Spatial Planning in the Network Society—Rethinking the Principles of Planning in the Netherlands[1]

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ABSTRACT *The Dutch planning system rejoices a very positive reputation in the international academic planning literature. Yet both the conceptual orientation and the institutional practices of Dutch planning are eroded. New institutional practices have emerged that effectively form a 'shadow structure' to the official planning system, eroding both its effectiveness and legitimacy. The article suggests that this institutional development is to be understood against the background of larger processes of social change to which the system has so far not responded: the coming 'network society'. In light of this analysis it is suggested that Dutch planning could enhance both its effectiveness and legitimacy by reconsidering some of the basic features of the planning system.*

1. Introduction

The Dutch system of spatial planning can rejoice in an almost mythical reputation in the international academic literature (cf. Faludi, 1991a; Alexander, 1988; Alterman, 1997; Priemus, 1996). The monograph on spatial planning in the Netherlands by Faludi and Van der Valk gives another boost to this, opening with the sentences: "This book is about an art in which the Netherlands excels: strategic planning. Foreign observers will need little convincing of the merits of Dutch planning" (1994, p. xiii). Upon inspection this 'canon' of the effective, legitimate and robust Dutch system of spatial planning is based on a selective interpretation of planning in the Netherlands. In actual fact both recent developments within planning as a policy practice as well as the effects of some macro-sociological developments now put the celebrated Dutch system of spatial planning in jeopardy. A reflection upon these challenges makes clear that the Dutch system will need to change its institutional practice in order to remain effective and legitimate.

What are the features that determine the current interpretation of the Dutch planning system? First of all, the Dutch system is unusual in its institutional comprehensiveness. According to the recent Compendium of the European Commission (European Commission, 1997, p. 12), this 'comprehensive integrated approach' "requires responsive and sophisticated

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planning institutions" in particular to coordinate relevant activities within government. Hence, much of what planning theorists attract might be understood as a function of the complicated organizational format of the Dutch system in which much effort is put into inner-governmental coordination of spatially relevant policies.

Secondly, foreign commentators are often impressed by the vast numbers of full-time planning professionals in the Netherlands. There is an intricate structure of planning agencies on all levels of government with at the apex the National Spatial Planning Agency (RPD) with more than 275 employees. This network of governmental agencies is paralleled by dozens of consultancy firms the turnover of which is highly dependent on contracts with these governmental agencies. We would argue that this 'institutional density' in itself does not make the system legitimate or effective. It is, however, a necessary feature of a planning system in which the policy technologies of 'indicative plans' and 'planning documents' and elaborate consultation are key to the generation of inner-government agreements.

Thirdly, Dutch spatial planning has deep historical roots. Actual land use planning dates back to the beginning of this century. Dutch spatial planning can even be traced back to the nineteenth century (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994, pp. 26–44). Starting at the municipal level, higher levels of scale were successively brought under the operation of planning institutions and planning technologies over time. National institutions were established during the Second World War. Again, this seems an institutional success story: the strategy of spatial planning slowly structures ever more governmental decision making. Yet the often narrated long historical roots are obviously no guarantee for a continued legitimate and effective planning system.

Fourthly, many observers have been impressed by the level of institutional creativity as evident in the continuous output of planning documents in the Netherlands (Faludi, 1991b; Mastop, 1989). This output is indeed remarkable. All three levels of government do have their own legally defined planning documents, besides an array of informal plans and visions published by other departments or by coalitions of societal actors—the number of which has been expanding rapidly over the last few years. The value of this institutional creativity, however, depends on the role and function of all these documents. Some commentators have problematized the extraordinary output of plans (Kreukels, 1995; Boelens, 1990). They explained that one reason for the extraordinary output lies in the fact that planning documents with time horizons of up to 15–30 years are time and again perceived as out of date within years after their official publication. The extraordinary output of planning documents could therefore just as well be interpreted as an indicator of institutional failure as of institutional success.

Fifthly, it is not as if there are no critics to the Dutch system, yet critiques of the Dutch system by internationally known and active academics are often published in Dutch (Kreukels, 1995; Mastop, 1995). Mastop (1995, p. 83) for instance recently argued that a "fundamental reorientation on the system is indispensable in the coming period". What is more, critics of the Dutch system tend not to publish their arguments in English (De Boer, 1976, 1996; Simonis, 1985; Lukkes, 1990; Van Rossem, 1996; Donner, 1996; Van Blijswijk *et al.*, 1995).

The argument of this paper is that many of the features that contribute to the international reputation actually relate to a particular institutional design which is not necessarily best suited to deal with the issues in spatial planning in the years to come. On the basis of a comprehensive research project conducted at the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (WRR), 1998) it is argued that changes both in the societal context and in the institutional context of planning have reduced the power of the Dutch system of planning. What is more, it is argued that this change in the societal context and institutional organization of planning require that the

Netherlands system of planning is rethought fundamentally. This in order to keep the tradition of a legitimate and reasonable effective spatial policy alive.

In the context of this paper we examine to what extent the existing institutional arrangements and the current spatial concepts of Dutch spatial planning can still form the basis of a system of strategic planning which is both effective and legitimate. We argue that the Dutch system has fallen victim to both institutional and conceptual erosion (section 2). The explanation for this is two-fold. On the one hand, there are several changes that occurred in the institutional field of planning (section 3), on the other hand, the system obviously struggles with some macro-sociological developments that erode the both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the Dutch system of planning (section 4). We discuss the consequences of the different dimensions of the emerging 'network society' that now forms the socio-spatial context of planning practice. By so doing our explanation for the failure of Dutch planning resists the temptation to come up with an intra-governmental 'politics or interest' approach. Rather, we discern an interaction between major contextual developments that put the system of planning under pressure and some institutional repositioning that now weaken the basis for effective spatial planning. Drawing on this analysis the paper suggests a possible direction in which the revision of the system could be sought so as to maximize its legitimacy and effectiveness in the years to come.

