

The government must change its approach to sustainable accessibility

When it comes to sustainable accessibility, it is not just policy content that matters, but also management aspects in the realisation of that accessibility. In other words, how does the government accomplish its goals? This article considers alternative roles and procedures of the government which can potentially improve the transition to sustainable accessibility: more effective coordination, improved facilitation, greater involvement, and more experimentation.

The transition to sustainable accessibility does not only require that problems and potential solutions are identified; in addition, barriers to and opportunities for the implementation of potential solutions must be clear, so as to be able to determine how barriers can be eliminated and opportunities can be seized. The Sustainable Accessibility of the Randstad Conurbation research

programme demonstrated that the government can and must contribute to this process, but that alternative roles, processes and procedures are required. This article describes these other roles, processes and procedures based on the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) case. TOD is one of the key elements of sustainable accessibility and involves integrating urban planning developments and

Table 1 Relative strengths and weaknesses urban regions in relation to successful TOD

Success Factor	CASE Northern Wing / Amsterdam region	CASE Southern Wing / Rotterdam-The Hague	CASE Urban region Arnhem-Nijmegen
PLANS AND POLICIES			
Vision stability	Average	Average	Average
Central government support	Strong	Average	Strong
Political stability at the national level	Weak	Weak	Weak
Political stability at the local level	Weak	Average	Average
ACTORS			
Quality relationship between actors iregion	Weak	Strong	Strong
Presence regional body for space and mobility	Weak	Strong	Strong
Presence multidisciplinary implement. teams	Average	Average	Average
Public participation	Weak	Weak	Average
Public acceptance (densities, public transport)	Average	Weak	Strong
IMPLEMENTATION			
Planning of TOD on regional level	Weak	Average	Strong
Certainty for developers	Weak	Average	Average
Willingness to experiment	Weak	Strong	Strong

public transport on the scale of the metropolitan area, while, at the same time, the conditions are created to stimulate walking and cycling at the local level (see the article by Geurs & Klinkenberg in this issue for a detailed discussion on the theoretical aspects of TOD).

More effective coordination

An international comparison of experiences with TOD provides a number of critical success factors for the successful implementation of TOD (Thomas & Bertolini, 2014a, b), the most significant ones of which are shown in Table 1. In addition, this table also contains a list of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the three areas in the Netherlands on which the study focused: the Northern Wing of the Randstad conurbation (i.e. the

Amsterdam Metropolitan Area), the Southern Wing of the Randstad conurbation (the Rotterdam-The Hague axis) and the urban region of Arnhem-Nijmegen. The focus and continuity of regional government policy would appear to be of vital importance. Demand for the coordination of the urban-planning and transport markets is largest at the regional level, but there is currently a lack of essential coordination at this level. The quality of the relationships between the various regional authorities is therefore crucial, as is a joint policy focus on TOD. The quality of these relationships and focus in the parts of the Netherlands that have set TOD targets varies significantly, as the analysis summarised in Table 1 shows. The presence of a regional body

devoted to urban planning and mobility is a welcome formalisation of relationships between central, provincial and local government, which currently tend to be largely informal. While some areas are currently home to such a body, other regions lack them or have a body that does not meet the required quality level. An additional factor is that it is not clear what the future will bring for these types of bodies: the abolition of the Intermunicipal Statutory Regulations-Plus Act [Wijzigingswet Wgr-plus] would appear to be a step backward in this respect, whereas the growing powers and sense of responsibility of the provinces could potentially represent a step forward. It is therefore essential that the current transitional stage results in a firm institutional integration of regional policies aimed at space and mobility. However, this is something the regional authorities cannot accomplish by themselves; they require that the central government supports them in this process. The continuity of and focus on TOD at the national policy level are essential to the success of these efforts. Both of these aspects need to be improved, as all three Dutch cases researched revealed them to be weak areas. Another critical success factor is coordination between the various policy sectors. TOD, being highly multidisciplinary in nature, requires careful coordination of the mobility policy and urban-planning policy both

at the strategic and operational level. In terms of this coordination, the Netherlands scores relatively high at the strategic level, while being significantly weaker at the operational level. The closer the implementation of the policy approaches, the greater the differences between the mobility and urban-planning policies. Whereas some policies focus mainly on the realisation of infrastructure projects, others are affected by the problems in the property market, and there tends to be a disconnect between projects and the market.

