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Making planning support systems matter : improving the use of planning support systems for integrated land use and transport strategy-making

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Preface

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS COINCIDENCE

In October 2005, just after I received my Master's Degree in Environment and Infrastructure Planning at the University of Groningen, I was accepted as an intern at the European branch of Shell: a position that is much desired and difficult to obtain. Within days after the acceptance, I attended a small good bye party for my Indonesian classmates, where I first heard about the PhD position at the University of Amsterdam. The profile (a combination of land use planning, infrastructure planning and geographical Information) seemed to fit seamlessly. It took one phone call and a short conversation with Frank le Clercq and Luca Bertolini to convince me that this PhD project was well suited to both my skills and my interests. I was so convinced that I started travelling to Amsterdam from our house north of Groningen (a long commute of over 4 hours, twice to three times a week minimum!).

Four years later it is great to see the research finished, the goals met and the job accomplished. In these four years, I have learned a lot, I accomplished much and developed many (non-) academic skills. I found it especially striking that so many of the skills I developed during my active engagement in endurance sports were particularly useful during the research period. Below, I will draw some parallels from three of the sports that I practiced during the past four years: running, cycling and swimming. Then I will say something about the skills of the people who were fundamental for my success and thank those who positively influenced my research, my academic pursuits and my private life.

RESEARCHING AS AN ENDURANCE SPORT

In the first two years of the research I was training to run a marathon, with the ambitious goal of finishing within three hours. Reaching such a goal required running three to four times a week, at least one hour per day. In the beginning one feels a clear progression, but over time the progression slows down and it feels like just clocking in countless hours in order to accomplish a very long term goal: to run a marathon. Such a long term goal requires significant short term investments. To keep the momentum, I created mid-term goals: 10 kilometres under 40 minutes, 15 kilometres in one hour, and a half marathon under 1 hour and 20 minutes. I used a similar strategy in my research. That is one of the reasons why this dissertation is based on articles. Instead of working towards a book in four years, I started with conference papers (with acceptance for conference as a goal), which slowly turned into articles (peer review acceptance as a goal). This strategy provided positive feedback (reaching goals), focus and spread out the work- and energy load. Finally, this process primed me for achieving the ultimate goal: approval by the PhD commission.

In the third year of my PhD research, I bought a racing bike and started to ride long tours, such as the classics Waalse Pijl, Liege-Bastogne-Liege and the Tour de IJsselmeer. Such tours cover 250 kilometres or more (10 hours non-stop biking). One rapidly learns how to take good care of the body and mental health: to start eating

when you are not hungry, to get ample rest and to manage one's energy (do not burn it all up in the first hours). Again, lessons that proved easily transferable to the four years of PhD research. I started out with a lot of ambition in the first year, with work weeks stretching over 60 hours now and then. My intention was to finish many articles early on, in order to have a lighter fourth year. In practice, the requirement to put in adequate energy and time never seemed to decrease. Organising three experiential case studies demands a lot of energy, especially because one has to actively search and convince partners in planning practice. Also, the teaching load increased over the years. Also, articles that need revision kept coming back as fast I had sent them, even now that the book is finally finished! This meant that I had to learn to take ample rest along the way. To keep my head fresh, I took a lot of non-related work on board (not always to the likings of my professor). However, making movies, writing non-related articles, organising cycle tours or talking to Chinese delegations kept me from getting too bored with my subject.

In the final months, I started to take lessons to improve my long distance swimming skills. A sport that is completely different from running and cycling. Swimming is a technical sport with a very steep learning curve. Learning the technique and improving ones endurance have to go hand in hand, which makes it an exhausting learning process. An important element that increases the exhaustion is the fact that there are other swimmers that cause turbulence and waves (which seemed to coincide with my breathing rhythm). When I mastered the technique, these waves did not seem to bother me anymore. I saw this as a metaphor for the turbulence and waves caused by colleagues, peers, managers, and others. They came up with new ideas, organised all kinds of (fun and less fun) meetings, they asked me to consider all the other relevant academic fields that can be included in the argumentation, they asked me to move offices at least once per year. All these influences could potentially overwhelm one's own work, but I managed to find my own rhythm, which enabled me to deal with outside disturbances.

