



Contribution from Wijk aan Zee



Rural life and waste

We are asked to say a few words to 'Rural life and waste'.

Since 1989 we have a lot to do with waste. Not only with our own waste, but with the waste of the entire region. Wijk aan Zee is situated at the coast and not far from an important canal, that connects Amsterdam with the sea. And we have to do with the silt on the bottom of the waterways. If we want these waterways to be used by ships, we should dredge regularly. The sea and the rivers keeps bringing silt that settles on the bottom of the harbours and waterways. We used to throw the silt that had been dredged into the sea. That is still happening now with the biggest part of the silt. But a smaller part is so polluted that it cannot be thrown into the sea. The sea is vital to human life. It is not a place for rubbish.

On international conferences of countries connected with the sea, it has been agreed that the sea should not be burdened with it. The quality of the seawater is of vital common interest.

But what to do with the polluted silt.

The organisations that have to pay the bill want the cheapest solution. And the cheapest way is to do nothing. Nothing means: Put it somewhere else under conditions of isolation. And in the eighties it was planned to turn a part of the beach of Wijk aan Zee into an isolated dumping place, a part of the beach that does not belong to the town of Beverwijk, but to our neighbourtown IJmuiden.

The inhabitants of Wijk aan Zee accepted the economical development of the 20th century as necessary. The steel factory Hoogovens has been permitted to grow since the twenties. And the price of this development: a nice territory of dunes and forest and the development as a coastal resort. The village also accepted the idea of necessity of the development in the sixties that changed the village into an island. From then on the village was surrounded by water or fences. But when in the seventies the steelwork wanted to take the western seaside, the village did not accept this development anymore. For them it was enough. The village protested but the province allowed the steelwork to build because of the economical necessity. But thank God, the economical situation changed, less steel was needed and the plans that were presented as absolutely necessary, were not possible nor wished any more.

But the part of the beach, for which the authorities gave permission to be industrialised, the planners never gave up. That is the only reasonable explanation why in the nineties plan after plan had been launched for a dumpingplace and other activities on this place. We tried to explain why this was an bad idea. An abuse of the beach in an overpopulated country with a lack of free space. There has been a big difference in appreciation of this part of the beach between us:

To the planners it means an industrialised part of the Dutch coast where you should concentrate all evil.

To us however, this place belonged to the last part of nature in our region that has characterised the village through all centuries. Sea, nature, birds, fish, recreation, sun, sand, dunes and water. In our times an important place to relax and to get a better view on things.

And, that is very important, as a counterweight to the industrial surroundings. There are two ways to deal with burdens: you can either concentrate them in one place or you can spread them. The problem of the silt has been accepted by the village and it has not been denied. The only thing the village refused was the solution: dumping on the beach. Nobody even thought of doing something else with it.

We looked for a solution in our own region. Since there was no good place to storage it, a solution would be to change the silt in a usefull product. For that is how nature deals with things. It changes all its burdens in new, more usefull things.

We found a way to make bricks of the silt, a perfect solution, so we thought. We were convinced that the pollution would not be bad for the quality of the bricks and that it would be of no danger for people to use them. The pollution had an influence on the colour of the bricks, wich could work in our advantage.

We went throug a great deal of trouble to get the gouverment and the political parties to give us a hand. They did not see a future in it and they followed the road of least economical resistance. Meanwhile they told us that we were selfish to not just accept their solution. Slowly but surely they began to understand our point of view. They now doubt the fact if their plan was such a great sollution, but still there is no one who has taken over our view completely.

In the mean time a factory has been built and taken in use in Hamburg, wich is based on the very same principal. Even though we now have a lot of expertese and piles and piles of litterature on the subject, and even though large budgets have been spent by the gouverment on studies on it, it was a coincidence that I found this out. We have always had an organisation with a lot of expertese. Some call it a state in a state. It recently celebrated its 200th birthday. The ceremony began with organ-music and even our queen was present. The organisation takes pride in the fact that for the past 200 years they have played a big role in the creation of the Netherlands as the now are. At the world exhibit, wich was held in Hannover a few days ago, the Netherlands are presented as to be created.

The political parties.

We have had some support of political parties. That support is important to us, but it is also a bit dangerous. For as soon as a party wishes to associate itself with you, you lose the interest of all other parties. They will then fight your sollution, because they fight that other party. For the local parties, they follow the program made by their national party and they find it difficult to go against the established expertese.

What can we learn from all of this:

As a village you can provide solutions for problems that are of national or international interest. The authorities which should solve the problem, lack the passion to solve it. Villages do have that passion. These authorities only have financial interests. Political paries do not realy encourage you to participate. Expertese is limited. Especialy by the economical structure. You have to get used to the idea that very obvious things cannot be realised because of this economical structure. Perhaps you need to be part of a village to see that. For then you are close enough to reality. It is very important to see and accept that knowledge. But in our time knowledge mostly deals with details. We have experienced that if you passionately want something you have a strong case. Most of the authorities and companies lack that passion.