



Sjors van Duren is Policy Advisor for the Province of Gelderland in the Netherlands and Programme Director of Velo-city 2017, the major cycling conference that takes place from 13-16th of June in the Arnhem and Nijmegen Region. He tells **Florinda Boschetti** more about his job as the lead Cycling Officer and Programme Director of the world's leading cycling event.

Cycle of change

In 2014, the-then 29-year old Sjors van Duren was awarded as the Netherlands' 'Best Civil Servant of the Year'. This is some achievement for someone of such a tender age so, Thinking Cities wondered, who is the man behind this prestigious prize?

"At that time I was a traffic and transport consultant at the Arnhem-Nijmegen City Region and I was elected winner by the professional jury of Public Mission magazine, chaired by Jacques Wallage among 100 best civil servants of the Netherlands. I was, according to the jury, "a young, enterprising civil

Sjors van Duren



servant, who believes in an idea and knows how to realize that idea," and "an out-of-the-box thinker with an unstoppable amount of energy."

Today Van Duren is Policy Advisor at the Province of Gelderland where he coordinates cycling policy in the Arnhem-Nijmegen City Region and it's clear that he his dynamic enthusiasm isn't even close to showing signs of wearing out.

"I work closely with local governments and the national government to get broad (political) support for the development of the provincial cycling plans. I also contribute to the work of the CROW/KpVV (a not-for-profit

There are more bicycles than there are people in the Netherlands



organization in the Netherlands, the technology platform for transport, infrastructure and public space) and the Dutch Cycling Embassy, to develop and spread knowledge on cycling; especially on the relation between spatial planning, land use and cycling,” he elucidates.

“I was a pioneer in the realization of fast cycling routes between the cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen: The RijnWaalpad. Together with four municipalities, a Province and the local representatives of the Dutch Cyclists union, 17m was invested in a 16km-long super cycle highway. The goal is to change the behaviour of commuters, from driving their cars to riding their bikes. The RijnWaalpad is a testing ground for cycling-innovations: an interactive app, new designs for tunnels and lighting. I also contributed to the realization of the cycling tunnel under the A15 highway which is part of the RijnWaalpad. There is an interactive light sculpture in this tunnel that is essentially a network of LED units that can light up in various colours. With the Bicycle Buddy smartphone app cyclists can choose their own favourite colour. By passing the tunnel more often you can collect more colours to choose from. In this way cycling on the RijnWaalpad is rewarding and fun.”

For a cyclist that sounds like nothing short of heaven on earth.

“Planning cycling infrastructure often encounters resistance in public opinion, even in the Netherlands which is considered to be a cycle-friendly country,” Van Duren responds with something of a ‘straight bat’.

“The Dutch really enjoy cycling. Most Dutch people (around 84 per cent) own one or more bicycles. Of the 17 million inhabitants in the Netherlands, 13.5 million are cyclists and they own 22.3 million bicycles in total. There is no other similarly affluent country in the world where bicycles are used so intensively! Good cooperation between Municipalities, Region and other Governmental bodies is key to success of cycling projects. We still can learn a lot from other countries, for instance on behavioural change and on framing the bicycle better - the Danes are world champions at that.

After Groningen played host in 1987 and Amsterdam held the event in 2000, the Velo-city conference is back in the Netherlands in 2017. So, with all due respect, how did Arnhem-Nijmegen win over the jury and beat the other candidate host cities?

“The Arnhem-Nijmegen region is one of the leading, most progressive

cycling regions in the Netherlands and has developed a cycling infrastructure in which cyclists and bicycles have come to receive top priority. Safety and speed are core values,” insists Van Duren, “and cyclists are respected and innovation runs free. Plus we had some excellent selling points! Firstly, we have the largest, most extensive and top-quality cycle superhighway network in the Netherlands: 60 kilometres of cycle path will be built by 2017, most of which will be non-stop routes. The special bicycle bridge over the River Waal is the perfect solution and a ‘must see’ in light of the global issue of bicycle access over bridges, rivers, canals and train routes. The same applies to the ‘Het Groentje’ bicycle bridge on the cycle superhighway between Nijmegen and Arnhem.”

