

The Top 8 Specific Challenges for Urban Regeneration in New Towns



This paper is written by the current chairman of the European New Town Platform (ENTP), Almere, and Stipo Consult (The Netherlands). They have involved all ENTP-partners and developed a shared vision on the specific urban regeneration challenges that New Towns are faced with. This paper is the result of contributions by Vantaa (Finland), Cergy-Pontoise, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, Sénart (France), Almere, Capelle aan den IJssel, Haarlemmermeer, Purmerend, Zoetermeer (The Netherlands), Basildon, Craigavon and Torfaen (UK).

Friday 11 March 2005, the Board of the ENTP embraced the vision, and decided to organize a conference, based on the challenges described in this paper. As a follow-up to the conference, Communities of Practice have been advised on each of the challenges. The rating of the partners gives a first impression of the probable composition of each CoP.

Table of Contents

The specific <i>urban</i> life cycle of New Towns	1
The specific <i>social</i> life cycle of New Towns	1
Top 8 specific urban regeneration challenges for New Towns	1
8. The broken economic life cycle	2
7. Public facilities, those laggards	3
6. That awkward age	4
5. Power to the 'hood.....	5
4. The Identity Gap	6
3. Social diversity getting stuck	7
2. A new profession	8
1. Have a heart!	9
Colophon	10

The specific *urban* life cycle of New Towns

Urban Regeneration in New Towns is a new, but increasingly important issue. New Towns in Europe were developed to accommodate post-war growth, mostly from the fifties to the seventies. Most of the earliest locations are thirty to forty years old by now and are beginning to need more than simple cosmetic maintenance. We are now, for the first time in the history of New Towns, talking about renewal and further development of the existing urban environment. With their typical history and growth pattern, New Towns are confronted with their own, very specific challenges for urban regeneration.

New Towns are not problematic. On the contrary: they are often well loved by their inhabitants and function very well. Some of them are still faced with large-scale building programmes and will grow further over the next decades. Others have stopped growing for some time past. Both kinds of New Towns share the challenge of re-developing for the first time the oldest areas of their carefully planned urban environment.

The specific *social* life cycle of New Towns

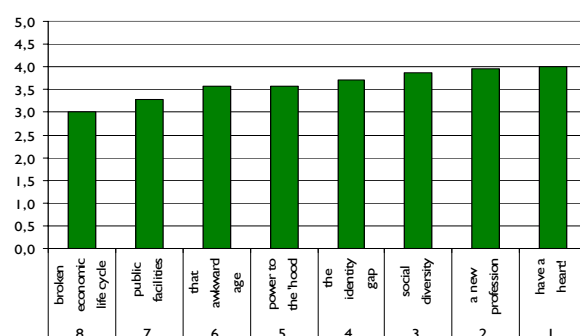
Not just the spatial, but also the social development of New Towns is quite characteristic. The earliest New-Town districts attracted mainly middle class settlers, drawn by the peaceful and safe living environment and the spacious, reasonably priced houses. Families with children were the dominant type of household.

After 25 years or more, the cities have begun to 'mature'. The first inhabitants have become empty nesters and turned grey. Their children are a fast growing group of 'born-and-bred newtowners', many of whom want to stay in town. The population shifts quickly. More (second or third generation) immigrants find their way into New Towns. Local businesses emerge. More and more, the New Towns grow into cities with a rich diversity of strongly individualised families and of individuals with future-oriented, self-assured, mobile and enterprising lifestyles.

Top 8 specific urban regeneration challenges for New Towns

From these specific spatial and social life cycles of New Towns, we can derive Specific Challenges for New Town Urban Regeneration. The partners were asked to rate the importance of these challenges on a 1 to 5 scale, 5 as most important. These are the challenges that the partners were consulted on, and their 'rating' by the ENTTP-members, in accumulating order of importance:

8.	broken economic life cycle	3,0
7.	public facilities	3,3
6.	power to the 'hood	3,6
5.	that awkward age	3,6
4.	the identity gap	3,7
3.	social diversity	3,9
2.	a new profession	4,0
1.	have a heart!	4,0



Now, we will first describe the 8 challenges. We will count down from number 8 to number 1.

