the world's highest population density.” So there you have it – there is no lack of space.

Looking at its present status, the western part of the country is a poorly managed collection of urban and rural fragments, arbitrarily deposited left and right, linked by a haphazard maze of roads and tracks cutting across it.

According to the founders of Deltametropolis, this sorry state of affairs is not caused by a shortage of land but by a combination of 1) a relative abundance of still-agricultural land and, 2) our collective laziness and general addiction to maintaining a stance of “flexibility” about land use matters that really covers up lack of attention and unwillingness to make tough, long-term decisions.

That our common weaknesses are translated directly into political and bureaucratic habits of evading and postponing decisions is a sign that nothing is wrong with our democracy. Our increasingly chaotic manmade environment reflects exactly that national character trait that we hold in high esteem: tolerance, especially with regard to ourselves. For all our national self-image as a society that asserts communal interests, current development trends in our urbanized west really reflect more *laissez-faire* attitudes.

In the face of these trends and attitudes, Deltametropolis was launched as a strategic concept to trigger a change of heart, to stop this ongoing deterioration of our manmade and natural environments, and to muster up enough energy, creativity and courage both to develop a long term strategy and to stay with it.

As an effort to change the hearts and minds of citizens and officials alike, the concept of Deltametropolis starts with re-conceiving the urbanized west not as part of a high-density country but as a low-density megacity. And Deltametropolis is a low-density megacity. With 6.9 million persons in its 7,800 square kilometres, Deltametropolis' density of 887 persons per square kilometre is less than that of Greater New York (932 persons/sq. km.), which sprawls from central Connecticut to central New Jersey, or metropolitan Los Angeles (905 persons/sq. km.), the international symbol of urban sprawl!

Understanding it as a city, the Deltametropolis Declaration summarized its key traits in articles 11 and 12. Article 11 states that human interaction is the essence of city life. In that spirit, Deltametropolis focuses on three types of human interaction:

- social interaction: the city as liberator
- economic interaction: the city as a source of wealth
- cultural interaction: the city as a school of civic culture

Article 12 states that Deltametropolis stands for transformation of the loose, poorly managed collection of urban and rural fragments – that is, an uncoordinated city – into an integrated, well-coordinated Deltametropolis.

These seminal texts date from 1998. In the meantime, our strategy has matured into a set of eight proposals to coordinate activities that now run their courses more or less independently. Four proposals aim at coordinating the territorial re-arrangement of land uses and transportation systems. Three proposals concern coordination of social arrangements. One proposal is concerned with reforming methods of governance in order to increase our common ability to combine forces and to agree on the directions in which to use them.

## **TERRITORIAL COORDINATION**

In the past few years the Deltametropolis Association has focused on the connecting links within the overall metropolitan system as these promise to have an immediate impact on creating more interconnectedness, coherence, and synergy. Those connecting links are the water system and the transportation system. Starting with these, one can then explore the opportunities these offer for transforming our rural and urban systems. This focus had led to four proposals.

**1 Water system:** The present water system is utilized up to and beyond the limits of its capacity. A structural adaptation of the water system is necessary. The Deltametropolis Association has designed a restructured water system that would create additional water storage capacity and additional linkages between water basins. This also offers the opportunity to use this renewed water system as the Deltametropolis' basic urban recreation network (to be called "WaterRealm"); sailing and boating on the water and cycling and walking along canals and lakefronts are typical Dutch ways of exercising and enjoying nature.

This concept of WaterRealm has now been refined by several planning reports. The time has come to act. For that purpose, a provisional WaterRealm Alliance has recently organized, combining the forces of water boards, farmers unions, local governments, and national organisations for recreation and nature conservation.

**2 Transportation system:** Improving interconnectedness and accessibility of the transportation system are essential for improving the productivity of the megacity as a whole. The road system and the rail system must be interconnected on three levels: 1) international, connecting Deltametropolis with metropolitan regions elsewhere; 2) intra-metropolitan (to be called Deltanet), interconnecting urban centres within the total Deltametropolis; and 3) local, serving smaller areas around each of the urban centres within Deltametropolis. Nowadays, the transportation system's primary weakness is the absence of sufficient connecting linkages among rather than the actual condition of these six different systems (that is, the rail and road systems serving the three levels). More specifically, as public transportation is associated with rail systems only, the connections between road systems and rail systems are poor to non-existent. To improve interconnectedness within Deltametropolis and to reduce travel times, creating connecting linkages must be given greater priority than expanding the six networks independent of each other.

