

RETHINKING REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING

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Introduction

Regional planning has not been the most popular branch of planning (Wannop, 1995). Several authors (Classon, 1974; Martins, 1986) have argued that the acceptance and success of regional planning strongly depend on the administrative strength of the authority that is responsible for this task. If this authority is weak or absent, regional planning was often seen by local authorities as an obscure ritual or administrative luxury (Self, 1980).

In the past regional planning was often primarily seen as a governmental activity aimed at the production and review of some kind of a 'regional plan'. However, planning theory has already taught us for many years that planning involves more than just that (Healey, 1997). Modern regional planning is much more than the application of regional development theories, such as developed in traditional economics (Hilhorst, 1967, 1971). It is not only an intellectual process, but also a social, political as well as organisational process. Control of urban sprawl and mobility is impossible without regional co-ordination involving multiple local authorities and relevant stakeholders. Environmental pollution doesn't respect local boundaries either and likewise other public affairs can often be best dealt with on a regional level such as, for instance, waste and water management. Internationalisation and globalisation are tendencies that also support a stronger regional representation in order to remain visible in the European and worldwide competition. These and other phenomenon have implications and certainly encourage a regional approach, which includes not only government but non-governmental actors too.

John Glasson (1974) has made many years ago a valuable conceptual distinction between inter-regional planning and intra-regional planning. *Inter-regional planning* is planning between regions. Its main aim is derived from social welfare since it seeks to change the economic inequality of regions. It is also denoted as 'regional development', which has received a lot of attention in literature (Cappelin-Batey, 1993; Molle-Cappelin, 1988; Hilpert, 1991; Hil-

horst, 1967, 1971). However, most of these studies are not dealing with planning itself, but with empirical characteristics of regional-economic development and/or ex post evaluation of economic policy measures. *Intra-regional planning* is planning within a region, but at a higher level than local authorities. The primary aim of intra-regional planning is to achieve a satisfactory relationship between people, jobs, and the environment within a region. Inter-regional planning is often seen as a task of national authorities or international communities, such as the European Union (Cappelin, 1993). Intra-regional planning is linked with a regional authority, be it a formal regional government or a coalition of local governments and/or other stakeholders.

The modern view of planning coincides with the proliferation of the word 'governance' in recent years. Although this term has slightly different meanings in different disciplines, such as management science and political science, and also in USA and Europe (Lefèvre, 1998), the commonality can be best described as the management of the common affairs of political communities by active collaboration of various interests. The most important characteristic of governance is that it involves more than government. It explicitly includes other stakeholders who together attempt to determine the progress of developments in a region.

This purpose of this paper is to discuss some implications of regional governance for regional planning. It is started with a systems view at the relation between governance and government. In addition the relationship between governance and network theory is outlined. Next the obvious association between collaborative planning and governance will be discussed. Although some authors defend governance without government (Rhodes, 1996), it will be explained that so-called 'social dilemmas' exist that cannot be solved without a superimposed authority, or government. It is illustrated by Dutch regional transportation practice that regional governance may need an external stimulus to survive. It will be concluded, that modern regional governance may imply a shift from traditional comprehensive governmental planning to more 'tailor-made' planning approaches, such as the formulation of agreement packages (covenants) between stakeholders.

From government to governance: a periodic swing?

There is little question that societies are becoming increasingly complex. Some planners therefore argue that complexity should be a touchstone for the planning approach to be followed (De Roo, 1999). Systems theory (Linstone, 1996) and also history (Kuhn, 1969; Kennedy, 1989) teach us that the evolution of complex systems generally appears to proceed by periodic swings between

opposite system characteristics. For example, a hierarchical system grows until it can no longer be effectively managed or controlled centrally. The next stage is that it disintegrates into smaller units with considerable autonomy. Ultimately this disintegration goes too far and the system is no longer effective. Then a reunification process starts, which brings the system usually at a higher level of complexity than existed previously; and so on.