8. The broken economic life cycle

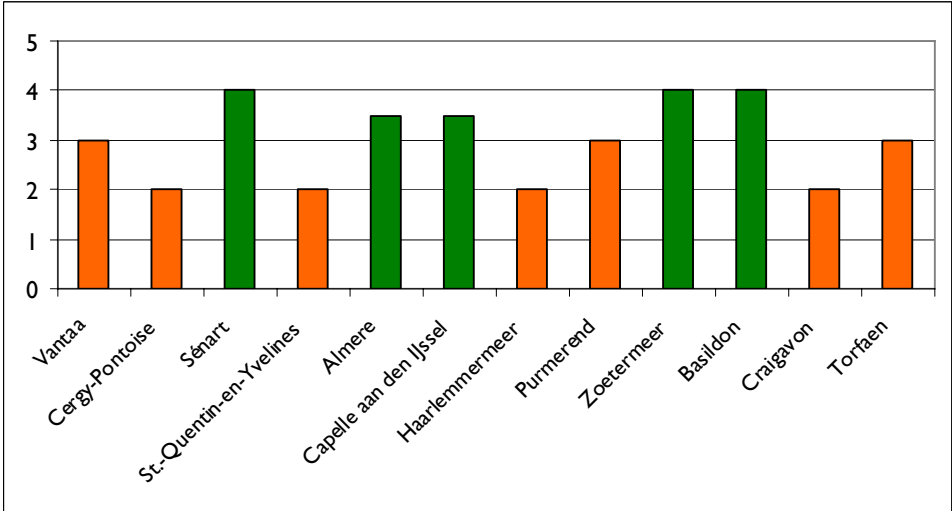
New Towns have been important motors for the economic growth of their regions over the past decades. When New Towns were developed spatially, separate economic zones were appointed. Industrial and business zones were developed in order to attract larger businesses to the New Towns. By now, a large part of economic growth comes from within the New Towns themselves. Many smaller businesses are starting to emerge from within the community. Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines stresses this: “We use a development centre to promote businesses from within the locality.” They start by working from home or perhaps a garage, but when they grow further, they cannot find the kind of space that is available in old towns (often re-used older buildings). There is a huge gap between a garage and a formal office building. For this reason, Basildon puts an emphasis on the informal economy, the ‘One Man And His Rotweiler’ kind of company. In New Towns, outgrowing the garage usually means moving out of town.

Another important issue for the economic life cycle is the apparent lack of a creative class. This is a problem, as creativity is very important for modern economy. There are no old buildings for sub-cultures to use. There is no platform for a city-elite who determine what *has to* be seen. New Towns struggle with this, like Torfaen: “We don’t want mediocrity. We are using new urban design measures to try to facilitate new development without stifling creativity.” New Towns lack the physical conditions and the cultural climate for creative development. In the tightly planned urban environment, with its single-purpose function zones, there is little space for shifting functions through the decades: from residential to shops or small businesses and back.

Challenges:

- *Filling in the gap between the garage and office building for further economic growth within New Towns.*
- *Creating spaces and platforms for the creative class.*

The score on this challenge, ‘the broken economic life cycle’:



