

## **Delft: Planning between design and research**

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*Planning at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft occupies a special position in the Netherlands as a result of its relationship with spatial design at the same faculty. Planning forms part of the subject of urbanism. Even though planning is a clearly identifiable discipline in scientific research, students do not graduate as planning specialists - instead, they train to be urbanists. How does that work?*

### **Planning is part of ‘urbanism’**

The urbanism curriculum is one of the tracks in the Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences Master's programme. In other words, there is no separate, accredited planning track. Urbanism is aimed at understanding the structure of towns and cities and urban regions, and the driving forces behind urban transformation. Urbanism is also about a policy and professional field aimed at interventions in the processes of urban development. Urbanism is rooted in contributions from various fields, which TU Delft shares with programmes elsewhere, such as the Bartlett School of Planning and the Harvard School of Design. A typical feature at TU Delft is the combination of urban design, landscape architecture, spatial planning and environmental technology concerning issues like energy and urban metabolism. Scientific research is carried out in these areas, including theory development, although research is being performed to an increasing degree in so-called cross-cutting themes. The various urbanism disciplines are grouped around subjects and projects, the most important being the graduation project (60 of the 120 credits that make up TU Delft Master's programmes).

Studios are at the heart of the teaching. Parallel to this there are academic subjects in design methodology and in the social sciences, including theory subjects. The interdisciplinary teaching in urbanism means that most graduates are neither urban designers nor planning specialists, but urbanists. Because of the combination of disciplines, no other label is possible. How did this structure come about?

### **The emergence of planning in Delft**

Planning and planning research at TU Delft go back further than at the other universities. The very first planning chair at TU Delft dates from 1947, and was designated ‘urbanism research’. The combination of these words has a major significance here, given that their content and connotation go back to debates in the 1920s and 1930s. As early as the 1920s De Casseres, who conceived the then Dutch neologism ‘planologie’ (‘planning’), advocated that urban design should be based on sound empirical research, and not on artistic foundations. His plea received backing from the Amsterdam City Council in the form of the ‘Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan’ (‘general expansion plan’), which consists of a number of impressive volumes packed with statistical data and maps. The leader of this research was ir. Th.K. van Lohuizen c.i. He was appointed to the urbanism research endowed chair, part of a completely new study programme in urbanism, with C. van Eesteren as the professor by special appointment of urban design. Although it was part of his teaching and research remit, Van Lohuizen distanced himself from the notion of applied preliminary research. Room was also

needed for fundamental research into influential social forces on the design of cities. He also believed that 'post-research' was important, aimed at how plans were implemented (Van der Valk, 1990: 13). But more than anything in the case of Van Lohuizen, it is research and design that are inextricably interlinked. Appropriately enough, the title of his inaugural lecture was '*De eenheid van het stedenbouwkundig werk*' ('the unity of urbanism'). After Van Lohuizen, who died in 1957, the teaching and research remits were reformulated, but the perception of the relationship between research and design lived on. Despite Van Lohuizen's plea for fundamental research, the applied character of most spatial research and teaching continued for many decades, with a major emphasis on spatial analysis and the related research methods and techniques.

With the appointment of Paul Drewe in 1973, TU Delft returned to the traditional designation of the chair, that of urbanism research. However, Drewe was not a civil engineer: his background was in economics and sociology. With him, there came a greater emphasis on advanced research methods. In their historic review of research chairs at TU Delft, Den Draak and Hulsbergen state that Drewe, in spite of his interest in planning processes, always placed the emphasis on substantive research - research into urban structures at various levels of scale. In other words, urbanism research has an object that is material in nature.

