

One Pioneer, Many Legacies. The Province of Flevoland and the Randstad Metropolitan Area, the Netherlands

Original

One Pioneer, Many Legacies. The Province of Flevoland and the Randstad Metropolitan Area, the Netherlands / Paone, Fabrizio - In: Territories in Crisis. Architecture and Urbanism facing Changes in Europe / Cristina Bianchetti, Elena Cogato Lanza, Agim Kerçuku, Angelo Sampieri, Angioletta Voghera. - STAMPA. - Berlino (Germania) : jovis, 2015. - ISBN 9783868593839. - pp. 274-283

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2673658 since: 2020-01-31T17:42:23Z

Publisher:

jovis

Published

DOI:

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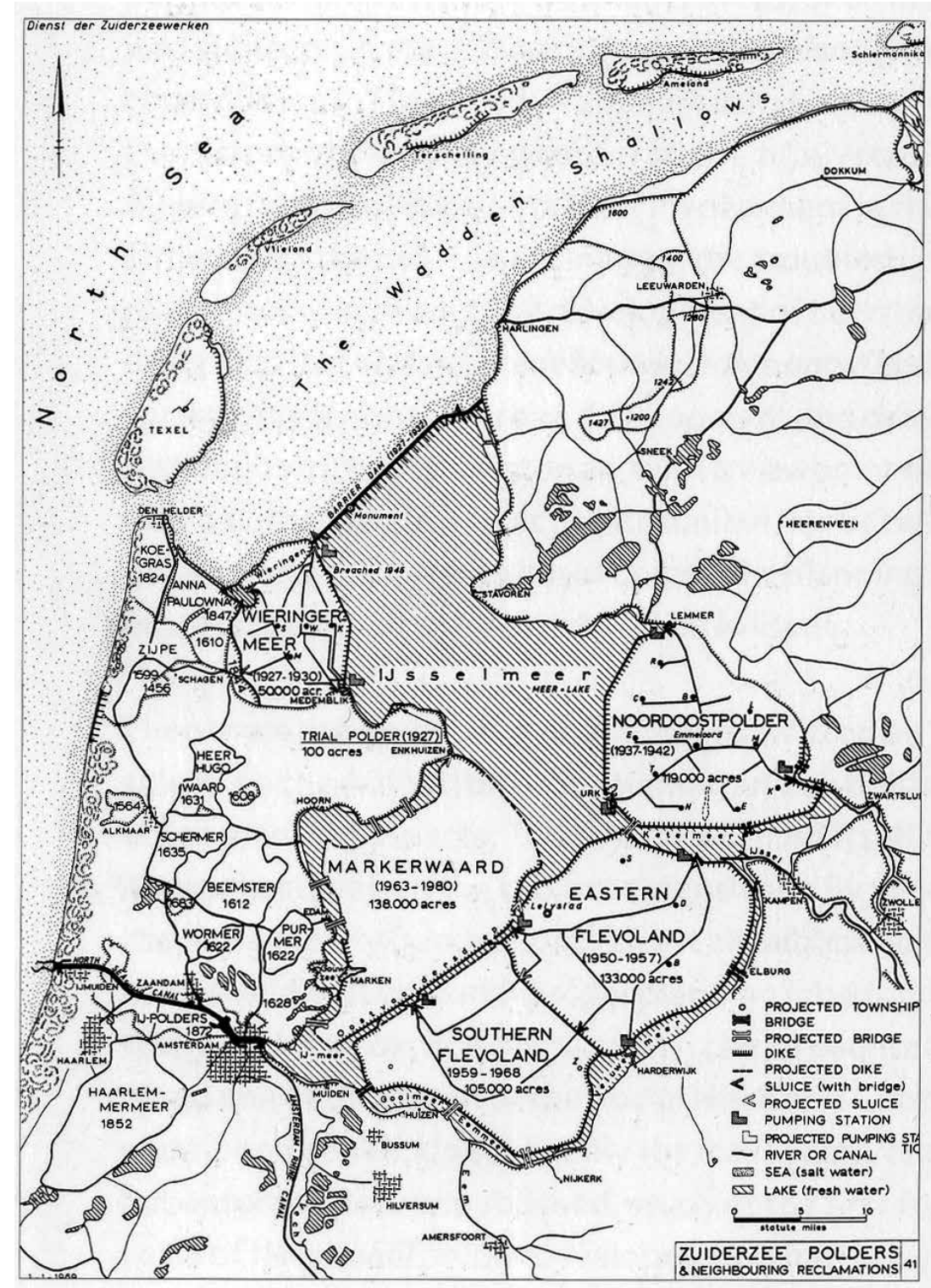
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ONE PIONEER, MANY LEGACIES