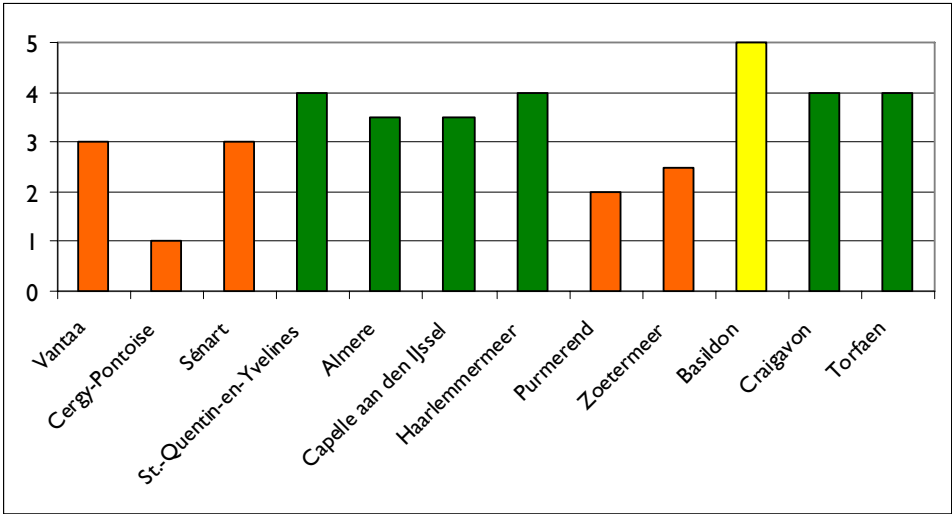
7. Public facilities, those laggards

‘Mature’ old towns have had decades, centuries even, to develop a wide range of public facilities for culture, care, welfare, health, education, recreation, leisure, etc. Usually, New Towns have developed these public facilities very carefully, but still they keep lagging behind. A diverse range of public facilities needs time to evolve. The tightly planned city offers little opportunity and space to react quickly to the latest changes in public needs. New Towns are looking for ways to manage the balance between scarce space and the need for new facilities. For instance, Torfaen uses a GIS plan of all green spaces to ensure balance of the green areas with those that they want to develop. Moreover, national financing systems for education and health are not designed for fast growth, so that money only becomes available after long delays. Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines has developed its own way to deal with this. The economic development has enabled them, by means of a tax on businesses, to fund a sizeable number of services and facilities.

Challenges:

- *Finding space and money for public facilities in existing urban areas of New Towns, without ‘killing the green’.*
- *Creating a less budget-oriented and a more value-oriented approach with other social investors to get them to co-invest in public facilities.*
- *Achieving new deals for funding systems with national governments.*

The score on this challenge, ‘public facilities, those laggards’:



6. That awkward age

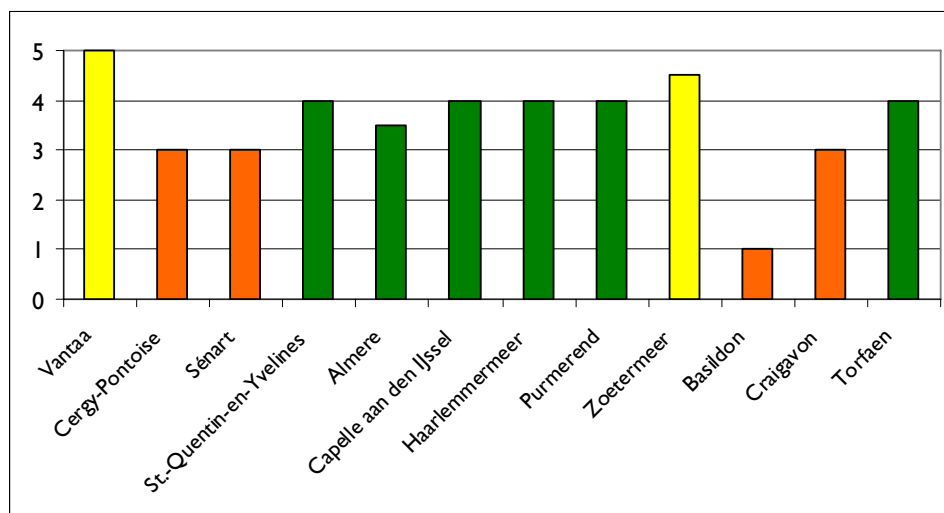
New Towns have a dynamic urban development which carries its own specific urban regeneration problems. Many countries have national investment programmes for cities. The challenges New Towns are faced with, however, are not the same as those of 'old towns'. New Towns have a better record for social and physical quality. 'Soft' investments are necessary: investments in community building, youth facilities, and culture. The challenges are alike, but their characters are different. The special status enjoyed by New Towns in North-Western Europe ended, but no other national investment programmes have taken its place, as they do not apply to New Towns yet. Like Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines stresses: "The new town benefits from the national government are again subject to common law." New Towns, it seems, are at 'that awkward age'.

Urban problems have not become as manifest in New Towns as they have in 'old towns'. Preventive action is called for. Or, as Cergy-Pontoise puts it: "We aim to achieve balanced urban development." This means preventing urban problems from going off the tracks and becoming uncontrollable. It requires small-scale, almost organic interventions in existing urban areas and investments in social cohesion. However, it is difficult to prove that prevention actually works: the results of preventive measures are hard to quantify as it is impossible to say how big problems would have been without them.