**3 Rural system:** The beauty of our rural areas depends on long-term preservation of sufficient open space essential for plant and animal life. The current practice of both local governments and private land developers is to claim total flexibility regarding future land use outside city boundaries (whether that flexibility is for political or commercial reasons). This flexibility regarding future land use has two main negative effects on the rural system. First, based on its speculative value as potentially urbanized land, rural land prices rise above the levels necessary to sustain profitable agricultural production *even where expected urban development will never occur*. Second, with such uncertainty about future land use, farmers are discouraged from making long-term, agricultural investments.

For these reasons, the Deltametropolis Association favours defining clear, distinct boundaries between urban and rural land use. Such urban growth/rural preservation boundaries must be adopted for at least 20 to 30 years, long enough to make them visible in the landscape by means of water courses, dykes, rows of trees, or urban facades. The city boundary should no longer look like an urban fringe, the city's backyard, but like its front yard, looking out onto a magnificent regional park system of lakes, meadowlands, and woods.

**4 Urban system:** The traditional pattern of city centre and periphery is transformed within an urban network with a wide variety of urbanized nodes. The present constellation of Deltametropolis is a good example: the main cities (the “stars”) each have their own specific profile, and there is no clear hierarchy between them. We Dutch do have, however, an over-fixation on the city centres, or downtown areas, of the four main cities. By accepting that there are, in reality, some urban 25 centres within Deltametropolis, opportunities for greater differentiation and specialization among the centres increase and improve significantly.

Whatever new hierarchy may arise from this multi-centered megacity may be left to the future. It may well be that local inhabitants will forever experience Deltametropolis as a non-hierarchical pattern of discrete centres (Amsterdam, Utrecht, Delft, etc.), whereas visitors will more readily experience Deltametropolis as an integrated whole.

## **SOCIAL COORDINATION**

One may assume that nobody will deny the mutual influence between the character of human societies and the environments they create for themselves by cultivating the land, by building villages, towns and cities, and by developing transportation and communication networks. However, causal relationships between social structure and material structure are elusive. For this reason they are presented here as independent matters that have to be coordinated to become interdependent.

**5 The city as liberator:** Becoming a megacity requires participating in a global network of megacities. That, in its turn, implies internationalisation of our population. This is exemplified by the title of a manifesto the four main cities issued as part of the national elections in 2002: “the city in the world, the world in the city.” Within this policy the city’s function as social liberator becomes clearer. By transforming a constraint – our traditional self-image as a high-density country – into a more liberating vision – the low-density city – , we also create mental space for further growth that would surpass our rate of natural increase – that is to say, growth by immigration. This means that we must drop our attitude of disapproval towards economically-driven immigrants but concentrate our energies on methods to ease the integration of immigrants into our society through education, work, and citizenship. The Netherlands are not particularly good at this. For instance, in Great Britain a higher percentage of immigrants participate in higher education than in the Netherlands. More generally, the share of immigrants within the Dutch student population is, by European standards, extremely low. So, our “integration machinery” is in need of revision.

**6 The city as a source of wealth:** Megacity development requires major investments that a society can only afford if it raises its productivity. Recent studies by the Deltametropolis Association make raising productivity a central theme of megacity policy. For most of the twentieth century industrial production was the driving force behind a consumer society in which strong middle-class growth meant strong growth in consumer spending power. Globalisation of the economy added new driving forces that attracted new lower class immigrants for whom even the low paid jobs left shunned by the new middle class offered considerable income improvement. Globalisation also created new upper classes to manage and direct the flow of capital within the global

economy, together with their accountants, lawyers and advertising agencies. The conspicuous consumption of these new upper classes attracted yet more lower class workers willing to work in low paid jobs in a wide variety of personal services on the fringes of the official economy.

As a strategic concept, Deltametropolis combines a sharp growth in the number of urban centres with improved interconnectedness, thus joining them into an integrated urban system of some seven million people. By doing so, Deltametropolis creates greater occupational diversification and specialization, new opportunities for greater economic efficiency, and a higher level of productivity.

**7 The city as school of civic culture:** The Netherlands is a typical democratic society in which complex urban life can flourish only within an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. For this reason civic culture requires both a readiness to cooperate on matters of common concern (like safety, health, and education) as well as a readiness to complain if things don't work as expected. Civic pride is based both on our monuments to material wealth (museums, parks, historic neighbourhoods, etc.) and on our spiritual traditions (tolerance, equity, justice, democracy). These characteristics of a liberal society can seem threatened by rapid internationalisation. However, once you accept that internationalisation is not to be prevented but, just the opposite, is part of a megacity strategy, and as long as you think our civic culture is worth maintaining, then there is only one thing to do: put more effort into supporting and spreading our civic culture.