Fabrizio Paone

The territory known as Flevoland was created in the twentieth century after land was reclaimed from the sea. A special place where time is encapsulated in modernity, accelerated and compressed. Nevertheless, what we see today is not moving towards homologation. Globalization appears to be separating the destinies of cities and territories that have developed based on the same institutional and infrastructural conditions. We believe that the genealogy of these urban formations—especially Nagele, Lelystad, and Almere—has become more complicated; in fact, their legacies seem to multiply, shatter, and become nonunivocal. The pioneers appear reborn in the inhabitants who settle in this new, maiden land, sparking a real estate supply determined to support this oneiric projection. With its exemplary aura, Nagele is clearly occupied by inhabitants who ignore the intellectual travail leading to its creation. It is similar to Chandigarh: “authentic” delimited modernity that has not influenced the real settlement dynamics of our contemporary age, in short a “niche” product. Lelystad poses questions that remain urgent—e.g., how to create new urbanity and social cohesion. However, the process appears doomed to irreversible failure because it involves new designs that, although they add aesthetically beautiful objects, are incapable of eliminating the sense of abandonment and stagnation communicated by the city. Although Almere appears to have followed in Lelystad’s footsteps, it later developed in a discontinuous polycentric manner. It was reborn in the nineteen-nineties, when the influence of the urban dimension of Randstad and its priority in the Dutch and European urban agenda led to investments and a successful outcome. The current crisis lifts the lid

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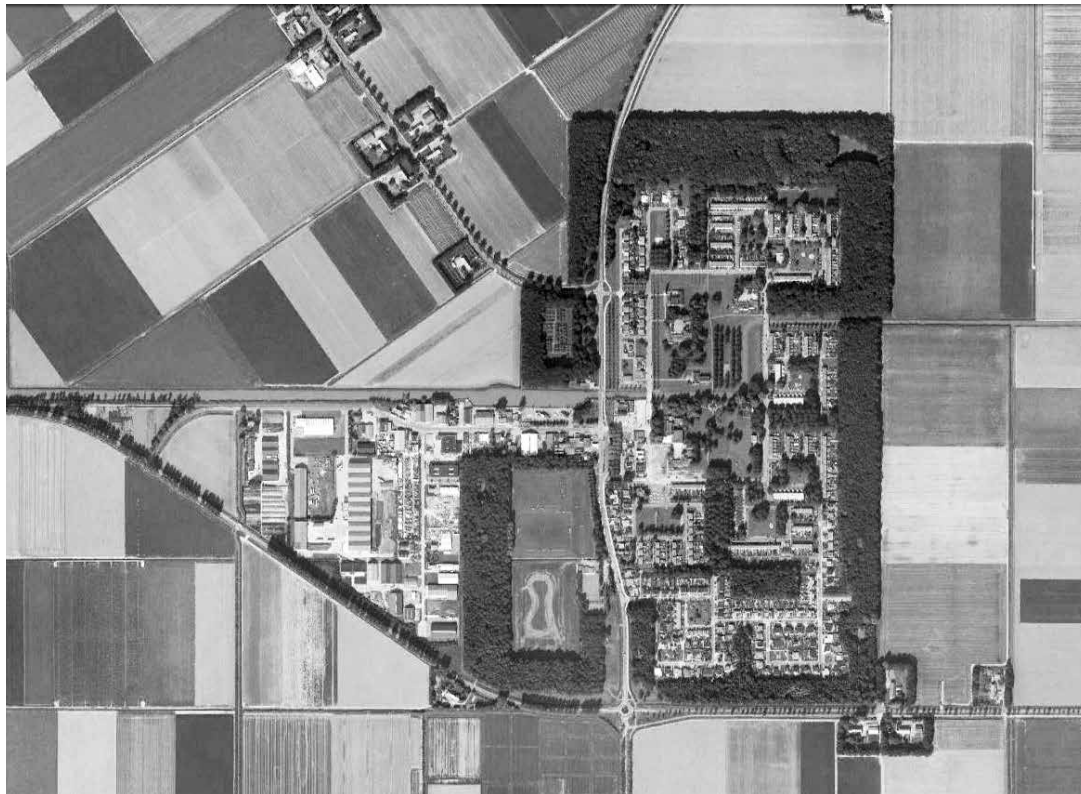
1 IJsselmeer, terre bonificate a partire dal Medio Evo. L'interramento del Markerwaard, cui è associato il periodo 1963-1980, non è stato realizzato ed è riportato nella configurazione degli anni settanta

