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When Space Is Luxury: Planning for Competing Uses in a Recreation and Protected Area, the Meijendel Dunes, With a Long-Standing Visitor Monitoring Program



For sustainable urban living conditions in affluent Western countries the cohesion between cities and surrounding green areas in a so-called metropolitan landscape is considered vital. In the Netherlands the Meijendel Dunes, bordering The Hague (450.000 inhabitants), is such a green space, covering 2000 ha. However, the area is as well important for nature conservation, recreation, drinking water production and sea defence. In the Valley (180 ha) great nature qualities and the main leisure activities meet, making it a contested area.

We aim to show the role of a long-standing programme for visitor monitoring in planning, both for recreational mobility and resource management for nature conservation.

From 1992, daily counts on all 4 entrances with automatic devices and a pressure-sensitive tube across the road provided the basis for the visitor monitoring. All can be accessed by bicycles and pedestrians. Only one of these entrances provides access for cars. Visual sampling is used to correct for inaccuracies by the detector, and the vehicle occupancy to re-calculate the number of vehicles into the number of visits. These coefficients were gathered in 1992–1996 in 4 seasons, spread over weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays, allowing for a classification into 12 types of days. Planning and leisure literature was used for further analysis.

On average the annual number of visitors in 1992–2008 is 893,500; it varies between 807,400 (1998) and 963,000 (1994). The average modal split is 53 % by bicycle (range 50–57 %), 44 % by car (40–48 %) and 3 % on foot.

Interesting is the relationship with several management measures. Because of nature values in the valley, there is a policy of outplacement of activities, especially those not necessarily bound to this sensitive location. Examples are the introduction of compulsory use of leashes for dogs in this former leash-free zone (1995), resulting in less walking the dog. After outsourcing of a jumping-off place for horses in 1997 the number of trailers decreased with 55 %. In two phases parking policy measures were taken. A capacity reduction with 300 places in the Valley in 1995 resulted in a decrease of 40,000 cars. An extension of the parking at the entrance with 150 places in 2000 brought an increase with 20,000 cars. However, the number of cars going into the Valley slightly decreased, while the numbers of visitors only knew a temporal decrease.

A point of special interest is the opening in 2007 of a new bicycle path to the Valley. About 70,000 bicycles used this path in 2008. However, the total number of visits per bicycle in 2008 (488.000) is only slightly above the level in 2006 (469,000). A remarkably decrease of the annual number of visits per car is seen with some 60,000 since 2005, compared with a level just above 400,000 visits in 2001–2005. In the mean time the number of visits by bike has grown leaving the total numbers of visitors at almost the same level.

These examples illustrate the importance of long-term monitoring for evaluating spatial measures in transport planning as well as resource management in a contested

area. However, count data should be used with an awareness of its limitations. Numbers *can* be an indication of effects, but there are too many variables to allow evidence of these effects.

From the long-term observations we conclude a decrease of visits by car, and, “hidden” within considerable year-to-year fluctuations, an increase for visits on bicycle. Weather conditions are thought to be an explaining factor. This needs further research, however. The same holds for an eventually exchange between car and bicycle when visiting Meijendel.

References

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Everyday Mobility – the Actancy of the Urban Structure?

The problems related to growing car traffic since the 1980s have placed several traditional views of “progress” in doubt. The notion that more and better roads, flowing and growing car traffic do not guarantee growth in well-being in neither economic nor social terms has led to the realisation of the need for alternatives to such development. Until recently, planning practices have had, in general, rather conservative approaches that take the main traffic conditions, such as growth in overall volumes, and the rise of mobility in favour of the private car (as opposed to rising accessibility to cater for a variety of modes) as a given framework rather than one to be assessed and dealt with in transportation and land use planning. These conservative approaches (including planning tools, concepts, calculations, methods of data gathering) can be seen as part of “car-system” or path dependent self-expansion of automobility (Urry 2007).

These approaches also reproduce themselves through the everyday life routines of travelling, for which they create the conditions. How is this happening? And – on the other hand – do “alternative” practices of travelling, especially walking and cycling, have potential to challenge this car dependency?

The urban structure is becoming a natural part of everyday routines, black box for practitioners and professionals alike. We ask what are those qualities of the urban structure – as a concrete geographical form, as functional relations and as relational abstractions – through which the black box is created and externalized from personal agency. This enables us to interpret the urban structure as an “actor” – with natural as well as and knowledge qualities – embedded with properties that not only condition, but also influence the perception and behaviour of the human actors, creating outcomes that condition automobile dependence. (c.f. Latour 2004). Trying to open this black box we are examining the sphere of everyday life routines, where the actancy of urban structure is illuminated by the concept of affordance (Gibson 1979).

The patterns of daily mobility and the relevance of the urban structures to variations in mobility are studied through a statistical and spatial analysis of a survey conducted in