Modis (1994) describes this evolutionary pattern of alternating system states as phases of growth and stagnation, or 'order' and 'disorder'. Order means growth through development of system components in an internally compatible way with overall stability, which implies that the technology or organisation is successful. This is followed by a phase of disorder: growth stagnates, resulting in instability. In this phase, new technological and organisational options are explored. This is followed by a stage where new organisational and technological concepts provide a new order and a stable growth; and so on.

Linstone and *Mitroff* (1994) also observed that complex system evolution generally appears to proceed by periodic swings between centralization and decentralization. They depict systems growth as alternating processes of growth and stagnation, of order and chaos. They illustrate that there is much empirical evidence that societal systems behave in this way. Changing information, communication and transportation technologies have in the past lead to profound changes in organisations, their geographical behaviour and also their management (*Kennedy*, 1989).

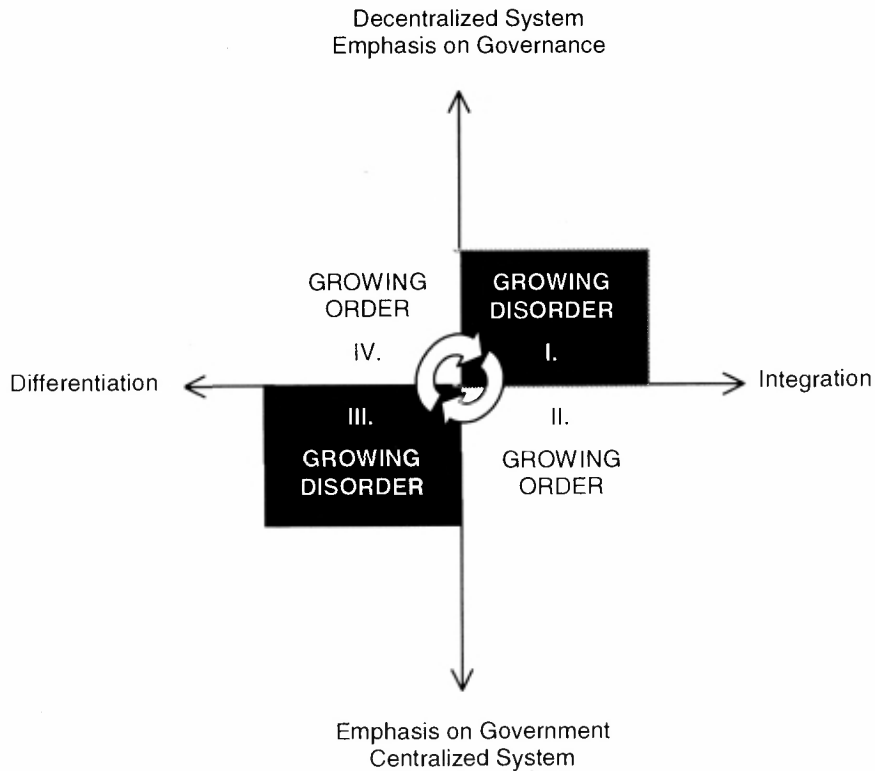
The change from government towards governance may also be explained in these terms. A metaphor to gain insight into this change is given in *Figure 1*. This metaphor is an iterative cyclic process of order and disorder of our complex societal system, but depicted here in two dimensions resulting in four different alternating stages. In stage I the system is in growing disorder and it endeavours to find a new order by integration and combination of existing elements and procedures. In stage II a new order is optimised by central co-ordination and control mechanisms what we may denote as 'government'. When there is too much co-ordination and control, the system loses its effectiveness and stage III is entered. This means a new period of growing disorder, in which government loses (most of) its grip and disintegrates, until finally in stage IV a new order is crystallizing out based on differentiation and separation. The emphasis of this new order is evidently on 'governance' and not 'government'.