Challenge:

- *Breaking through financial short-term thinking and acting. Politicians are not used to investing here and now in projects with hard-to-quantify social benefits in the long run.*

The score on this challenge, 'the awkward age':



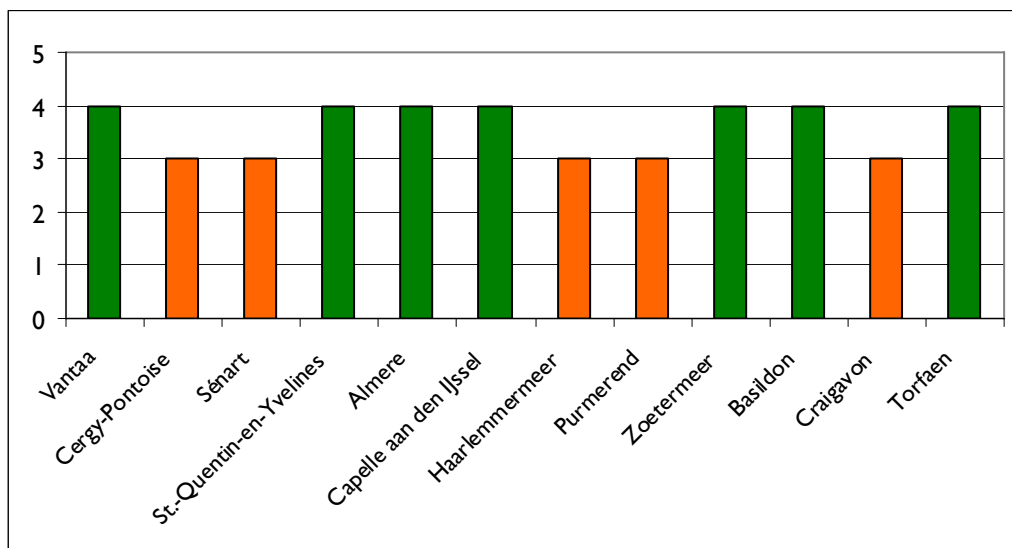
5. Power to the 'hood

The competition between existing districts and areas in New Towns is an important topic, more so than in 'old towns'. Because of the continual supply of new living environments, economic obsolescence and selective migration in existing areas are around the corner. Thus, vulnerable areas with low social cohesion can evolve, which can unexpectedly and swiftly cause those districts to deteriorate. New Towns are looking for ways to manage this competition. For instance, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines: "New accommodations and new services for the residents provide balanced development of the various constituents of the locality and equal treatment of the residents of the new town."

Challenge:

- *Keeping the competitive position of existing areas strong by continuing investments into these areas. Examples are: spatial interventions to keep residential and working environments up-to-date, investments in social structures and social cohesion, networks, coalitions, bonding with the home district, safety, education, facilities and work, and getting the owners to invest into their own beloved environment.*

The score on this challenge, 'power to the 'hood':



4. The Identity Gap

New Towns search for a powerful urban identity. Inhabitants who identify with their surroundings are important to generate collective zeal, but also to provide public support for activities, investments and developments. However, the first generations settled on rational rather than emotional grounds. They identify with their homes rather than with their towns. Craigavon: “The lack of identity and the lack of pride raise problems with antisocial behaviour.” The rise of a second generation opens up new opportunities. At the same time, it makes building an individual identity all the more urgent. The sense of identity is not helped by the fact that most New Towns were built in a period of functional planning. Character, architecture, and the ‘look and feel’ generally got less attention. One area looks like the next. A common complaint by outsiders is that they get lost.