2. Understanding Dutch Planning

Planning is persuasive story telling about the future, according to the American theorist Jim Throgmorton (1992). This most certainly holds true for the Dutch system. The legal and institutional basis of the Dutch system was laid down in the Spatial Planning Act of 1965 and since that time the idea has always been that planning should be conceived of, above all, as a coordinative activity. The instruments for this coordinative activity were consciously always of a non-financial nature: with one exception, planners never had financial resources of their own. The instruments of the planner were primarily communicative: concepts, plans and vision documents were to be used to capture the imagination of the various relevant actors, both within the sector departments on the national level (the so called 'horizontal axis' of coordination) as well as at the other levels of government (the 'vertical axis'). The idealist notion here was that planners' effectiveness in coordinating would put in jeopardy were they to have their own financial resources. After all, the point of good planning was that the government should only come up with a plan if it had come to an internal agreement (cf. e.g. Witsen, 1986). This implies that much of the essential work of the planner is discursive: listening to people, making an inventory of problems and wishes, scanning preferences, developing concepts that can guide thinking about spatial development, assessing the possibilities of building coalitions among actors and thus in essence persuading actors of various kinds to think about the future developments in one and the same language (cf. also Healey, 1997).

The above implies that the system is not only dependent on its functional logic but especially on the way in which it is operated informally. In the already mentioned "EU compendium of spatial planning systems and policies"—as such an excellent overview of what can be found in the European Union—the Dutch system is characterized in terms that are formalistic and rationalist. The so called comprehensive integrated approach suggests that "… spatial planning is conducted through a very systematic and formal hierarchy of plans from national to local level, which coordinate public sector activity across different sectors …" (European Commission, 1997, p. 36). In actual fact the coordination of 'spatially relevant' governmental policy poses great problems, both on the horizontal as on the vertical axis.

Let us first look at the vertical axis of the Dutch spatial planning system. Each level of government has the authority to lay down a strategic plan which results in a complex

'matrouchka' system of interrelated plans—from the national level to the regional, from the regional to the local level. These are (a) the national spatial planning key decisions, (b) the provincial regional plans and (c) the municipal structure plans. These plans are indicative, although the municipal structure plan does have some judicial consequences, but this is strictly limited to the municipality itself. The only legally binding plan in the Dutch system is the municipal land-use plan (*bestemmingsplan*), but this is purely passive: citizens are not obliged to implement this plan. Its main function is to create a maximum of legal security although over the years some elements of flexibility have been introduced by the legislator. The Dutch planning system is thus characterized by the absence of the obligation to bring spatial plans in line with the strategic plans (or key decisions) of a 'higher' government.

In absence of 'direct' financial resources and legal power, the trick of planning lies in extensive intra-governmental negotiation and consultation. Planning then, might be portrayed as active discourse-coalition formation (cf. Hajer, 1995). This density of discourse is probably the most fundamental characteristic of spatial planning in the Netherlands. This 'discoursing' takes place in the context of distinct institutional and conceptual structures.

2.1 Institutional Structures

Most prominent institutional practices are the national 'spatial planning key decision' (PKB: *planologische kernbeslissing*) and the National Spatial Planning Commission (RPC: Rijksplanologische Commissie). Best known is the PKB-procedure which was introduced in the early seventies—but integrated in the Spatial Planning Act as late as 1985. It created possibilities to enhance public participation and allowed for active involvement of the parliament in the formulation of spatial planning policies (For a more elaborate discussion, Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994, pp. 147–151). National plans pass through this system. Research has indicated, however, that recent plans were only published after numerous informal sessions with representatives of the 'other' governments and 'target groups' like representatives of the business community—sessions that all took place behind closed doors (Korthals Altes, 1995). A similar story can in fact be told for the highly sensitive negotiations between the RPD and the sectoral departments. Great efforts are put into this form of horizontal coordination that all take place *before* the official PKB procedure starts. This is were the second key practice, the RPC comes in.

Because generating consensus forms the foundation of policy making in the Netherlands in general, it is not surprising a specialized policy institution has been created at the national level. The task of the RPC is to develop a common policy framework in the field of spatial planning which spans the policy domains of all the departments which actually influence spatial development. Members of the RPC have high positions in their departments, mostly at the level of director-general. The secretariat is part of the RPD, which means that the director-general of the RPD is the secretary. In order to facilitate coordination, the chairman of the RPC is always an independent outsider.

The main function of the RPC is to prepare political decision making. Conflicts which cannot be solved by the civil servants are put forward to a sub-council of the Cabinet, the Council for Spatial Planning and the Environment, its existence another indicator for the sophisticated policy technologies used for intra-governmental consensus building in the field of national spatial planning policy. The monthly meetings of the RPC are not open for the public. Even members of parliament do not have direct access to the course and results of the deliberations within the RPC. All this forms the reason why the RPC, founded in 1965, could be criticized (cf. Van der Valk & De Vries, 1996). More important than the lack of openness is the fact that the intricacies of reaching consensus within the government in actual practice restricts the room for alternatives in the political deliberations that follow. A discourse-co-

alition, once formed, becomes a structure itself and will set markers for the debates in the PKB-procedure.

2.2 Conceptual Structures: Planning Master Frames

At the beginning of this section we have stated that Dutch strategic spatial planning is to a large extent indicative planning. The primary technologies for indicative planning are strategic plans, the linch pin of which are formed by spatial 'concepts', images of desired spatial development. In the planning literature it is assumed that spatial concepts can be very powerful instruments especially in combination with visualization techniques (Kunzmann, 1996).