Van Duren isn’t finished. “We have huge bicycle parking facilities with thousands of spaces in Nijmegen and Arnhem’s central train stations now. The ‘OV Chipkaart’ is a good example of coordination between public transport and bicycles, because the card can be used to rent an ‘OV-fiets’ bicycle, as well as for other public transport services. This leads to completely coordinated connections between both cities. We also have a visiting cycling professor and we host the yearly International Cargo Bike Festival. Last but not least, Nijmegen will be European Green Capital in 2018.”

It’s doubtful that any of the other candidate cities could compete with any of that but Van Duren is of the opinion that there’s more to their winning than what they have. Thinking locally, acting nationally might have been just as important.

“Actually, the whole country of the Netherlands will be the host of Velo-city in June. The conference itself will take place in Arnhem and Nijmegen but we have an extensive pre- and post-programme in the best Dutch cycling cities, organized by the Dutch

Cycling Embassy, and numerous excursions during the conference. On the Wednesday afternoon, 14 June, all conference attendees will visit Amsterdam to “be an Amsterdamer for a day”. A dedicated train will take all participants to Amsterdam to ride there and have a great evening in the Dutch capital!”

So what exactly is Van Duren’s role? What does being Programme Director of Velo-city 2017 entail and what will attendees have in store?

“Together with a team my role is to create a top-notch confer-

Strategy, under the supervision of the European Cyclists’ Federation (ECF), which will recommend objectives and define actions falling within EU competence,” he purrs.

“The keynote speakers will highlight the five conference themes: Governance, Infrastructure, People, Bikenomics and Urban Planning, in a different and innovative way. Personally, I am very proud to present names like philosopher and Dutch national thinker René ten Bos, the “cycling professor” Marco te Brömmelstroet and Julia Nebrija

enviously high levels of modal split?

“We will further integrate cycling policy into an intermodal transport system and the cooperation with architects and urban designers will be exploited to seek new solutions and combine attractiveness and effectiveness,” he notes. “We will continue to improve our infrastructure as we get more diverse bicycles like speed pedelecs and cargo-bikes. We will also continue to work on behavioural change, for instance with connectivity and with apps.

“The OV-fiets shows that there is a real synergy between high-quality public transport (rail or bus corridors) and cycling. Getting to the station by train and hopping on the bike for the last 5 kilometers; offering you the convenience of public transport on the long stretches and the freedom of cycling in the city near the station.

“The creation of fast cycling routes, sometimes called super cycle highways, makes it more and more convenient to travel by bike into the cities,” he concludes. “The removal of stops and the added comfort make cycling easier and more enjoyable and they prove to be an excellent system for the pedelec, reducing travel times and, very importantly, the efforts needed to bridge distances in the larger urban regions.” 🚲

Arnhem-Nijmegen could not be a more fitting host for Velo-City 2017



ence programme. The conference programme contains a number of inspiring keynote speakers, plenary sessions and more than 60 parallel sessions. There are over 260 speakers from more than 40 countries: great speakers from around the world will be presenting their latest insights, stories and research.

“Velo-city 2017 will welcome the EU Commissioner for Transport, Violeta Bulc, for the official handover of the blueprint EU Cycling Strategy. Stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, including Polis and some of other Members, have joined forces over the past few months to develop a blueprint for an EU Cycling

from Manila who will be addressing the impact of cycling on social inclusion and emancipation. In special outdoor sessions conference participants will see the effects of Dutch bicycle policy in practice (and also have a look at the not-so-good projects!) and they can bring their cycling project to special design workshops with the best Dutch experts from CROW.”

Finally, *Thinking Cities* wanted to know what the future has in store for Van Duren and for what is clearly his passion: cycling in the Arnhem-Nijmegen Region. What are his future projects for keeping up the good work and maintaining those

MORE INFORMATION

- Velo-city 2017 conference: www.velo-city2017.com and preliminary programme www.velo-city2017.com/program/conference-programme
- Cycling in the Arnhem Nijmegen City Region: www.snelfietsroutesgelderland.nl/arnhemnijmegencycling

FYI

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