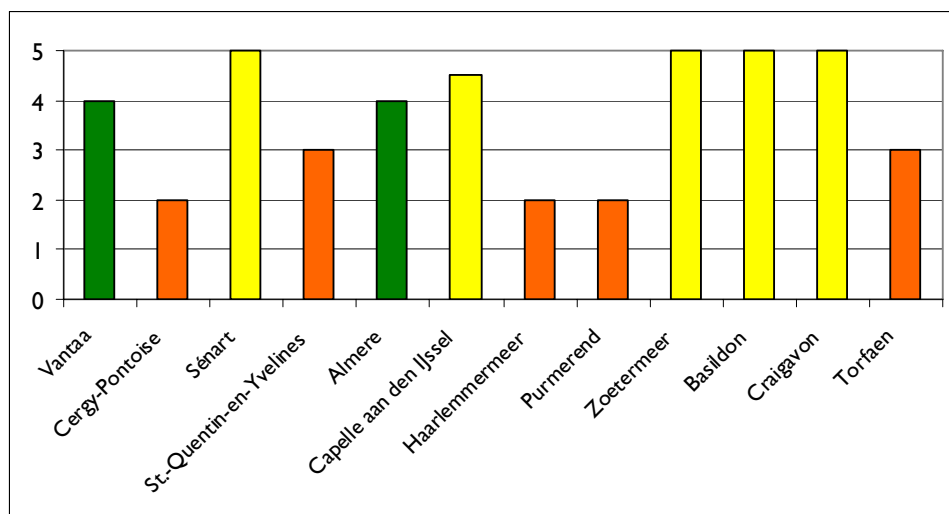
Vantaa stresses an interesting point. The architecture of the post-war period, especially of 1970s and 1980s, is not much appreciated. Nothing is considered as old-fashioned as the things of yesterday. However, it is an interesting and important period in architectural and cultural history in Europe. The inhabitants must understand it, and be proud of it, in order to grow roots to their city. The cultural history and architecture of new towns must be studied and evaluated. Preservation and conservation must be combined with regeneration to create identity.

Added to the identity gap is the poor image of New Towns. People who do not know the New Town see a boring, windy, middle-of-the-road town, monotonous, bourgeois and full of strollers. Though this image is out of date, it still persists in the outside world. Or, as Cergy-Pontoise and Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines put it: “Our image is good with the people who live and work here. But with the outside world it is bad, or just not well-known. We need to improve our image in the eyes of the outside world.”

Challenges:

- *Developing an urban regeneration approach which creates more identity and civic pride within New Towns. This requires a guiding course that connects many smaller and larger interventions.*
- *New Towns need more icons. These can be buildings, sites, or even resident celebrities, all of which can contribute to a stronger, more diverse image.*
- *Get a better understanding of and approach to the ‘architectural heritage of tomorrow’.*
- *Use these elements to improve the image with the outside world.*

The score on this challenge, ‘the identity gap’:



3. Social diversity getting stuck

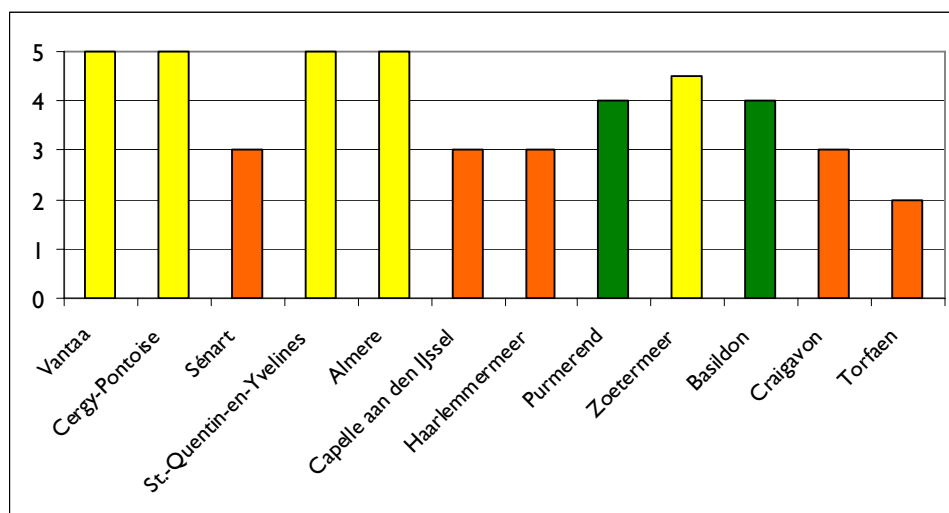
Spatial monotony is an important characteristic of New Towns. During periods of fast growth, whole districts were built at the same time with the same types of houses (mainly following a house-and-garden concept). New Towns are built to a carefully planned structure with few opportunities for coincidence, spontaneous new developments, or change of function within the built environment. Newly-grown social diversity requires different types of housing, facilities, recreational areas, economic spaces, bars and cultural facilities. This new social diversity is recognized throughout all New Towns. Cergy-Pontoise signals a new demand for access-to-ownership assistance. Sénart wishes to enhance the social diversity throughout dwellings. Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines wants to devote attention to building a more diversified housing market, one that is more receptive to younger generations born there, who now want to live there. Capelle aan den IJssel stresses a balance between short and long term diversity: "There is a risk that we build only for the elderly households, ignoring the wishes of the young people wanting to start on the housing market. This might drive young people out of town." Purmerend signals tension between the wishes of the local population, their local housing demand and the continuing intake of new people from the old donor city.