Dutch spatial planning, especially on the national level, has always been characterized by a great number of these concepts. Spatial concepts are not stable over time. Especially relevant is the conceptual shift that took place during the 1970s as the modernist, large-scale concepts of the sixties, aimed at a profound reconstruction of vast rural areas and urban districts, were replaced by spatial concepts aiming at the preservation of the existing fabric of rural and urban areas (cf. Zonneveld, 1989). Apart from this very much international shift in concepts, we have discerned many more changes in the concepts that planners use to guide spatially relevant policies. However, we would suggest that this does not necessarily mean that Dutch spatial planning lacks continuity. Analytically it is useful to distinguish between 'concepts' and 'basic principles' that actually express in more abstract terms some general orientations. For instance, we identified 'concentration of urbanization' as a basic principle of Dutch planning for which, over time, different concepts were proposed: concentrated deconcentration, growth centres, the compact city. Hence, underneath the shifts in concepts we discerned a continued commitment. The five basic principles we identified together form what we would call the implicit 'master frame' of Dutch spatial planning: concentration of urbanization, spatial cohesion, spatial diversity, hierarchy and spatial justice. These principles are briefly explained in Table 1. The idea of the notion master frame is that Dutch planning constantly seeks to rejuvenate these basic principles that form the core of the professional approach to Dutch spatial planning. Although over the years not every basic principle has been emphasized in the same manner, together they form an ambitious policy programme.

Faludi's work on the 'planning doctrine' in the Netherlands actually refers to two concepts Randstad and Green Heart, that for the best part of half a century dominated the planning debate. With Peter Hall, we would argue that these concepts were robust to great changes in society because parts of both spatial concepts, going through the complex filters of history and politics, "can be subtly emphasised, de-emphasised or re-interpreted" (Hall, 1993, p. 44). This is indeed what happened: one might say that the term Randstad meant different things at different times. The Second Report on spatial planning of 1966 came with a perspective of urban regions growing together forming large urban conglomerates. This was subsequently replaced by an idea of the Randstad as dominated by well defined and spatially contained urban regions in which local and regional public transport and the bicycle would fulfil an important role in transportation. What is more, until then the scale of the Randstad was always considered as simply too large to be seen as one uniform whole. As the concept of the Randstad re-emerged in the late 1980s, it was precisely conceived off as an European economic core area to be compared to London, the German Ruhrgebiet or the Ile de France. Finally, in the present Fourth Report on spatial planning extra (1990, 1993), the Randstad-Green Heart 'doctrine' has turned into a somewhat rigid spatial perspective to consolidate the demarcation of 'red' and 'green'. On request of the Dutch parliament the Green Heart even acquired its own demarcated borders not to be crossed by urbanization from the cities surrounding the Green Heart.

Table 1. The basic principles of Dutch spatial planning

Basic principles ('core tasks')	Spatial level of scale	Object of policy	Most important current spatial concepts	Incorporation into policy
Concentration of urbanization	Local and regional	Distribution pattern of urban functions	Compact city as regards VINEX locations; ABC-policy; open-space concepts/restrictive areas (buffer zones; Green Heart; Central Open Space)	Spatial Planning Act (Key Planning Decision (PKB) system and content of local government plans); development of VINEX locations via departmental budgets (especially; principal development to be handled by Transport, Public Works and Water Management)
Spatial cohesion	Local, regional and national	Relations between urban (including economic) activities; economically most promising areas, including development structure	Compact urban regions; national spatial-economic structure of Netherlands-Distributionl and (mainports, main transport axes); Urban Ring Central Netherlands/Randstad International; urban nodes; prime locations	Spatial Planning Act (especially content of local government plans); housing policy; Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries budget (recreational facilities; large green projects). As regards national spatial-economic structure: spatial-economic policy Economic Affairs; infrastructure and transport policy Transport, Public Works and Water Management; decisions on locations for high-grade State facilities (all departments)
Spatial differentiation	Local, regional, national	Manifestation of city and country	(living) Environment differentiation; open-space concepts c.q. restrictive areas (buffer zones; Green Heart; Central Open Space); national ecological network	Spatial Planning Act (especially content of plans of local government); other policy as regards daily living environment of local government; land-use policy Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries
Spatial hierarchy	Local, regional, national, international	Pattern of ('high-grade') facilities and economic activities	Prime locations; urban nodes (3 categories); Randstad International (= top of Netherlands)	Decisions on locations of high-grade State facilities (all departments); stimulation instruments Economic Affairs; Spatial Planning Act (especially evaluating role of provinces as regards municipality policy)
Spatial justice	Regional and national	Distribution of economic activities	Regions on own strength; urban nodes (especially nodes designated on dispersal grounds); target areas (rural development)	Decisions on locations of high-grade State facilities (all departments); stimulation instruments Economic Affairs; policy of EU structure funds

The application of spatial concepts has also become increasingly rigid especially when it comes to the basic principle of concentration of urbanization. They form planning guidelines that apply to the whole country leaving little room for variation on the regional and local level. Except for planning concepts like Randstad and Green Heart, this is why nearly all national spatial planning concepts are generally applicable. The concept of the compact city is the most outspoken example. As will be pointed out in the next section, the heavy reliance of national spatial planning on generally applicable spatial concepts in combination with the institutional arrangements used for the formulation and implementation of—national—spatial planning policy is becoming increasingly problematic. What is at stake is the openness of spatial planning.

