

XXth European Days of State Territorial Representatives
'Between development and environment, what regulation for the STR'
Bergen, Norway - 7 June 2013

Round Table IV: Exemplary or suicidal Europe?

"In the international context, the economic and environmental ambitions of the European Union seem very important and have a determining impact on each of the member states. Where from the interest to find the best balance between the Community environmental protection and the warranty of the European economies competitiveness."

Mr. Wim van de Donk, King's Commissioner in the province of Noord-Brabant

- Ladies and gentlemen, this EASTR meeting has the choice between environment and development as its central subject. This session pushes the boat even further out in choppy waters with its title 'exemplary or suicidal Europe'. The thought seems to be that environment and development are mutually exclusive domains. This is a false reasoning and a way of thinking that is antiquated. Noord-Brabant is discovering how we can and indeed must reconcile environment and development. Central to our way of working is thinking not of exclusion but of chances.
- In 1997 my predecessor Frank Houben published the Brabant Manifesto 2050. It poses the question in what type of society and type of environment we want to live in the year 2050. It was not the first time that a far reaching vision on the future development of the province was published. In the post-war years Jan de Quay, the then Queens commissioner, published a vision of industrialisation and future planning. In this sense the Brabant Manifesto, the dream for the future of Brabant was, once again, formulated in a new and provocative way. In a series essays experts explore the possibilities of sustainable development. Its conclusion was that in the policy making process the three, people, planet and profit had to be incorporated.
- It also led to the formation of the Telos institute that had but one purpose, to monitor the progress made in the so-called sustainability balance. The idea is to publish regularly on the state of the social, economical and environmental capital. Now this does not mean that the boy scouts had invaded the provincial government. The intention was not to carefully implement fully the three P's in each and every decision made or only to proceed when all three elements were in balance in the plan concerned. The aim is to maintain an overall balance in Brabant.
- One could speak of a three dimensional approach, cross-overs between ecology, economy and social-cultural develop. Think of the effects of investing and exporting clean technology. Climate change forces us to rethink the watermanagement. We literally need to give our streams and rivers more space. But the net effect is also an improvement of the ecology and with keen planning also expanding the possibilities of the leisure industry. Technological improvements are without a doubt a way of coping with an increasingly elderly population and its care needs. Take SIMAC in Veldhoven, a company that is providing smart care through the implementation of ICT. The Brabant energy programme aims at developing ways to reducing the use of traditional energy and finding new ways to generating energy. These technologies not only are instrumental in reducing climate change but also will generate work and income.
- This way of thinking is now finding its way into programmes aiming at regional development as the Vlaams Nederlandse Delta. This stands for the cooperation of Dutch and Flemish provinces, 6 in total, together with the ports of Antwerp, Rotterdam and indeed all ports in the region. Its aim? To promote economic and ecological

development. Studies show that in the near future some 40% of all European imports and exports will be shipped through the Delta. This is an enormous opportunity and a change. You have to find lasting and sustainable planning methods to guarantee quality of life in the future. On a smaller scale the same applies for the ever increasing air traffic from Eindhoven Airport, the second airport of the Netherlands. How to reconcile the economic dynamism with the ecological impact and the quality of life? Not by rules and ever stricter regulations but by engaging people in a dialogue and finding solutions together.

- Brabant makes full use of the possibilities of the European programmes and policies. The Interreg programme with its focus on innovation and sustainability is of great importance, the smart specialisation strategy of the European Union could have been tailor made for Brainport, the south eastern part of Brabant, currently officially designated as the world smartest region. The provincial government has in the recent years generated funds through the sale of its energy companies. This money will be invested in development funds that are closely linked to the aims of European policies. And we do not give, we expect considerable private investments. These funds will have a revolving nature to give them a lasting role into the future.
- These developments have led to a changing role of the State Territorial Representative. Originally the role was confined to being the eyes and ears of the national government and the implementation of state policies. But fresh wind has been blowing. No doubt the increasing importance of regional cooperation and Europe has been a key element. The STR is now seen as the first representative of Brabant and its inhabitants, a province with a strong regional identity. The STR has received considerable room for own initiatives, especially on the field of economy and planning, we call it spatial economy. As chair of both the executive council and the provincial parliament the influence and possibility to instigate discussions are considerable.
- There is however, one fly in the ointment. As always there are discussions over the future organisation of the Dutch state. Larger and fewer municipalities, less or even no provincial governments, the opinions are diverse. In this tempestuous climate it is vital to have a sharp and well defined profile of the provincial government and its role. It will not be seen as a source of subsidies.