However, finding space for new social, cultural and economic development and variety is not easy, without sacrificing the well-loved green and recreational areas. Vantaa: "Renovation of old building stock offers opportunities in this respect. Increasing urban density also has many advantages from this point of view."

Challenges:

- *Finding new strategies to 'shake things up'. The aim is to accommodate and stimulate all kinds of smaller changes within the existing areas, in co-operation with many investing parties, still keeping a long-term perspective.*
- *The final goal is to create more spatial diversity in the existing city environment of New Towns, without 'killing the green', in order to accommodate social, economic, and cultural diversity.*

The score on this challenge, 'social diversity getting stuck':



2. A new profession

The existing New Towns require more than just maintenance; they also need further development. Urban development of the existing city is a new profession entirely. New skills are required for developing the ‘old’ New Town, different to those needed for developing the new parts of town. Illustrative is Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines that says it is taking a new path. The New Town is facing the challenge of continuing the quality of life in the locality by managing the existing urban network. It now seems necessary to invest in the upkeep and adaptation of facilities and services.

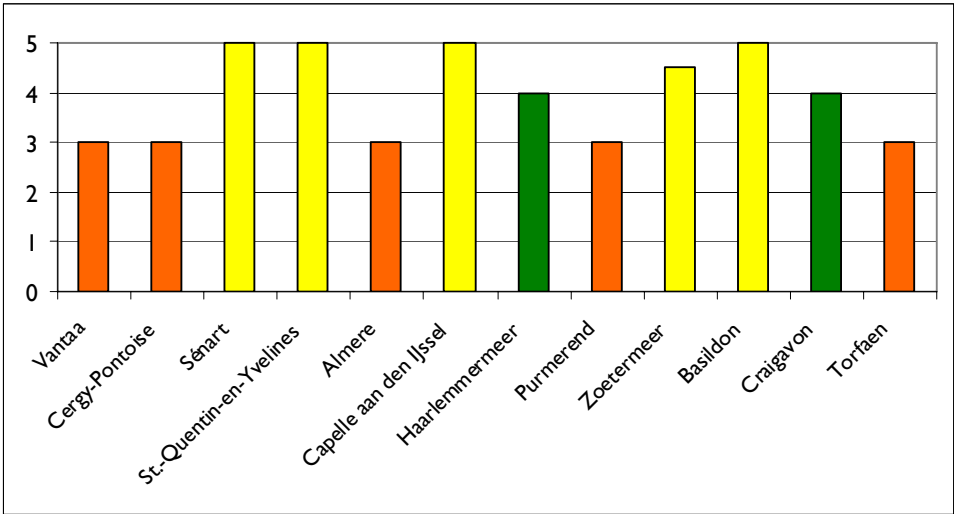
Developing an existing city means taking into account a wide range of different interests, which are simply not there when one builds in ‘open fields’. In addition to this, over the past years local governments have had to shift from directing urban development from the *top down*, to working *with* other parties. Urban management will have to learn how to give all parties’ interests their due weight within the development process; a shift from government to governance. Like Vantaa puts it: “This requires interaction and close co-operation with inhabitants and existing companies.” Or Torfaen: “We are trying to involve communities in public consultation and get them to understand the changes that we are proposing before we have detailed plans in place, so the changes seem like small steps.” Professionals in organisations concerned with building and developing New Towns, will have to move from a *new-building-mentality* towards an *existing-city-environment-mentality*.

Development strategy will have to change, from large-scale development to development by many smaller interventions, made when the time is right. This requires long-term strategies, incentives and patience. Developing the existing city also requires a more holistic approach: social and economic as well as spatial strategies, instead of spatial strategies alone.