3. Changing Institutional Relationships: the Role of Aligning Interests

One of the most interesting features of the Dutch system of spatial planning has been its capacity to always align itself with prevailing interests over the last decades. However, over the last years planning has lost the support of aligning interests as housing and agriculture that over the past decades helped to achieve planning goals. So far the powerful housing directorate, part of the same ministry as the RPD, was willing to contribute to the implementation of planning policies as long as spatial planning could provide enough sites for realizing the building programme. However, as a result of a shake up of national housing policy, the State now leaves more room for the market, which means that there is less of a guarantee that new housing projects will be realized at locations (and densities!) that are favoured by the planning agency. The agricultural sector has changed dramatically too. In the past there was a—in some cases fierce—resistance to give up agricultural land for other functions. As a result of higher productivity and the European market a smaller area of land is now needed for direct agricultural production in the Netherlands. This means that the defence of rural areas because of sectoral policies and interests will become less firm. What is more, as agriculture becomes more industrial in its appearance, the alignment of planning and the agricultural sector withers, resulting in a more 'urban' outlook of the countryside in many areas. This industrialization of agriculture could become even more important when the change of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union leads to a growing importance of market forces.

Fostering the competitive position of the Netherlands has been the predominant goal of spatial strategic thinking for nearly a decade. The Fourth Report on spatial planning of 1988 identified the main spatial economic structure, formed by the Randstad and the urban regions of the neighbouring provinces. A key spatial concept is the mainport, referring to the essential role of the Rotterdam harbour and the Schiphol airport in the Dutch economy. As a consequence, large investments in mainport and transport corridors (the latter one without official status of spatial concept) are made to attract new (foreign) businesses. The country proves to be remarkably successful in this regard especially in the sector distribution, logistics and transport. More than 50% of the European Distribution Centres of American and Japanese firms is located in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 1997a). In fact so many foreign companies have located in the Netherlands that the European Commission has become suspicious over the possibility that the Dutch government uses secret funds to attract these companies (*NRC-Handelsblad*, 17 April 1998).

All this could be interpreted as yet another success for the Dutch system of planning. The Fourth Report could be interpreted as a last change of tack aligning planning with strong interests represented by the Department of Economic Affairs and of Transport & Traffic, tapping their resources for the continued struggle to impose its own master frame on government policy. This reading is persuasive in the sense that it can be shown that the very

idea of a mainport strategy and especially the idea of a priority area for economic develop-ment—the main spatial-economic structure—originated in the RPD. These ideas were impopular at first, and it was only later that the sector departments came to see these ideas as the leading policy concepts for (their own) future development. In this sense the Fourth Report was a superb communicative act, laying the basis for one of the most effective forms of policy diffusion: internalization (cf. Winsemius, 1986). The idea being that if 'target groups' (whether other departments or societal stakeholders) would take over the concern for your preferred scenario you would have almost resolved your problem of steering. Yet there is another possible interpretation of the developments in Dutch spatial planning since 1986. Two separate elements can be distinguished: the unanticipated *institutional* consequences of internal-ization for the overall logic coordination of planning strategies and the *conceptual* consequences of the alignment with economic development interests.

3.1 The Changing Logic of Spatial Planning: Questioning the Official Planning Policy

Over the recent years all sector departments have, one by one, published new planning documents, be it mostly with an informal status. The Ministry of Agriculture came up with a document on 'urban landscapes' in which it played with possible mixed use environments around cities intermingling 'red' and 'green'. It aimed at an integrated approach to solving problems particular to the city (lack of amenity) and to the surrounding countryside that was undergoing rapid changes in particularly owing to a reclining agricultural usage. 'Red' could be made to pay for—high quality—'green' environments. This was a direct challenge to the official planning concept of the compact city and the restrictive building policy for the green zones surrounding the urban regions. The Ministry of Economic Affairs published a paper 'Space for Economic Activity' (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 1994) in which it argued for the reservation of additional space for economic activity. It showed the Ministry to be willing to think in terms of a conceptual spatial strategy, rather than just in terms of plain demand led accommodation. This institutional turn to an active spatial-economic strategy was subsequently reinforced by several publications pushing the idea of a corridor-oriented development of economic activity (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 1997a). Here the motorway infrastructure is taken as the basis for the determination of the ideal locations of new business parks and distribution activities which runs against the commitments of the official locational policy which is aiming at a concentration of labour intensive economic activities in the direct vicinity of nodes in the public transport system. Again, the spatial strategies are not congruent with the official line of the government. It would lead to an erosion of the compact city concept and, because of its orientation towards motorways and its claims of new 'greenfield sites' rather than the restructuring of established 'brownfield sites' in the urban regions, it would have an unfavourable ecological balance. A similar story can be told for a document bearing the title (in translation) 'Vision on urbanization and mobility' by the Ministry of Traffic & Transport (Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 1995) which argued for a spatial strategy that would take the existing infrastructure—the railway system in particular—as its starting point. However sensible this may appear to the outsider, this was a direct attack on the age old adagium of planners that 'railroad planning' (*spoorwegplanologie*) implied poor thinking: it was the general spatial plan that should determine where the—sectoral—infrastructure was to be, not the other way round.

   These documents and some others (see WRR, 1998, 98 ff.) all contained alternative ways of looking at current spatial trends and they all presented new policy approaches incongruent to the official planning policy. Despite the fact that neither of these plans had an official legal status, they were often effective in occupying the minds of policy makers and stakeholders. Since planning relies to a large extent on the effectiveness of its communicative technologies,

this poses much more of a challenge than one would be inclined to think if one would judge the power of the documents simply by their legal status. What emerged was a very lively debate on various spatial development strategies. A debate that became increasingly public as interested parties started to 'campaign' for particular alternative spatial concepts. This was not at all in line with the established procedures which—as we noted—were more oriented towards intra-governmental consultation and deliberation. Concluding, the strategy of internalization and the sectoral need to rethink their own policy strategies had grave institutional consequences for the coordinative role of the national planning agency RPD and the Minister for spatial planning.