This was very clearly apparent in 1975, with the appointment of Andreas Faludi as professor of urban design. In his inaugural lecture, Faludi did not doubt the notion of or need for classical, object-based urbanism research. However, he did assert: "On the basis of the deceptive but obvious principle that planning should be founded on sound knowledge of the object of planning, there is a tendency in the teaching of planning to rely too much on substantial knowledge." (Faludi 1975, 18). Although the name given to his chair suggested otherwise, Faludi taught planning theory, which is concerned with "the features of planning organisations and procedures" (Faludi, 1975, 9). There was a small number of people in the faculty who were interested in this view, as was evidenced by the existence of a planning theory group, but this did not extend to the other chair holders. Faludi had only been appointed a short time before moving to the University of Amsterdam in 1977, where part of the discussion on procedural planning theory was repeated.

It was Niek de Boer, who had made his name as an urban designer on the international stage with his design of new residential districts in Emmen and who was associated with the Faculty of Architecture as a professor by special appointment between 1969 and 1989, who took over part of Faludi's teaching of planning processes. Given his book, provocatively entitled, '*De Randstad bestaat niet*' ('the Randstad does not exist') (1996) it was, for De Boer, not about the spatial structure of the Randstad region, but something completely different, as shown from the sub-title: '*De onmacht tot grootstedelijk beleid*' ('the impotence of metropolitan policy'). What is described today by someone like Patsy Healey as capacity building does not exist in the Randstad. It is administrators who have ensured that the Randstad is just a geographical name and not a common entity. Although the book contains not one iota of planning theory, De Boer did retrace the footsteps of Faludi two decades later.

### **From urbanism research to spatial planning**

The urbanism research chair was re-christened to spatial planning in the mid-1980s. The background to this was that research takes place, or should take place, not just in the niche of one chair, but in fact everywhere in a 'modern' university, in every chair group (Den Draak & Hulsbergen, 2005: 21). This aim has been achieved and remains a feature of the current Urbanism department. There is no one specific chair that primarily covers research or claims to do so. One notable form of research is research by design. This approach to design is not something that is specific to TU Delft or in the Netherlands. It is also apparent in Flanders, in

the design study programmes in Ghent, Leuven, and Antwerp. There is as yet no sign of a hard core, theoretically and methodologically speaking. Ina Klaasen, who gained her PhD under Drewe, attempted to move things in that direction with her dissertation (Klaasen, 2004). Following Drewe's retirement in 2005, the planning chair was again occupied in 2008, when it was re-named Spatial Planning and Strategy. This name assigned The Plan a less central function. Since 1990, meanwhile, a wide range of research themes have been developed, with research into the network city standing out in particular. The city no longer forms a functional or morphological entity, but instead has a complex and multi-layered structure. The approach that was originally chosen dealt primarily with the consequences of IT. For this, Drewe concentrated on the French urbanist, Gabriel Dupuy. He emphasises the city region not as a complex of spatial layers on top of each other, as in the traditional layer approach, but as a complex of networks of actors that determine its structure and how it functions. It has to be said that Dupuy's approach has not really caught on outside TU Delft.

### **Planning at TU Delft today**

As far as planning at TU Delft today is concerned, the difference between theories *in* and theories *of* planning are still relevant. In the Master's programme, teaching of theories is linked to methodological teaching: how can theories be used in spatial analysis? This is followed by the graduation project, which has to connect the research themes in urbanism - these cut right across the various disciplinary chairs. The Spatial Planning and Strategy research group (the 'planning' research group, in other words) is responsible for three themes: metropolitan spatial structure; regional governance, design and politics; and international planning and developing regions.

The metropolitan spatial structure theme examines explanations for metropolitan growth and the changes to the form and structure of urban regions. It covers both traditional (Walter Christaller, Jean Gottmann, Brian Berry) and contemporary texts and theories (Paul Cheshire, Ivan Turok, or Allen Scott). The Randstad region is the 'testing ground' for the research - for example, whether the cities in the Randstad resemble each other more and more in terms of their structure and functional 'equipment', or whether in fact they are evolving differently, more complementarily. Here, too, borrowed size plays a part: cities derive their competitive capacity not just from within, but also from other nearby cities, a hypothesis which - if correct - works out very nicely for an urban region like the Randstad. In short, this type of research is theory-related, although the world of policies and their hypotheses is never far away. A typical example is the publication by Burger and Meijers (2012). On the basis of an urban systems approach, they are attempting to develop a method that connects both morphological (features of individual urban centres) and functional (relationships between cities and urban centres) aspects.