Challenge:

- *Training and developing skills within the organisation for management and holistic development of existing urban areas.*
- *Finding a new position between other investing parties.*
- *Develop new skills to make the shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’.*

The score on this challenge, ‘a new profession’:



1. Have a heart!

Rated most important urban regeneration challenge: the fast growth of residential areas in New Towns requires a centre, a heart that continually adapts and grows along. Continuing investment programmes are required to build and rebuild the central area. In New Towns, the division between the centre and the surrounding residential areas tends to be sharp. There is no transition zone that can breathe with the economic climate through the decades, like there is in old cities. The functions which these transition zones bordering the centres of old towns are given, are thus lacking in New Towns.

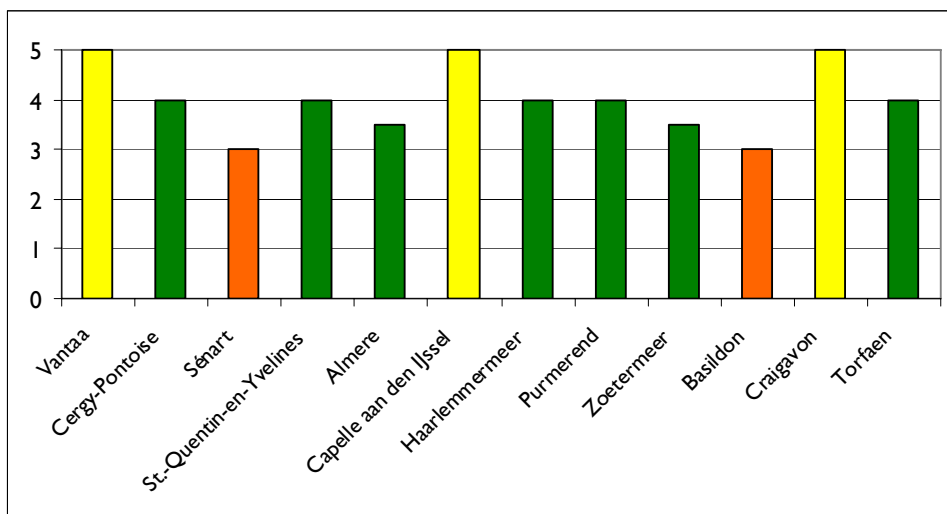
If the town's centre is its heart, a heart attack is lurking in New Towns. When a city grows, its scale needs adapting – in leaps. In order to function well, the arteries have to grow along with the heart – also in leaps. Many New Towns are working on this. Torfaen is developing a new Masterplan for the town centre to make it more sustainable in all senses of the word. Cergy-Pontoise experiences the need to enhance their retailing capacity in the town centre. Craigavon stresses the importance: “Without a heart, an area does not have any civic pride.” Sénart is working on the drafting and realization of the new town centre with two canals and leisure activities plus commercial centre. Almere is completely and integrally re-developing its heart.

In addition to the centre, larger New Towns have had to develop sub-centres, even though they were not planned in the beginning. Craigavon: “Our experience is that our New Town was supposed to bring two existing towns together. Instead, it created three with expectations of separate public amenities in each town.” These sub-centres often do not have time to specialise. Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines: “Communal centres are often seen as threats to existing central functions.” This may lead to unnecessary internal competition between the centre and the sub-centres.

Challenges:

- *Continually developing the heart as a development in its own right, but also involving the surrounding residential areas, trying to create a 'breathing zone'.*
- *Specialising centres and sub-centres, and keeping up the infrastructure leading to the centre(s).*

The score on this challenge, 'have a heart!':



Colophon

We thank Vantaa (Finland), Cergy-Pontoise, Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, Sénart (France), Almere, Capelle aan den IJssel, Haarlemmermeer, Purmerend, Zoetermeer (The Netherlands), Basildon, Craigavon and Torfaen (UK) for their contributions.

European New Towns Platform

Gerda Blom, City of Almere (as acting chairman of the ENTP)

Hans Karssenbergh, Stipo Consult (urban strategy and process development)

June 2005



www.newtowns.net



www.almere.nl

S t i p o
c o n s u l t
ruimtelijke productstrategie
en -ontwikkeling

www.stipo.nl