on earlier interrelated conditions. Seen from Flevoland, the twentieth century looks like an uninterrupted series of crises that cannot be solved because they are all structurally diverse, immeasurable, and randomly enhanced by certain works, trends, and authorial figures. The crisis that began in 2007 initially appears to have acted as a simple multiplier of ongoing trends and later became a sort of basis on which to elaborate more and different scenarios.

Technicalization of the Myth

The engineer Cornelis Lely¹ studied the reclamation of the eighteen-eighties (see Bosma 1997): the Zuiderzee had to be transformed into IJsselmeer—literally “lake at the end of the river IJssel.” In 1918, Lely was granted funds during his third ministerial term of office due to the emotional impact of the 1916 flood and the end of the war. National rhetoric and collectivization prefigure the worksites.²

Socioprofessional circuits and technical and institutional elites were created to not only provide civic and social services, but also to establish the municipality. These include: the Dienst der Zuiderzeewerken (ZZW, Zuiderzee Project Department, ZPD), the Rijksdienst voor de IJsselmeerpolders (IJDA, IJsselmeerpolders Development Authority, initially named Wieringermeer Directorate), both part of the Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstraat



2 Nagele, 2015 © archivio ?

(Ministry of Transport and Water Management); as well as the Directie IJsselmeergebied del Rijkswaterstaat (General Directorate), later named Adviescommissie Zuidelijke IJsselmeerpolders (Advisory Board for the Development of Southern IJsselmeer Polders), and the Openbaar Lichaam (Public Authority).

The first 2.5-kilometer stretch of the Afsluitsdijk from Nord Holland to Wieringen was completed in 1924; the 30-kilometer stretch between Wieringen and Friesland was finished in 1932. This created three big polders. In 1937, reclamation began on the Noordoostpolder and continued throughout the forties, creating an average subsidence of roughly three meters. In 1957, the Oostelijk Flevoland was considered to be dry; in 1968, the Zuidelijk Flevoland was also considered dry. Then came the construction of urban centers, which enriched and articulated the more current and diffuse ideas about Dutch modern urban planning. Compared to dominant professional culture, protagonists such as Cornelis van Eesteren, De 8 en Oupbow, Gerrit Rietveld, Mart Stam, Aldo van Eyck, and later Rem Koolhaas (OMA), Ben van Berkel (UNStudio), and MVRDV adopted a more dialectic approach towards the practice rather than a hegemonic role.

The settlements in the cities in the Noordoostpolder were designed by Pieter Verhagen³ following the dictates of the Delft School and the Dutch interpretation of the Garden City and its main protagonist Marinus Jan Granpré Molière.⁴ In 1966, Lelystad—the eponymous pioneer city—was the first settlement to be built in the Oostelijk Flevoland; it was initially designed by Cornelis van Eesteren and then by many individual and collective authors, architects, and designers. In 1962, the worksite for the city of Dronten and its two satellite villages was inaugurated. In 1976, the first houses were built in Almere marking the beginning of urban construction in Zuidelijk Flevoland, which had been connected to Amsterdam and the urban region of Randstad since 1959.⁵

Villages and Cities: Nagele, Lelystad, Almere

The agricultural territory of Noordoostpolder and Flevoland became a province of more than 2,400 square kilometers, and is currently inhabited by 400,000 inhabitants. The new lands became the basis of a reformed, ideal urban dimension with, in particular, the following three urban formations: Nagele with 1,000 inhabitants in the Noordoostpolder, a rural village designed as a collective by the [x] members of Dutch modernism; Lelystad, an average-sized city with 75,000 inhabitants, communicating a feeling of emptiness and abandonment; and Almere with 200,000 inhabitants, where demographic dynamism was coupled with greater economic and occupational opportunities.

