

R. J. Benthem

*Ter gelegenheid van het afscheid van de heer R. J. Benthem, tot 1 september 1976 inspecteur Landschapsbouw bij het Staatsbosbeheer, werd op 26 en 27 augustus 1976 te Wageningen een Internationaal symposium "Landscape planning" gehouden. Hierna volgt de rede die de heer Benthem zelf aan het einde van het symposium hield. De overige inleiders waren: prof. ir. M. J. Vroom, hoogleraar landschapsarchitectuur LH, Wageningen; ir. A. J. van der Poel, directeur van "De Dorschkamp", Wageningen; prof. Brian Hackett, department of Town and Country Planning, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England; prof. G. Olschowy, directeur Bundesanstalt für Vegetationskunde und Landschaftspflege, Bonn-Bad Godesberg, Duitsland.*

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During this meeting an insight has been given into different aspects of landscape planning and in the progress made in theory and practice during recent years. We have been informed about possibilities to steer the continual changes in the appearance of the countryside in our densely populated part of the world. The growth from simple pioneer action to a scientific and professional approach in planning the landscape has been emphasized.

We are also being told about the educational viewpoints. And we learned that teamwork is the only way to cope with many of the impacts threatening the old historic landscape patterns.

Furthermore it was evident that the environmental problems do not stop at national boundaries but that international cooperation is badly needed for a continued existence of rural areas, agricultural lands and forests as well as national parks, recreational and scenic areas and other forms of "open space".

Trends in land use were outlined in the excellent speeches and fruitful discussions.

The title of my concluding speech: "Landscape Planning: things to come", suggests almost a prophecy. However, I am not a prophet at all! And in this turbulent era it seems even more difficult than ever before to take the risk of predicting the future. I think it might be better to underline some identifiable tendencies and to consider some steps to be taken.

If we look at the growing concern of the man-in-the-street about the loss of ecological values, it seems first of all important to pay more attention to *environmental education*. The protests against the felling of trees and the transformation of valleys into reservoirs, against chemical pollution, high rise buildings and ever more highways are a clear indication that public opinion can be a strong support to protect existing natural features. Information about the background and the motives behind our changing countryside should therefore be considered in a broadly based educational program.

The instrument of *physical planning* can be another effective means for conservation or the promotion of scenic quality and biological diversity. This instrument can improve the competent authorities with an effective control on the use of land and a planned development of their territory. The urbanization process, the integration of urban and rural demands in land use policy, and the creation of an adequate infrastructure is largely decided by the standard of physical planning in our respective countries.

If this physical planning really aims at public welfare and if it is based on the carrying capacity of the land, it can make a great contribution to a sustained management of biological and recreational potentialities of the countryside.

Another point I would like to stress is, that, in my opinion, for a planned development of landscape much more *research* should be initiated. As landscape so far has been more considered as a phenomenon rather than a subject, the level of scientific knowledge in this field is by far not as it ought to be. During the last years however an enjoyable interest in landscape research has manifested itself in different ways and in several countries.

In the Netherlands the former Forest Research Station has been transformed in the State Institute for Research in Forestry and Landscape Planning with an enlarged staff of scientists in the respective scientific fields. Moreover landscape research in this country is being practised at Wageningen University, at the Landscape Planning Department of the State Forest Service and, for specific aspects, at some other universities and other institutions.