According to the metaphor of *Figure 1* periodic restructuring of a societal system will in general result in a higher level of complexity than existed previously. Periodic restructuring of society in general increases system complexity. This may explain why certain planning tools worked quite satisfactory 30-40 years ago, but are unable to solve today's problems. Evidently, planning meth-

odology of a centralized system cannot cope with planning problems of decentralized systems and vice versa.

Figure 1

Phases of societal system evolution



Source: Own construction.

An intriguing question is in which stage our society currently is. Albeit difficult to answer, intuition suggests that many countries in Central and Eastern Europe may now be situated in stage III given the collapse of the centralized socialist government system. Western Europe may be depicted in stage IV, given the growing interest in many fields for governance rather than government, as mentioned before. It is more difficult to position the United States.

This society is witnessing a very strong market-oriented local democracy and its planning practice seems a decade ahead¹ on Europe in many respects, at least given its earlier attention for consensus building, mediation practice, public-private partnerships, project-oriented planning, and so on. This could imply that they have reached again stage I.

But how valid is the metaphor of Figure 1? Can the evolution of a complex system be so simple as it is suggested here? Or does this metaphor only represent the past, and will the future be less predictive? Evidently, in recent years we can see in many societal activities simultaneous opposite developments, such as localization and globalisation, and decentralization and centralization as well as differentiation and integration (*Partidário-Voogd*, 1997). New information, communication and manufacturing technologies that were inconceivable a few decades ago have made long established and unquestioned functions, skills and boundaries obsolete. Also, geographical boundaries are for many activities hardly or no barriers anymore. But in contrast to the decreasing importance of boundaries, we see the resurgence of regionalism both in Europe and the United States. The region is becoming an increasingly important point of reference in the face of globalisation and the changing socio-economic importance of the national-state (*Horváth*, 1994). Evidently, we can now see forces at work pulling in opposite directions simultaneously. As *Wannop* (1995) also has illustrated, there are many different socio-political and historical contexts in which regional planning nowadays takes place. This again confirms the complexity of regional governance systems modern regional planning has to cope with.

Regional governance and the network paradigm

Understanding regional governance involves both grasping the functioning of relevant regional and local institutions, the changing role of government and the operation of 'networks', both public and private, which attempt to co-ordinate policy areas. If regional governance is defined as the patterns that emerge from the policy-making activities of political, administrative and societal actors on a regional level, the use of a 'network' metaphor is obvious. According to *Kenis and Schneider* (1991, 25) the term 'network' has become 'the new paradigm for the architecture of complexity'.

The *network* paradigm has gained recognition in social, political and economic sciences as the theoretical basis for examining governance structures. A social network may include as 'nodes' a wide variety of actors: people, firms

¹ Obviously, in view of Figure 1 'ahead' does not necessarily mean 'better'!

and other institutions. Between these 'nodes' different relationships can be distinguished. In network theory links, connections and interactions are seen especially essential. A network invites different kind of analysis. A rough distinction can be made between applications that focus on a quantitative, more formal, treatment of network structures (Wasserman–Faust, 1994; Wasserman–Galaskiewicz, 1994), and a more qualitative approach focusing on an understanding of the dynamics of policy-making processes (Scharpf, 1973; Rhodes, 1990; Teisman, 1992; Klijn et al. 1995, Klein, 1996). Especially the latter approach appears to be useful for understanding the mechanisms, possibilities and limitations of regional planning (Kasim, 1994, Elander, 1995).

A regional social network is becoming a regional *planning network* if it is used for selectively involving and activating certain actors. Such a planning network can be typified by the following components (Hufen–Ringeling, 1990):

- A set of actors (individuals, groups, institutions);
- The interests, wishes and goals of these actors;
- The activities and problem fields, with regard to the actors have interests and/or goals;
- The rules, norms and assumptions that determine the actions of, and interactions between the actors;
- The set of action and interaction possibilities of each actor;
- The set of expected outcomes, costs and benefits of each action and interaction.