The initial action is declarative: media-oriented, you could say, with deliberate anachronism. Two events took place after the announcement, “Let’s cultivate new lands and establish cities.” The first legacy consists in a persuasive stimulus: numerous statements identical to the initial one were reiterated by the inhabitants, the pioneers. Several technical initiatives were also organized in order to achieve the aforementioned goal: design and construction of the

dams and hydraulic works (responsibility of the ZPD); reclamation of lands and allotment (responsibility of the IJDA); design and construction of infrastructures (responsibility of the ZPD); design and construction of settlements (initially by the IJDA with external consultants and then several agencies that sometimes collaborated and sometimes were at odds); arrival of the inhabitants; practical and administrative independence.⁶

Nagele is a village set back from the main road passing through the territory; its pleasant environment is different from previous or later settlements. The big rectangular green area in the town center is full of plants and silence reigns supreme. From the road running all around the perimeter of this central area, one can see the museum, the three churches, the town hall, the three schools, the archives, and low buildings situated in each of the detached allotments. All of these architectures are offset by very few vertical elements—none of which, however, is taller than the trees. Residential clusters create quiet forms of cohabitation between inhabitants and motorists; these clusters are softened and surrounded by rows of trees that seem to protect these groups of houses from the endless visual dimension of the fields. The arts and crafts area appears a little bigger than originally planned; everything else looks like a finished, completely built design. The genesis of the plan began in 1947 and ended in early 1954 and it involved the collective front of the modern, “De 8 en Opbouw”⁷: Van Eesteren, Stam, Rietveld, van Eyck and Bakema worked with Merkelbach, Kamerling, Bodon and Elling. Kamerling acted as the main designer,⁸ but with the full cooperation of all the others who repeated the pattern ad infinitum and only afterwards designed the main buildings, adopting a redundant and recursive ideation process.⁹

Lelystad is bigger and was, from the start, unstable. As the regional center of agricultural activities, it was designed to accommodate 25,000 inhabitants, but this figure could increase fourfold if Lelystad becomes attractive for industry. The ZPD and van Eesteren believe that when reclamation of the Markerwaard—abandoned in the nineties—is completed, the position of the new city might help it play an ambitious national role in the future territorial and infrastructural network. Many aspects of its urbanization have been questioned, including the relationship between its town planning design, political decisions, and the national and international economic situation. However, trust in prescriptive planning dictating the agenda of urban construction declined while the plan was being drafted.

The characteristic traits of *planology*¹⁰ begin to emerge; these traits satisfy the need to systematically increase the data on which urban design is based.¹¹ A multidisciplinary program was adopted at the regional and municipal levels, while nationwide the plan was influenced primarily by legislative, financial and management tools.¹² In Lelystad, the impasse can be described as a conflict between projects, sharing, and competences, and the fact it was impossible to find common ground. Since the statue of the IJDA made it responsible for agricultural issues vis-à-vis the plan, it maintained that the infrastructures had to be useful to agriculture. This approach pitted the IJDA against the ZPD and van Eesteren, who had been the consultant since 1949. In 1956, the Ministry of Transport and Water Management decided that the ZPD and the IJDA had to cooperate; it set up a

Planological Commission and appointed van Eesteren as head planner. The main bones of contention involved the scheduling of the stages, the final size of the city, and its functions. The planning phase lasted over ten years: during that time, the IJDA was concerned about the configurations of the city before it was completed, because this would influence future inhabitants and their decision to move to Lelystad. Van Eesteren’s authoritativeness and experience appears to have made people forget there was no clear program or prior survey, a process that had been in force in The Netherlands since the nineteen-twenties. Nor were national laws passed. Van Eesteren presented his solutions between 1960 and 1964, more concerned about the far-sightedness of the urban concept, than perfecting the intermediate stages. The IJDA shifted from a critical but collaborative waiting game to outright animosity. The new IJDA director obtained the support of the Minister for a new Structure Plan drafted primarily by van Embden. At that point, the first worksites could be inaugurated and construction on the first house began in late 1965. In 1970, the new Structure Scheme was ready.