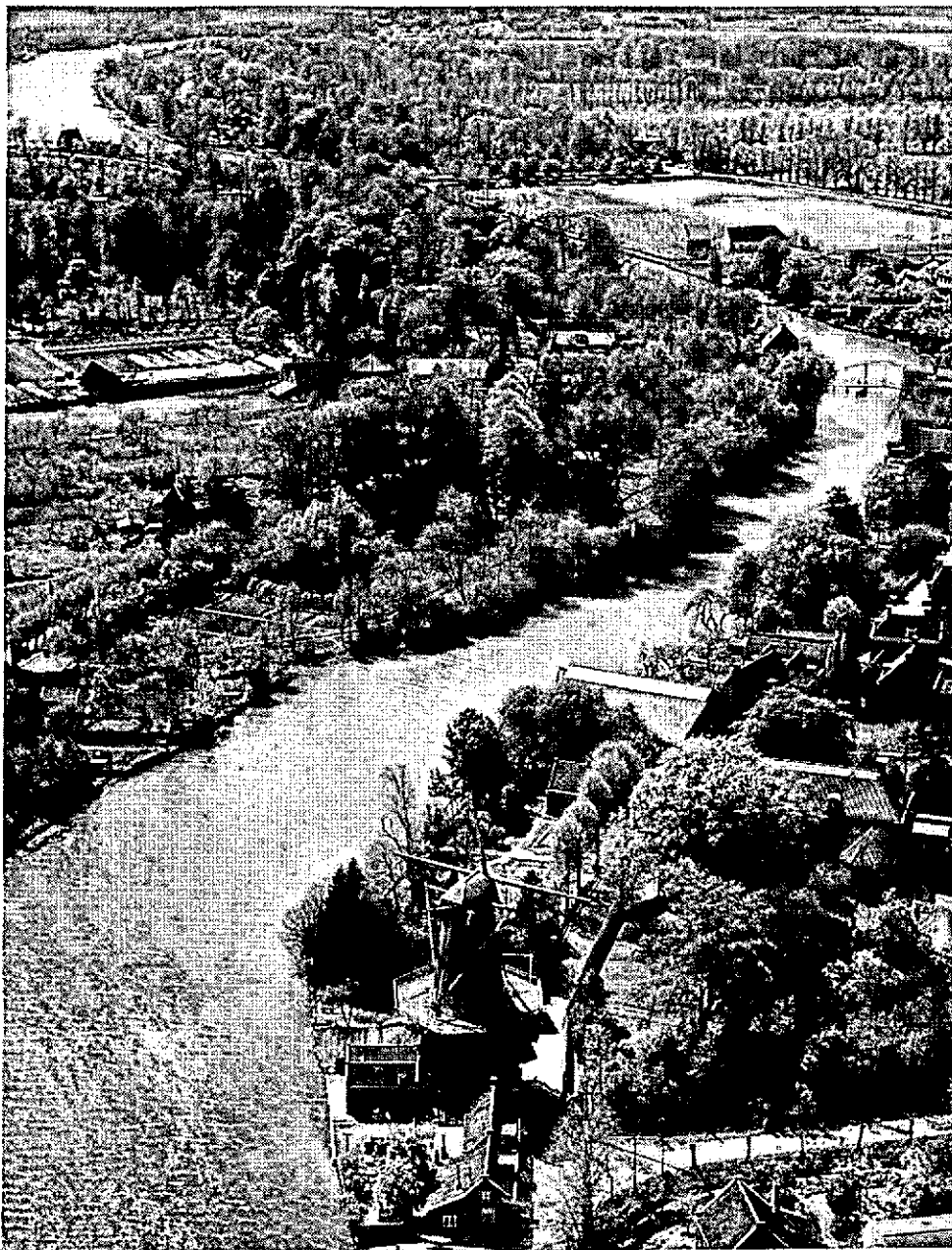
Besides the need for studying fundamental problems

there is an even greater urgency for applied research in a great number of fields where adequate scientific data are required.

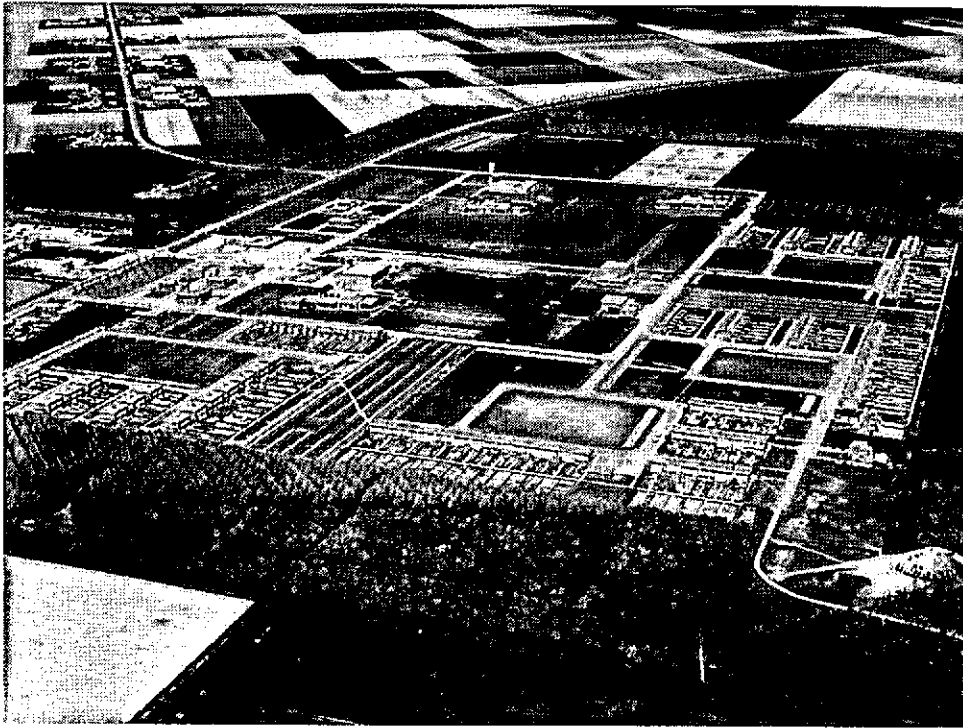
If we want to expand the concept of landscape planning we must however more explicitly express and formulate the ideas and the ruling principles of this activity. For in spite of the growing appreciation for our natural surroundings, the great majority of the people use to look at the landscape as a static phenomenon and not as an ever changing process. Consequently the main stream of energy regarding landscape is directed to the preservation of existing situations and values