3.2 The Alignment with Economic Interest: the Emergence of an 'Infrastructure Approach'

The second trend that indicates new institutional practice is the way in which the 'spatialization' of economic policy and the 'economization' of spatial policy have started to influence one another. As the government turned proactive and started to think of strategies to improve the competitive position of the Netherlands, a new inter-departmental coordination commission on the strengthening of the economic structure was set up, the so called ICES (Interdepartmental Commission for the strengthening of the Economic Structure). This commission—that still lacks an official status—started to look into ways in which, after years of cuts in spending, the government could contribute to economic recovery. It found a legitimate basis in the active investments in what became known as the 'general business environment'. The extension and improvement of infrastructure became a key idea in this. This initiative got a tremendous boost as the government decided to feed this policy with revenues from the gas exploitation, thus turning 'underground capital' (gas) into 'surface capital' (roads, rail, airport extensions).

   Again, formally there is no problem in the emergence of the ICES as institutional practice. It is oriented towards the improvement of the economic structure, which is a legitimate sectoral goal. However, as it developed its profile, it *de facto* started to overlap more and more with the official planning circuits, especially with the RPC—discussed in the previous section—which functions as the official platform for the coordination of spatial policy. Partly because the funds are used to finance the implementation of officially agreed upon spatial plans, partly because the idea of business environment was broadened up, the ICES—its secretary part of the Department of Economic Affairs—now constitute an alternative circuit of spatial planning. This alternative circuit works with its own discourse or master frame, which we have called the 'infrastructure approach'. It is not focused on the elaboration of land use plans but works in terms of investments in concrete projects related to new infrastructural works. What is interpreted as infrastructure includes more than just roads and rail. Since amenity, nature reserves and cultural infrastructure all contribute to the quality of the business environment, the ICES decision making extends far beyond its original sectoral brief. Evidence of this is formed by the extent to which the ICES progress reports now influence overall governmental policy (Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 1996, 1997b, 1998). The differences between the two approaches are summarized in Table 2.

3.3 The Weakening of the Viability of the Dutch Planning System

Concluding, the developments over the last decade have much more serious repercussions for the viability of the Dutch system of planning than often is acknowledged. There is a crisis in terms of its institutional structure, its prime conceptual commitments and in terms of the coalition which is to make the planning strategy work. The turn to infrastructure has led to the development of a shadow structure for decision making that effectively erodes the legal

Table 2. Characteristics of spatial planning and the infrastructural approach

	Spatial planning	Infrastructural approach
Organizational principles	— Planned, area-oriented — Designation — Communication-oriented — Autonomous concept formulation prior to implementation and financing ('deductive') — Prioritization of spatial claims	— Project-based, infrastructure-oriented — Development — Investment-oriented — Project as motivating factor, thinking and doing linked ('inductive') — Fitting projects in
Organization structure	— Supersectoral coordination via planning/policy document system — Comprehensiveness as aim — Decentralized orientation: Key Planning — Decisions primarily indicative; designation as extreme exception	— Negotiated coordination between sectors — Sectoral goals with central orientation, requirement for partial re-centralization
Core programme/paradigm	— Prevent suboptimal spatial structures by integral deliberation on basis of planning concept formulation — Substantive orientation (in particular spatial differentiation, spatial coherence, concentration of urbanization) — Spatial quality as social goal — Orientation towards regional qualities, socio-economic coordination	— Realise win–win-solutions by pro-active government policy — Strengthen economic structure, optimise spatial establishment conditions — Spatial quality as establishment factor — Orientation towards connections, connectivity
Policy legitimacy	*Procedural:* — Graduated deliberation at multiple levels of scale (connected in 'series') — Social involvement by means of public participation at planning stage — Careful weighting of priorities takes time, balanced spatial development demands involvement of various interests	*Instrumental:* — 'Parallel' prioritization within spatial-economic framework, later handled in formal spatial planning — Social involvement seen primarily in terms of creating basis of support (PKB plus) — Resort to existential necessity of investments, long duration of decision making not consistent with needs of a dynamic society.
Policy effectiveness	— Mainly a matter of persuasion and negotiation by means of communication and concept formulation — Steering through concepts, drawing on sectoral instruments — Integral plans	— Primarily financial by distribution of resources — Steering by strengthening infrastructure — Project-based intervention

institutional arrangements for plan-led spatial decision making and for supra-sectoral choice such as the RPC. Likewise, we see how the complicated and time-consuming institutional PKB arrangement puts a heavy emphasis on intra-governmental bargaining while the new and largely informal ICES procedures provide an alternative trajectory.

Conventional analysis would explain the above with a 'politics of interest' analysis (cf. Schwarz & Thompson, 1990). In that case the developments would be interpreted as a matter of conventional territorial disputes common to bureaucratic organizations. This would be missing the point, however. Instead one might consider the background to the various sectoral initiatives. Our argument here would be that the developments in planning strategies as described above cannot be understood without reflecting on the broader societal developments against the background of which these intra-governmental processes take place. Hence, in order to be able to come to an assessment of the relative role of this intra-governmental game of 'mutual positioning' (see Hajer, 1995) as element in the erosion of the Dutch planning system, we need to refocus and zoom out and consider the changing societal context of planning.