Nevertheless, certain topics and problematic issues seemed unsolvable. What exactly is completed urbanity? And how big does a settlement have to be to achieve it? How can



3 Nagele, gli spazi aperti centrali e la scuola cristiana protestante di Van Eyck e Van Ginkel © Fabrizio Paoone

the detailed and independent development of the parts—first and foremost the residential districts—embellish and improve the city, when they compromise its coherence and unity with arbitrary variations? What are the contemporary shared elements and how can they all be built all simultaneously?

Nagele was a distant memory

In many ways, Almere appears to have learned from the stalemates and mistakes made in Lelystad.¹³ After the Ministry of Transport and Water Management approved the location of the city in the Verkavelingsplan (1968), the IJDA mandate for the new designers was based on four main points: the envisaged minimum/maximum number of residents (up to 2,000); residential homes more attractive than those in neighboring areas; the drafting of a reference plan during either fast or slow growth; univocal identification of the first development site. Its legacy seems to be more focused on the negative than the positive—i.e., what should not be done, the risks involved, the logic to be avoided, and the conflict between institutional actors. It was back to the drawing board to design a discontinuous urban structure; huge swathes of land where diversification of the residential supply was meant to attract inhabitants with diverse aesthetic tastes.



4 Almeerdestrand, nuove residenze Homerus, © Fabrizio Paoone

Areas with plants and trees were envisaged in various parts of the city to separate and link the districts. The IJDA set up Projectburo Almere (PBA, Almere Project Bureau); under the direction of Friedeling, it started its work in late 1972 and remained active until 1981. The project envisaged three main settlements—Almere Stad, Almere Buiten, and Almere Haven—which finally became the Ontwerp Structuurplan Almere in 1977. The interdisciplinary teams working in the PBA included architects, planners, sociologists, civil engineers, agricultural engineers, landscape engineers, traffic engineers, and economists. All of those involved used scientific data in their research, while social, political, and design issues that couldn't be classified in these scientific data tended to be ignored, notwithstanding the fact that they are all influential issues.

Almere developed. Construction of the first house began in 1976, and in 1984 the municipality became independent. The 40,000 inhabitants in 1985 grew to 71,000 in 1990; 105,000 in 1995; 143,000 in 2000; 175,000 in 2005; and 190,000 in 2010. Two new districts are now being built (Almere Hout and Almere Poort) and another (Almere Pampus) is currently on the drawing board. In 2009, the MVRDV studio and the municipality jointly drafted the strategic document entitled “Draft Structural Vision Almere 2.0”; the plan includes yet another residential settlement: Almere IJland.¹⁴

The Crisis as a Way to Separate the Destiny of Neighboring Urban Formations

The economists at PBA initially estimated that 10–13 percent of inhabitants in Almere would have worked outside the city: a serious underestimation. In the nineties, proximity to Amsterdam and inclusion in the metropolitan area of Randstad were the main dynamic growth elements in Almere.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Dutch town planning focused on the ring of cities around the Groene Hart (green heart), one of the first five European metropolitan areas with a major European port (Rotterdam), and one of the first four airport hubs in Europe (Schipol). No other medium or small-sized city could provide the same opportunities as regards education, employment, recreational activities, events, history, and diverse housing units, thereby allowing people to travel smoothly between Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Hilversum, Haarlem, and Schipol. According to the Flevoland Development Agency (OMFL), roughly 32,000 businesses—including 400 multinationals—are active in Flevoland (2015); furthermore, in the last ten years employment has grown more in Flevoland than in any other Dutch province.¹⁵ Spatial proximity to the metropolitan area and its real estate dynamics is considered advantageous, while production has become increasingly mobile and is well served by mobility systems.

The crisis that started in 2007 appears to have further differentiated the destiny of neighboring urban formations that—although located close to one another—have different

relationships with metropolitan dynamics, thereby accentuating their already positive or negative evolution. The internationalization of the food market has made the agricultural production in Flevoland economically irrelevant. Nevertheless, its regular allotments, rational infrastructures, low housing density (165 inhabitants per square kilometer), and the presence of large unbuilt spaces have made Flevoland a privileged site in which to set up activities, including large wind farms. While food self-sufficiency appears to be a subject attracted by a lost past, low-priced land well served by infrastructures is acting as a boost for considerable urban transformation. One of these projects was the redesign of the Almere city center, commissioned by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) between 1998 and 2007 following a competition launched in 1994. The project marks the willingness of public institutions to renew investments in Almere and establish synergies with private investors who, by building big commercial projects, are considered to anticipate the construction of the new public spaces (see Provoost et al. 1999).