and not to a renewal or an improvement of the environment in which this and the new generation will have to live.

I must not, however, be misunderstood. In the environmental revolution of the last forty years we had to do our utmost for the protection and the survival of important landscape patterns and endangered biotopes for our flora and fauna. And this urgent task is by far not ended neither in this country nor abroad. This is, however, so self evident that I hardly need to give this comment. But at the same time one should be more aware that the preservation of specific values in the landscape



The management and rehabilitation of historical landscapes is an urgent item in landscape planning policy.  
Foto: Aero Camera.



Forests, shelterbelts, farmyard and roadside plantations, vast stretches of farmland and brand-new urban settlements are the components of the landscape in the Dutch Zuiderzee Polders.

Foto: KLM Aerocarto.



High rise buildings are destructive to the scenic pattern of rural lands.  
Foto: Staatsbosbeheer.

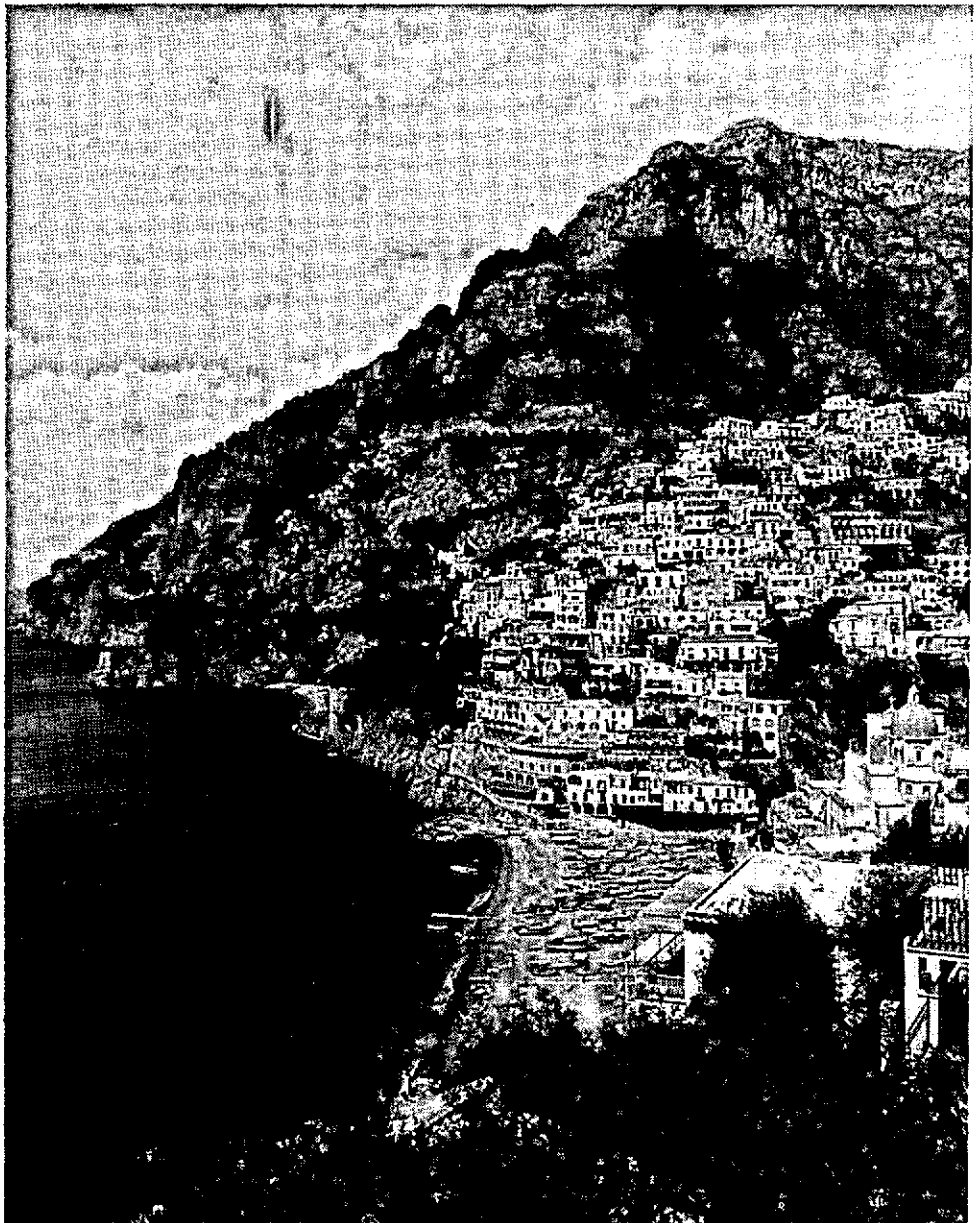
Is by far not enough to stop an ongoing deterioration of the countryside as a whole.