The regional governance, design and politics theme now has a fairly extensive history in urbanism. Discussions on the ability to achieve a cohesive policy in the Randstad region date back to the 1990s. The polemic work by Niek de Boer has already been touched on. This theme is primarily about arriving at theory and method development at a regional scale. The theme connects planning-based to design-based research, making it typical of TU Delft. The formation of planning theory concerning collaborative and communicative approaches forms a source of inspiration (Patsy Healey; Judith Innes & David Booher). Literature concerning discourse (Maarten Hajer), storytelling (James Throgmorton), and framing (Donald Schön) forms another. A typical feature at TU Delft is the explicit focus founded on the spatial design and visualisation, viewed from multiple angles - among other things, as a source for consensus formation and policy development, and as an expression of both political decision-making and the use of knowledge in multi-actor situations.

Cohesive theories that bring these approaches together are scarce or even lacking entirely - a clear contrast to the theme of metropolitan spatial structure, where there is no shortage of theories. Regional governance, design and politics therefore has more theoretical and methodological ambitions, but from an empirical research point of view. An example of this is provided by Balz & Zonneveld (2015), who examine a regional design studio in a complex governance constellation against a strongly planning-coloured interpretation framework: Zuidvleugel Atelier.

The third theme is that of international planning and developing regions. Whereas the first theme is rooted partly in geography and the second in spatial design, this third theme is specifically planning related; what are the features, processes and roles in spatial planning in various national contexts, and what are the possibilities and limitations of policy transfer? International comparative research is key for being able to identify why alternative spatial planning practices have been developed in different contexts, and how they are embedded in more extensive social models. The work of Gøsta Esping-Andersen has been a source of inspiration for this, as has the literature that seeks to refine the models he distinguishes. An important part of the research is methodological in nature, partly because the literature simplifies the differences between policy systems and cultures, and partly because it is largely aimed at western systems. The Spatial Planning and Strategy research group has been carrying out international comparative research since 1995. The first outcome was the well-known European Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems (synthesis report of 1997). This compendium has been picked up in a recent publication, which concludes that the typology of planning systems included in the compendium is by no means always applied correctly. Differences between and within countries are often simplified. Moreover, there have been major changes in many countries since the compilation of the compendium. A modified typology therefore needs to be developed in which not only the formal features of planning systems are expressed, but also planning practice (Nadin & Stead, 2013).

### **Typical 'Delft'**

A number of features of the study programme and planning research have been described as typical for TU Delft. In summary, this refers to the incorporation of planning into urbanism as a whole and the relationships between social science and design research. The history of chair assignments therefore reads like a permanent search for the right place for planning. If we compare the present-day situation to that of the more distant past, then we notice that the traditional difference between substantive and procedural research does not actually exist. It is no longer the case that planning supplies knowledge about changing urban structures against the background in which others create spatial designs, if this distinction in fact ever existed in its purest form. Nor is it any longer the case that research into and the teaching of spatial design can be seen as separate from the governance context. Spatial design involves management and policy issues and, conversely, governance cannot be viewed separately from content. In that sense, planning and design no longer occupy delineated fields. It is therefore accurate to talk of an urbanism discipline. The differences between sub-disciplines within urbanism emerge more prominently in teaching when the structure of the curriculum and the content (and teachers!) of individual subjects are discussed, than they do in research. Politics and society are rarely interested in monodisciplinary research. As far as that is concerned, there is a strong disciplinary identity based on the context in which scientific research is carried out. The distinction between the three planning research themes that have been discussed is therefore somewhat artificial.

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