

Connected cities: the sequel

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At the time of writing we are well into the second semester of the EU Interreg IIC Connected Cities project. In each semester the major events take place in a new location. This time we will be at Mount Pelion, east of Volos in central Greece. The topics and issues shift as well. The first semester focused on Dutch practices. As lead partner, we invited experts from the province of Zuid-Holland to organise a showcase workshop. They organised activities in which the other partners were invited to learn from and contribute to their own policies and design tasks for linking sustainable mobility and urban (or rural) development within a complex urban network. What Zuid-Holland demonstrated was the Stedenbaan project. Its aim is to concentrate much of the new housing demand in close proximity to existing and new train stations in the province, closely matching the Transport Development Area (TDA) philosophy advocated by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Our colleagues at the provincial council wanted to discuss which station areas they should prioritise in the development of the network.

It was only when I travelled for the first time to Volos that I became fully aware of the complexity of that task. Of course I was somewhat worried that it would not be easy to grasp the difference between station areas in Leiden, The Hague, Delft, Rotterdam and Dordrecht. And it could prove even more difficult to say we should prefer a station area in Capelle aan den IJssel over one in Zoetermeer. Moreover, the representatives of the European New Town Platform might have an opinion – after all, Capelle and Zoetermeer are two members of their organisation. But for someone who has just arrived from Patras in Greece? Yes, we expected that the local context would be confusing.

So I stood for the first time at Athens central station (Larissa Station), ready to take the next intercity to Larissa. Athens is a city of four million inhabitants, but Larissa Station is equal in size and number of train services to Delft in Zuid-Holland, a town of less than 100,000 inhabitants. Near Larissa Station there are no

urban projects, no plans for urban transformations centred on the station. And the station itself does not reflect such ambition. Transport development is nowhere to be seen at what we would expect to be the main public transport hub in the country. Before starting a delicate discussion on what stations to prioritise in Zuid-Holland, we could have started by explaining the main idea of the Stedenbaan project from the very beginning. But we should not refrain from exchanging our ideas because of the tectonic differences that may exist between our cities. These hiccups are bound to happen and might just be part of the learning process.

In this Nova Terra special edition we report back on some of the showcases and lectures held in Brussels. Berry de Jong reflects on Eindhoven's backyard, discovered through our Connected Cities project. Michel van Hulten advocates the benefits of the Flemish practice of 'free' public transport, which began in Eindhoven's backyard. Thomas Wagener addresses another obstacle to users of public transport: physical barriers. Christine Mastrogiannidou looks ahead to one of the showcase workshops in Greece with her article on paratransit. She addresses the social dimension of sustainable mobility. How can we prevent social exclusion caused by inadequate transport opportunities? Robin Seijdel discusses various ways to support sustainable urban planning and development. His tools will be deployed in Magnesia's harbour workshop. Finally, Sophie Labbouz reports on one of the largest Bus Rapid Transit projects in Europe today, le Mobilien. ←