4. The New Context of Planning

4.1 The Network Society

There has been a burgeoning social theoretical literature on space and society over the last decade (Castells, 1989, 1996, 1997; Graham & Marvin, 1996; Harvey, 1989; Lash & Urry, 1994; Urry, 1995; Amin, 1994). For all their differences, these texts strongly convey the idea that the context of spatial planning is changing dramatically. Yet this literature is only rarely being related to the goals and principles of planning practice (an important exception being the work of Patsy Healey or Peter Hall (Healey, 1997; Hall, 1993). A reflection on these social theoretical contributions sheds new light on the recent developments in the Dutch planning scene and presents new ideas concerning the challenges for the planning system in the years to come. For this article we have distilled some key findings of the literature mentioned above that can together be seen as features belonging to what Castells has called the 'network society'.

4.2 From Proximity to Connectivity: the Erosion of the Premises of Current Spatial Policy

The concept of network society brings together insights from geography and sociology and points, above all, to the fact that social arrangements increasingly stretch across space (for this also see Giddens, 1990 or Beck *et al.*, 1994). "Networks constitute the new morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture" (Castells, 1996 p. 469). Of course, social actors (whether individuals, organizations or businesses) have always operated in networks, yet key to todays society is that it operates with a substantially different sense of time and distance. An indicator of this change in socio-spatial relationships is the rise in mobility that can be discerned all over the western world. For Dutch planning this poses an extra challenge. With 383 cars on 1000 inhabitants the access to car mobility is around the European average. If one would relate the key data to the length of the road network or to the surface area of the country, the Netherlands comes out on top in terms of number of cars per square kilometre and the car mileage per square kilometre (WRR, 1998, pp. 64–65; cf. OECD, 1991).

The most direct consequence for planning is that in a network structure 'proximity' is less relevant for social organization. Of course, this is true to a different extent for distinct

activities, yet by and large we see a new spatial configuration emerging that can perhaps be better characterized by describing the flows between 'nodes' as in terms of its land use patterns. Hence here the network society immediately seems to undercut the axiomatic idea of 'proximity' as orientation for planning, and the control of land use to influence socio-spatial developments. Since distances are increasingly measured in terms of time—the so called 'friction of distance' (cf. Hägerstrand, 1970)—locational strategies tend to opt for places that are optimal in terms of 'connectivity' rather than proximity. Even in agriculture much activity takes place in networks spread in space: there is no need to be close to markets as long as logistics and transport technologies can guarantee a swift delivery of goods at the appropriate places. The network society is a constellation which comes with such newly emerging strategies. It poses a direct challenge to the key planning concept of the compact city which, after all, uses spatial proximity as its organizing principle.

The new economic structures of the network society is the joint product of technological innovation, political-economic restructuring and new enterprise strategies. Technological innovation in transport and transport management has resulted in a reduction of the friction of distance through which space 'shrunk' by a general speeding up of movement, albeit with sometimes large interregional differences (Spiekermann & Wegener, 1996). The emergence of 'telematics' has led to revolutionary change in the organization of production processes allowing for a spatial separation of functionally interdependent activities managed by complex logistic systems. To the degree that new technologies allow for the production of goods elsewhere ('outsourcing'), rapid moving about of goods, persons, money and ideas ('electronic' and 'smart' highways, 'just-in-time' production) proximity is eroded. Of course, this leads to new patterns too. Firms distinguish between 'front offices' and 'back offices' and for the first category proximity seems even more important than before. Here the decision by the Dutch multinational Philips to move its head office from the traditional base in Eindhoven to the undisputed centre of trade and commerce Amsterdam seems a case in point. All these developments are well described in the literature and do not require further elaboration here. What is important to notice, however, is that all these development tendentially undermine the current vision on the spatial-economic structure of the Netherlands which presumes that the larger cities are the areas where the expansion of the economy takes place.

A second dimension of the network society is the new pattern in the consumption of space by individuals. What has occurred over the last decades is a shift away from a mostly quantitative search for housing, work and recreation towards an increasingly complex and diverse search for high quality locations. Under the influence of a positive economic climate and a general social emancipation people have come to develop new consumer styles, also in terms of consuming space (cf. Urry, 1995). First, the consumption of space has gone up in quantitative terms. There is ample evidence for an increase in the space per household. This is true for both urban environments (e.g. in the call for larger apartments) as well as for suburban and non-urban environments (more demand for single family houses with garden, a rising number of people living outside the urban regions). Second, the consumption of space has made a qualitative turn. People have come the consumers of 'places' rather than—abstract—spaces. They have very high expectations of the environments in which they live, recreate or work. Third, the individualization that has resulted from the general emancipatory process has stored the concept of networks with meaning to describe new social relationships too. As people no longer depend on the traditional pre-given biographical formats, they put together their own biographies. This then quickly translates in to new spatial patterns. Although it is fair to say that the metropolitan centres will remain the most intense cumulation of different social networks, it is increasingly normal for people to participate in urban networks but live in preferred environments at greater distances from the urban centres or vice versa. The fact that people are increasingly prone to work with flexible

contracts and that households increasingly comprise two income earners, only adds to socio-spatial patterns in which work, recreation and dwelling are spread across space and with little stability over time. The general commitment of the planning system to concentrate these activities in and around the existing confined urban regions has not been able to prevent this general dispersal of households and activities. Not the city centre of a well defined urban region but people's own home and residential area form the functional centre but also symbolic or mental core of a large urban field (Boomkens, 1998; Reijndorp *et al.*, 1998a). As stated, key spatial concepts in (Dutch) spatial planning are therefore seriously challenged, especially the assumption that the activities of people should be limited to the confines of urban regions, measured in physical distance from the city centre. What is more, the above makes clear that successful regional development now requires active engineering of space to create the 'places' that appeal to actors looking for a place to live, recreate or work (or a combination of those!).