HAVING A SUPERPROMOTER

The quality of a product, especially a book, is related to the skills of the author, but also to the quality of his/her direct working environment. During the long PhD research period, it is very helpful if one has good colleagues with whom to share the problems, challenges and euphoric moments in- and outside the professional environment. It is even better, when they are able to offer additional stimulus through their own work and provide constructive comments. I would like to continue by extending my sincere gratitude to all the colleagues who provided this crucial support during the past years.

It is even better when somebody in your environment is also able to connect emotionally and intellectually to the product and process of your PhD research. Such a person can provide crucial encouragement when the research seems stuck or challenged ("is somebody else doing the exact same research already?") and can explore new lines of reasoning. Although sometimes tunnel vision is a danger in such situations, it can be crucial in moving the research forward to the next level.

The last four years I was lucky enough to be supervised by somebody who could provide such crucial and through support, first as daily supervisor and later as my professor: Luca Bertolini. Only recently I found the right term for him, an increasingly popular marketing concept: that of the *Superpromoter*.[1] A *Superpromoter* is defined as the personification of the power of enthusiasm. He/she is a sincere enthusiast who can influence others by sharing his/her enthusiasm. The *Superpromoter* is a problem-solver, an optimist by nature, constructive-critical, has a social personality and an open and transparent agenda. Having a *Superpromoter* as a customer can help to expand a company exponentially, by creating new *Superpromoters* for the product (his/her enthusiasm is contagious). Having a *Superpromoter* working *within* a company benefits the working atmosphere. But having a *Superpromoter* as a boss or professor is really the optimum! Luca's motivation helped me to give my maximum, inspired me with new ideas and concepts, re-energised my when I was facing problems and helped me to think outside of the box. He was a key contributor to the shaping of the content and the pleasant working atmosphere of the last four years. Looking around in the PhD landscape (inter)nationally, such professors are rare and truly exceptional; therefore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Luca.

THE MANY PEOPLE WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE (FROM ABSTRACT TO CONCRETE)

Although they no longer exist as an autonomous research institute, I would like to thank the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt) and the University of Amsterdam for providing a pleasant and fruitful working environment. Also, thanks go out to the people who kept the interface between the bureaucracy and the employees workable, most notably Barbara Lawa, Gert van der Meer and Marianne van Heelsbergen. I would like to thank Transumo (Transition to Sustainable Transport) for their organisation of all those interesting discussion and knowledge exchange events, and primarily for making out research financially possible (including all exotic conferences).

One of the most pleasant experiences of the last four years was the company of the many stimulating individuals in my life. They made it possible to regularly share enjoyable lunches, have discussion events, drinks, annual soccer tournaments, cycle tours, etc. I cannot name them all, but within this group I extend my appreciation to Bas Hissink Muller, Nadav Haran, Sebastian Dembski, Thomas Straatemeier, Perry Hoetjes, Wendy Tan, Wouter van Gent, and Els Beukers. Also a special thank you to Nikola Stalevski for editing all of the articles (twice, or even three times) and dramatically improving their English language (even these very words). I learned a lot from him.

I also would like to extend not only special thanks, but also sincere gratitude to Frank le Clercq, who sadly passed away within one year after the start of my research. He was in many ways a founder of the research approach and the line of reasoning that flows throughout this book. He was a co-author of the first research proposal, a

[1] See http://www.superpromoters.nl and Vogelaar, R. (2009) *De Superpromoter: Over de kracht van enthusiasme,* Van Duuren Management, Culemborg.

scholar with a long term interest in the relationship between knowledge and planning, and a central person in one of the predecessor initiatives of this research -- the VervoersPrestatie Regionaal (VPR). He was a model developer, who took a constructive critical approach to the role these models play in planning practice.

The biggest gratitude I extend to Iris Rüssel; she managed to provide added motivation and encouragement, while at the same time working on her own PhD research at the Free University. It is no coincidence that her research subject is the heart. With her energy we managed to even keep our 'normal' life running smoothly, which made the last four years even more special.

I close this foreword with a quote that both fits my lifestyle and the general research approach described in this dissertation:

> *"Until we try, how will we know?*
> *How will we know until we try?*
> *So let's say we give it a go*
> *To find the world we're looking for"*
> **Pennywise**, Wouldn't it be Nice (2005)

Marco te Brömmelstroet, January 19th 2010