The legacies have multiplied: some are successful, some enigmatic, and others negative. The concept of “center”—and especially of “core”—is perhaps still the most problematic term.¹⁶ There’s a shift to more complex projects from the previous search for smallness and the traditional language of villages in the Noordoostpolder, where just one center unambiguously characterizes closed communities and comforting identities. Between the solutions developed by van Eesteren and those that came later, the location and orientation of the Central Business District (CBD) in Lelystad underwent changes that did not provide a stable configuration. Notwithstanding the main central area, centrality is introduced into each district during renovation; this centrality is based on a system of dual access; shops and offices on the ground floor and homes on the upper floors.

“Core” is the buzz word used during revision of the architectural ideas and modern town planning program adopted by the CIAM in the second half of the twentieth century up until 1959 and the Otterlo congress in The Netherlands when it disbanded. In the hope of architecturally and spatially defining the core, it tried to introduce emotions as testimony to the human condition; an authorial aesthetic commitment within modern settlements that had become a socially neutral linguistic system.

However, we also have to point out that sharing spaces for a long period of time cannot be authoritatively imposed. Based on the logic of matching residential situations that use small-scale solutions (present in many areas in Almere), the new centrality created by densification strategies and the OMA project triggers a review of the role of superimposition and vertical stratification in urban design. Nevertheless, it’s Nagele’s “empty” center that continues to amaze: its architectural objects exhibited as totem furniture on a carpet, monuments relegated to the sidelines and bereft of their surroundings. Or the “empty” center in Randstad, without a city but not without urbanization, generating memories of built presences and the gaps that give meaning to those presences.

Notes

- 1 The engineer Cornelis Lely (1857–1929) was Minister for Maintenance of Dykes, Roads, Bridges and Navigability of Canals, Trade and Industry in three different governments between 1891 and 1918.
- 2 For more information about the rhetoric discourses around nationalization, collectivization, and housing experimentation regarding the construction of the kibbutz in Israel, see Or (2010). More general information is provided in Spiegel (1967).
- 3 Some of the drawings probably date to before the forties. However, philological verification is difficult because the original material was destroyed when Rotterdam was bombed during the Second World War. The plans were redesigned later by the draftsmen working for the Directorate. Nagele was built based on several plans by the Dutch modernist group, as mentioned in this paper.
- 4 Marinus Jan Granpré Molière was chairman of the Stedebouwkundige Raad (Planning Advisory Board) in 1921; he made the keynote speech at the International IFHTP Conference in 1924 in Amsterdam. Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin both attended the conference.
- 5 For brief information about the features and processes of the plan, see Tilman (1997).
- 6 Events have been accurately retraced in van der Wal (1997).
- 7 The team included De Opbouw, the Dutch functionalist groups founded in 1920 in Rotterdam and in Amsterdam in 1927.
- 8 The plan was exhibited as a collective experiment at the CIAM in Bergamo in 1949. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Kamerling was unable to attend. It was exhibited again at the CIAM in Hoddesdon (UK) in 1951.
- 9 The drawings and the design operations are described in Hemel and Rossem (1984).
- 10 The neologism planology was introduced by Joël Meijer De Casseres and was used as a conceptualization in the disciplinary debate in The Netherlands. See Faludi and van der Valk (1994).
- 11 An assessment of how the discipline was applied is illustrated in the collective book Stedebouw in Nederland. 50 jaar Bond van Nederlandse Stedebouwkundigen (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1985). For more information about the specifics of the Dutch contribution vis-à-vis the European context, see Dutt and Costa (1985).
- 12 An excellent series of articles in English on this and other issues regarding Dutch town planning is published in Needham (1992, revised 1996).
- 13 For the principles and objectives of Almere see Nawijn (1979).
- 14 http://english.almere.nl/fileadmin/files/almere/subsites/english/Draft_strategic_vision_Almere_2.0.pdf
- 15 <http://english.almere.nl/business-in-almere/economy-facts-and-figures/>.
- 16 The most important reference is in the proceedings of the eighth CIAM (Tyrwhitt et al. 1952).

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