The emerging picture of the spatial organization of the network society in the Netherlands is dominated by a general scaling up of social processes. So far the intention was to achieve 'spatial quality' by keeping the countryside area open through a concentration of urbanization in the urban regions. Most prominently of course is the twin concept of Green Heart and Randstad. The disappearance of the countervailing power of the agricultural interests (that basically controlled the countryside and kept other interests out) and the new features of the network society push a more dispersed patterns of settlement. In various regions of the Netherlands the pace of urbanization has been such that whole stretches between the official urban regions have now changed face in light of unplanned piecemeal settlements. This all happened despite the fact that official policies did not allow for such developments. What is more, it could be argued that the developments in many cases took place because of the planning system. There is no built in check that guarantees a selectivity in development. In various regions the planning induced a delay in construction activity leading to building activity elsewhere. Despite all the checks in the Dutch planning system local councils especially often can slip through the net.

These contextual developments point strongly in the direction of spatial interaction at a higher spatial level and suggest that effective planning should take focus at this extended regional level. However, this is precisely where the Dutch system for various reasons has been at its weakest for some time. Secondly, as demands for developments cumulate, a passive plan led system is insufficient. There seems to be a need for a more active system of planning which allows for a response to 'emerging spatial patterns' and is able to create the sort of quality of places that now are in demand at the same time.

The changing context of planning as a cultural-political component plays a role too. The Dutch parliamentary democracy relies on a well developed corporatist supplementary structure. Its consultative orientation is concentrated on intra-governmental deliberation while always leaving space for contributions of powerful organized interests. The corporatist mould also shows that public participation takes place only after plans have already been subject to extensive intra-governmental negotiations. Plans, as we saw above, are only made public if key governmental agencies essentially support them. Consequently, the openness of the system to change in the phase of public participation is quite limited and attempts by the public to really have a say frequently meet with irritation on part of the government.

It is precisely in such frictions about the contributions made by the public that the cultural-political dimension of the network society makes itself felt. What do we mean? Western polities are currently all experimenting with new practices of 'interactive decision making', round tables, collaborative planning. The capacity of the existing institutional arrangements falls short to accommodate the demand for discursive exchange with societal actors. Governments have become aware that they are often talking to the wrong actors and

in the wrong sort of context. The description of the Dutch planning system (section 2) has shown that participation follows *after* consensus among the main players has been secured. Yet now both the players and the problems have changed: the prevailing corporatist practices of negotiation, next to the representative democratic practices, used to produce consensus and a shared sense of direction among a core elite. Yet new societal actors (whether environmental non-governmental organizations or citizen associations) require a different approach than 'end of pipe' public participation. In the present situation politicians complain about the 'hinder power' of public participation. Yet the fact that this is itself the *product* of its institutional practices has not been acknowledged. The point is that a network society requires a *new generation* of intermediary practices that do not only allow for the public to have its say (as in the participatory practices) but approach the variety of 'stakeholders' as knowledgeable actors in the plan making process. So far planning has not produced institutional arrangements that have a similar level of sophistication as the corporatist arrangements of the post war Welfare State. This seems to backfire on the effectiveness and legitimacy of Dutch spatial planning.

It is not as if Dutch planning is not actively searching for new ways to relate experts to the public and interest groups to politics. An important example of new practices in this regard is the ROM area approach (the acronym stands for spatial and environmental planning). In this approach the central government identified several areas where environmental problems required focused attention in combination with a socio-spatial restructuring of the areas concerned. The approach brought together various stakeholders (including municipalities, organized interests, environmental NGOs, citizen committees and the provinces) for a deliberative process on the future of particular regions. In some cases this resulted in new ideas and new strategies (see Glasbergen, 1995). Apart from this national scheme there are many local and regional initiatives which brought together the new actors in a setting to discuss strategic planning (WRR, 1998, 116 ff.; Smit *et al.*, 1998; Reijndorp *et al.*, 1998b). The assessment of the results varies but what stands out is that the existing planning system has difficulty in accommodating these practices. The experiments are precisely that: experiments. This implies that after achieving a consensus on a development strategy the whole process would be relegated to the official planning system with its formal plan on three levels. Hence the procedure for a revision of the regional plan and the (many) implicated local land use plans, each with its own procedural requirements, would have to start. In this the often fragile agreement would be up for revision, allowing everybody to raise protests anew. The predictable result being a long delay with a considerable chance that the consensus achieved would be jeopardized. This is another reason why both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of the Dutch system need to be rethought in light of the cultural political requirements of a network society.

Another element of this struggle of the system with the new cultural political reality relates to the loss of the established relationship between expertise, policy and politics. The post war era in spatial planning was accompanied by a stable hierarchy. Expert knowledge was provided by the planner-expert that mastered the art of relating various sorts of specific expert knowledge and also actually felt a responsibility to think for the public interest. This would then form the basis of policy making while politicians got a role in determining the strategic direction of spatial development. Now planners are confronted with a proliferation of interest based utterances as well as a proliferation of new sorts of expertise (cf. Reijndorp *et al.*, 1998b). The neutrality of expert knowledge is—quite right—seriously questioned, something which planners often still feel uncomfortable about. In fact the Dutch planning profession is by and large very introvert and pays very limited attention to the societal and political context in which planning is to take place (Kreukels, 1997).

This professional orientation (which for reasons of space can here only be alluded to) obviously includes a particular bias. The old idea of 'survey, analysis, plan' still lomes large in

the style of planning. This also shows in a particular idea about public participation. Public participation was always perceived to be a possibility for comments on decisions to be taken by elected representatives. Yet with the demise of the order of expertise, policy and politics, participation has gained another role. In the new literature participation is now interpreted as a matter of generating knowledge as well as a matter of providing legitimacy. This actually requires a rethinking of the place of participation in the plan and decision making process. The strength of some of the regional alternatives in the Netherlands in this regard is that they involve the public from the outset and thus make it possible to draw on the various forms of 'local knowledge' in the making of spatial plans (Teisman, 1997).