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As a strategic concept, Deltametropolis is, in a way, precisely that: a proposal to reinvest in our fine Dutch traditions of progressive water management, sensitive landscape architecture, and high-quality urban design. Deltametropolis is both an incentive to put more effort into the quality of our manmade environment and an invitation to join forces across jurisdictional, class, and ethnic lines to attain a better quality of life for all.

## GOVERNING CAPACITY

As a strategy, Deltametropolis will require many, many years of sustained effort. Will we have the governing capacity to ensure such sustained, disciplined action? At present, coordinated governance in Deltametropolis is growing weaker; a hundred municipalities, seven water boards, three provinces, and twelve departments of central government all follow their own course – not to speak of half a million businesses and seven million people who also do as they see fit. The political parties' decline has seriously diminished the capacity of elected representatives to govern cohesively; anchorless voters select anchorless politicians. Political parties once provided vertical connections and support for every level of government. Now every level of government seems increasingly adrift. The weakening of traditional social institutions, a greater ethos of individuality, and internationalisation of traditional Dutch businesses have all done their bit to create a loss of cohesion and to diminish any sense of responsibility for sustaining such cohesion. Moreover, the emergence of a "network society" – and the Deltametropolis vision – calls a purely territorial definition of governmental units into question.

Effective governance is the capacity to identify, recruit, combine, and direct available forces in society towards a common goal. In a highly competitive international environment, the ability to make decisions better and quicker provides the winning edge.

There is no easy way to meet these demands. To strengthen public governance, there seem to be three paths to explore.

The first and most traditional path is to exploit economies of scale by enlarging the territory, population, and resources of the governmental unit. This is the path the European nation-states are following through the European Union. Geopolitical considerations apart, this is the way to liberate market forces and create countervailing political powers at the same time. Centralizing governmental capacity in the European Union goes hand in hand with devolving power to European regions regardless of national boundaries. In the Netherlands this could mean that, to strengthen megacity governance, the province of Holland should end its division into North and South Holland, forced upon it in the nineteenth century, and should be reunited. If the province of Utrecht would then follow suit, this would give Deltametropolis a unified regional government.

The second path to explore is where and when to replace territorially-based government by functional government. Water management in the Netherlands has been organised along these lines since the Middle Ages. It is a logical form of specialised government for all functions that transcend territorial boundaries. So creating a transportation authority for Deltanet, as we already have water authorities, is worth a try.

The third path is that of using our civic culture, of strengthening government by improving the influence of citizens on public policy. As political parties have lost their value as platforms for combining and directing social forces, this role has been taken over by the media, especially television. Television has become a sort of national living room where the events of the day are discussed and evaluated. Technically, it is only a small step to using the media also for regular opinion polling and for voting in consultative referenda. By doing so, civic culture and a sense of individual responsibility for public policy would be strongly enhanced at the same time as government is strengthened by rooting its policy more firmly in the views of the citizens in whose name these policies are pursued.

Summarizing Deltametropolis as a strategic concept, it consists of eight actions:

- 1 Use the necessary adaptation of the water system as an opportunity to make the water network the backbone of the recreational network, creating a park system of megacity scale and scope, to be called WaterRealm.
- 2 Use the agricultural landscape, rooted in our history and world-class economically, as an integral part of Deltametropolis'identity. Safeguard this quality by designating long-term sustainable boundaries between urban and rural realms.
- 3 Reduce travel time within Deltametropolis by improving interconnectedness of railway networks and road networks on three levels: international, intra-

metropolitan, and local. Start with improving connecting linkages between road and rail networks of Deltanet, improving their capacity of transfer passengers and cargo between modes.

- 4 Transform the present loose collection of rather traditional, inward-looking urban centres into an interconnected and integrated urban system of some 25 old and new urban centres, thus creating new opportunities for diversification, specialization, and an overall rise of urban quality-of-life.
- 5 Be aware that participation in a global network of megacities implies internationalisation of the Deltametropolis population; improve policies and programs to integrate immigrants into Dutch society with special regard to educational opportunities for immigrants from elementary school right up through university level.
- 6 Raise the productivity level of the Deltametropolis by creating opportunities for ongoing industrial production and growth of employment in international management of economical enterprise.
7. Put more effort in sustaining the Dutch civic culture of tolerance and social cohesion; reinvigorate fine Dutch traditions in water management, landscape architecture, and urban design.
- 8 Strengthen governing capacity by exploring three paths to improvement: creating a governmental unit for Deltametropolis through unifying the provinces of South and North Holland and Utrecht; replacing territorial governmental units with functional ones, especially for functions like transportation, where feasible; and improving the influence of citizens on public policy by using a variety of methods for public participation via the media, registering their opinions and expressing their preferences.