In this dynamic world a creative approach is indispensable to ensure an acceptable living space for man and his fellow creatures. Our forebears have always been creative when their surroundings were at stake. All over Europe we still find the evidence in many types of landscape: in sheltered farmlands, well-designed country parks and gardens, forests of different kinds, in open pastures and tree-lined roads and streams.

In this our era - which president Kennedy so rightly called "the century of change" - there is a great challenge for landscape planners to take their share in the

creation of a new contemporary environment. An environment in which biological diversity, agricultural land use and recreational demands should be more satisfactorily integrated. If our peoples really want a better place to live in, we should help them to create it. And if the political leaders, the captains of industry and all the decision makers who speak today so much about environment and ecology, will contribute to such a better living space, then they should give us the tools.

In this country we gained some experiences in shaping new landscapes, some centuries ago, and also in recent years. In the early days we drained our lakes with windmills, we changed extensive peat-marshes



Coastal landscapes in the Mediterranean and elsewhere are threatened by overbuilding and unrestricted urbanization.

Foto: Deutsche Presse Agentur GmbH, Düsseldorf.

into vast agricultural fields and we built hundreds of stately country homes surrounded by parks which are still highlights of "natural" beauty today.

In recent times new landscape were created in the polders of the former Zuiderzee and in the Delta area. But in particular I would mention the landscape planning practised over the years in a great number of land consolidation projects. In these schemes vast areas of old agricultural land are being rearranged and reshaped into more productive units, while concurrently a renewal of landscape and a conservation of natural elements have been realized.

I hope we can see some of such projects tomorrow in the field. New legislation is now in preparation to open up more possibilities for such a multi-purpose land use planning in the nearby future.

I hope that this short gathering of landscape planners from different countries here in Wageningen may be stimulating for a more creative policy in environmental affairs. As one of the old-timers in international landscape planning it was an honour and a pleasure for me in these days - staying on the threshold of retirement - to take part in this symposium and to meet so many old and new friends here. The torch of ecological landscape planning, lighted in the dark days of a war-damaged Europe is now going to be handed on to a new generation in the next few years.

Started as an emotionally motivated action of a small group of pioneers we are now confronted with a huge task in a world-wide context. For planning, rehabilitation, protection and renewal of man's environment is one of the most urgent tasks to be fulfilled for the future of the human race. Just in a time of the greatest explosion of technology and material development our road to survival looks like a narrow emergency exit.

The exploitation of natural resources has reached a level never before achieved in the history of mankind. And in the deterioration of landscape in so many places, we have a picture of a society which has lost its elementary ties with the natural world.

Landscape planners try to re-establish the relationship of man with the natural world. They are involved now in countless projects and play an increasing role in multi-disciplinary teams for rural and urban development. Modern methods and techniques are employed in handling criteria for a just treatment of land and landscape and for a more balanced use of our limited space.

Despite the use of this technical equipment we should however bear in mind that the spirit and the vision of the designer should never be omitted in the work of the landscape planner. For, useful as the computer may be, we may never expect to have our new landscapes created solely by programs and investigations and without the ennobling touch of the talented human mind.

I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to give some contribution to the work for landscape planning over the last thirty years, in this country and in an international connection. I am grateful too for all the good help, the devotion and the inspiration of so many friends and colleagues here and abroad. And I feel satisfied for being a witness of this new awareness everywhere that the landscape around us holds values which are essential for human life and happiness.

After a long period of unrestricted materialism there are signs of the dawn of a growing respect for the cultural landscape of Europe, the most beautiful of all continents. It is my sincere hope that in this cradle of civilization and stronghold of Christianity this changing attitude may be expressed in a more respectfully treated environment in the remaining part of this century.