5. Rethinking the Dutch System: Concluding Remarks and Outlook

Our argument is that the Dutch system of spatial planning needs to be rethought in order to remain effective and legitimate. This sheds new light on the all too positive account of the virtues of the Dutch model in the academic literature. In particular the acknowledgement of the new context of planning—here discussed under the heading of a network society—seem to call for a reconsideration of some of the features of the system. The network society poses structural challenges to the potential for a purely land-control oriented strategic planning. Obviously, not only in the Netherlands. However, there are reasons to believe that the features of the present Dutch system of 'spatial ordering' unnecessarily inhibit its potential for governance. In this concluding section we suggest a possible alternative that could strengthen the basis for effective and legitimate strategic planning. It can be captured under the heading of a 'spatial development planning'.

A spatial development planning starts from the premise that quality in spatial organization requires new procedures that allow for a more active involvement with changing socio-spatial processes, on the national level, but on the regional level in particular. Legally binding land use plans need to be connected to a new institutional way of plan making on that level which is to be much more society-based and less administrative.

A few considerations for a rejuvinated planning practice for network societies would include the following. First a more direct coupling of, on the one hand, the conceptual technologies (plans, maps, vision documents) that have always characterized strategic planning, and on the other hand, financial instruments which often lie in the hands of—national—sector departments. This coupling of concepts and investment power would enhance the effectiveness of the planning system.

Second, a reconsideration of the complex 'matrouchka' system of interrelated strategic plans on three levels of government. This now puts a heavy burden on the coordinative role of plan making. The alternative is to allow regions a greater autonomy and make the national government more selective in its involvement. National government should focus on strategic projects and development decisions based on a clear idea of the national spatial structure. This would include, for instance, the indication of a hierarchy in the national mobility networks, just as it would imply a national definition of landscapes of national interests. In such areas (in the Dutch case the river landscapes immediately come to mind) the national government would increase its involvement. At the same time, however, much plan making power would be relegated to the regional level. This alone would imply a complete overhaul of the system of national spatial planning. Since the 1970s national spatial planning became heavily involved in the formulation and implementation of planning strategies at the regional level. General applicable spatial concepts like the compact city are the symbol of this approach. As a result national spatial planning has become authoritarian and paternalistic which in the case of an absence of genuinely national interests is quite unnecessary. Instead, efforts in strategic

planning should primarily be aimed at a proper integration of national spatially relevant policies and decisions thus providing a 'level playing field' for regional plan making. Apart from that, national guidance of spatial developments at regional and local levels should be much more oriented to enhancing the quality of plan making processes at these levels. This would require a more facilitory approach including the general enhancement of appreciation of what spatial qualities are and how they can be achieved (see later).

Third, the constant requirement for an extensive phase of internal administrative negotiation is build into the system as it was founded in the mid-1960s. In the early 1970s this system was extended and came to include an equally extensive but *ex post* public participation. This double structure leads to antagonisms in the political culture of the network society as described in this article. What is more, it takes away the energy from a potential alternative: a more societal process of plan making in which governments would seek to involve stakeholders right from the outset. This alternative of a democratic stakeholder planning (cf. Healey, 1997) deserves careful consideration. First and foremost, it would require a redefinition of the *checks and balances* in the planning system. In the present system the checks are nearly all located in the intra-governmental sphere. The societal model would require the elaboration of institutional checks and balances that would prevent the big 'shareholder' interests from dominating the *public* deliberation or public decision making.

This idea of a 'societal turn' of the planning system obviously requires more discussion. Already it is clear that we can distinguish a moderate response which endeavours to restructure the system to comply to the requirements of a 'network management approach' (Kickert *et al.*, 1997; Koppenjan *et al.*, 1993). Yet in this case it is the effectiveness of the criterion that determines who is to be allowed into the policy network (i.e. those stakeholder that one simply needs to be able to implement a certain strategy). A more appropriate response of the planning system seems to be one which allows the planning process to benefit from the knowledge brought in by other stakeholders and is based on institutional practices that seek to integrate differing interests and perspectives in a policy design process.

Our argument is not that planning fails to respond to the new societal realities all together: it does, but only to a certain level. We have given the example of experiments in a number of selected regions to improve horizontal and vertical integration of spatial and environmental policy in close cooperation with important 'target groups'. There have been other initiatives on the local and regional level which indicate that planners and politicians seek to come to grips with the network society. Indeed, planning practice features a proliferation of regional plans as well as experiments with interactive policy making. Yet these new practices basically 'float' in a space way away from the actual decision making processes. What is more, so far these experiences have not led to a broadening of the debate on the institutional features of the Dutch planning system. New practices are merely 'added on' without a proper legal embedding in the system.

On the national level the present governmental concern with the lack of effectiveness now dominates the debate on the future of the planning system. This is understandable from the governmental position, but the broad brush analysis that is presented in this article gives reason to argue that the concern for a more effective planning system should be coupled to a rethinking of the way in which a legitimate decision making on spatial planning can be achieved in a new social context. This is a historical task. Planning, after all, is itself a policy strategy that is closely connected to the development of the Welfare State and it should not come as a surprise that it ran into serious institutional and intellectual problems with the emergence of the neo-liberal ideas about rolling back the State and creating space for the market. Right now, it is time to think anew and consider what sort of recombination of these two strategies is most promising.

Note

1. This article is based on a research project conducted by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy, The Hague in 1996–1998. At that time the authors were project-coordinator and member of the WRR research group, respectively.

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