Improved facilitation

Property developers believe security is a key requirement for investing in areas located near railway stations (Thomas & Bertolini, 2014a,b). Market players should be able to estimate themselves which programme shows the most potential in a specific location. It would be helpful if the government created scarcity in strategic areas, so as to ensure that market players prioritise the locations which serve collective and long-term interests, as is the case with the areas near railway stations. However, this is contrary to current practices in the Dutch property market, which has been characterised by an abundance of development opportunities and neglect when it comes to areas near railway stations. In addition, developers also tend to opt for the

most convenient solutions that require the least amount of effort (i.e. development of greenfield land). Furthermore, the study also shows that the availability of information and the option of personal communication between the governments and market players involved have a significant impact on negotiations relating to area development and hub development (Lenferink & Van der Stoep, 2013; Lenferink et al., 2014a, b). Improved availability of information does not necessarily translate to more contracts but it does result in higher-quality agreements, in the sense that they do a better job of serving the public interest. Personal communication provides the option of revealing the intentions behind specific decisions and, in the process, can potentially increase the likelihood of an agreement being signed between the parties. It has also been demonstrated that companies, even in times of crisis, are interested in exploring the use of new financial and legal instruments relating to area development and hub development (see the article by Geurs & Klinkenberg in this issue). However, the complex organisational structures found in areas near railway stations make it difficult to actually use these instruments, which calls for a strong leader in this area. Within the context of TOD, market players look to the government and, especially, regional and provincial governments. This also

means that a solution must be presented for the current relationship between municipal governments, regional and provincial governments in this area, which tend to be ambivalent or even downright antagonistic.

Other studies have demonstrated that there is particular potential for a government which leaves more room to market players/private companies. Concentrated urban planning is a key factor in facilitating the shift to sustainable forms of accessibility (see the article by Geurs & Klinkenberg in this issue), and government interventions can be a tool in this process. However, agent-based simulations of various management models also demonstrate that the potential role of the market should not be underestimated (Levy et al., 2013). They reveal that market-driven forms of management, under specific circumstances, result in higher building densities than government-regulated urban planning. It is up to the government to assess in what areas the market dynamic is aligned with the policy objectives and to give this market dynamic free reign as much as possible. In those areas where the market dynamic does not coincide with the policy objectives, limited regulation to facilitate agreement in relevant areas is sufficient.

Greater involvement

Other critical success factors for TOD implementation, as revealed by the study, are public participation and acceptance. However, the Dutch cases reveal these factors to be relatively weak (Thomas & Bertolini, 2014a, b). Although participation is provided for under Dutch law, it tends to occur only after the fact and then only on specific elements of the plan. In this sense, the Netherlands differs from successful international examples of TOD implementation, including Vancouver, Canada; Portland, Oregon; and Perth, Australia, where the public actively provide input. This input starts at an early stage of the process, also in terms of sharing ideas on, and making fundamental political choices for, the future direction of the city and region. In the cities mentioned above, TOD is regarded more as a tool for achieving these higher goals than as a tool in and of itself.

Whereas many Dutch planners tend to view TOD as the most efficient form of urban development, property developers and the public at large take a more indifferent attitude (Pojani & Stead, 2014a). This attitude of property developers is due in part to the current economic and financial crisis and the slump in the housing market, while also being related to weak demand. Specifically, while households and individuals view areas near railway stations as functional

locations for work or travel, they do not tend to regard them as high-status residential areas. The negative image which these areas had for a long time and which, in some cases, has been hard to shed also does not improve public opinion of TOD. The TOD lobby and local administrators have not been effective to date in coordinating and integrating ideas, interests and institutions and in developing and communicating a shared and persuasive overarching message. The lobby acted largely in isolation from the wider planning community, while administrators were focused on short-term results, which is contrary to the long term approach required for TOD.

More experimentation

Although the Dutch government does invest substantially in collecting information and data on international experiences with TOD, the use of the insights acquired continues to be somewhat scattershot and is limited to individual inspiration, without resulting in any joint initiatives or specific results (Pojani & Stead, 2014b). Evidently, these tend to be complex concepts and highly context-dependent lessons, which cannot be implemented just anywhere. By reflecting on developments elsewhere, however, it does become possible to gain an understanding of the main issues involved, understand what makes one's own practices special (or not), and develop critical

and reflective skills. Various workshops held in conjunction with stakeholders in relation to research into the implementation of TOD and research into mobility transition strategies (Switzer et al., 2013), demonstrate that this learning potential is substantial in the Netherlands. These initiatives should therefore not be limited to a handful of workshops; be sure to find opportunities to experiment with the insights gained. This is important, as the willingness to experiment is also one of the critical success factors of implementation. One which has been proved to be lacking in the Netherlands (Thomas & Bertolini, 2014a,b).

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