The interactions in a regional planning network are varied in nature (Martins, 1986). It can involve *resources transfer* that is the exchange and/or appropriation of resources between actors. Another type of interactions is called *volatile communications* (Scharpf, 1978). These include offers, demands, commands and their acceptance. Some interactions can be explained in terms of *organisational mobilisation of bias*. By this it is meant that administrative routines tend consistently to favour certain actors at the expense of others. This can bear the danger that it operates not only in terms of favouring certain actors to the detriment of others, but also in terms of concentrating attention on certain problems and solutions to the detriment of others (Martins, 1986).

Planning networks are seldomly stable. Dependent on the problem, each time new partners and new linkages are created and old linkages are weakened. For instance, investors have to be interested and attracted, which involves a different pattern of relationships then after the investment has occurred. Hence, a network is dynamic. Unlike classical regional development theories which share a state-centric conception based on a regional, national or supranational authority for hierarchical co-ordination in public policy-making, planning networks may even be used to conceptualise and operationalise the form of 'gov-

ernance without government' (Rosenau, 1992). This form may be effective if a network has sufficient self-regulating power (Kräwinkel, 1997).

Regional planning involves the recognition and management of a network structure that can be roughly visualized like. It will help planners to realize that not the government but other actors may have the decisive power to induce desired changes. It is therefore essential for a regional planning authority to know who the major actors are and how they are interrelated both in terms of goals and in terms of means, including restrictive conditions. This enables a planning authority to initiate or stimulate effective bargaining or mediation processes (Healey, 1997).

However, regional governance not necessarily implies the involvement of a planning authority. It is not expected that all public decisions be prepared by planning. If theorists of governance, such as Rhodes (1996), be right we must expect for the coming years both more social fragmentation and attempts by central authorities to retain control, as well as the emergence of new inter-organisational networks striving to overcome problems of service delivery and co-ordination. Networks may emerge that are essentially 'non-geographical', i.e. not limited to a certain area or region, in which different actors involved in formulation and implementation of policy co-ordinate their interests through so-called 'non-hierarchical bargaining' (McAleavey, 1993; Bressers et al. 1994; Schneider-Dang-Nguyen-Werle, 1994). Networks that are active on a regional level will most probably include public and private partners, therefore fitting a general trend towards 'greater permeability of public and private-sector boundaries' (Stoker, 1996).

Regional governance and collaborative planning

Governance implies co-operation of stakeholders. Patsy Healey (1987) has developed a collaborative planning approach to the design of governance systems and practices, focusing on ways of fostering communicative, consensus-building practices. In her book, she addresses governance processes and the challenge of institutional design for collaborative planning. Healey distinguishes two levels, the 'soft infrastructure' of practices for developing and maintaining particular strategies in specific places and the 'hard infrastructure' of the rules and resource of policy systems.

The 'soft infrastructure' rests on communicative action theory (Innes, 1995). Point of departure of this theory is the assumption that reality is socially constructed rather than that 'facts' can be known. Its epistemology is based on multiple forms of understanding that should be investigated through discourses. Communicative planning may take many forms of which communication, per-

suasion, learning, mediation, negotiation and bargaining are essential ingredients (Forester, 1989; Susskind–Cruikshank, 1987).

No doubt, effective communication is crucial for good governance. Evidently, information distribution alone does not qualify as communicating with the public, for it is merely a one-way flow. Communication involves two-way relations whereby both sides can share the facts and voice views. In this light, extra steps must be taken in order to create venues for allowing stakeholders to communicate. Friedmann (1973) already pointed out that (transactive) planning deals with much dialogue, mutual discovery, acceptance of conflict, shared interests and commitment, and reciprocity and mutual obligation.

It is obvious that participation of a variety of stakeholders is essential to learn about community values and problems, and for avoiding unnecessary conflicts by making community members feel comfortable with the way the process is conducted². In the previous section it has been mentioned that planning networks should encourage civic engagement of stakeholders. These networks help to facilitate co-ordination and communication, while amplifying information about the trustworthiness of other actors. However, there is some evidence that networks will be less intense and declining in larger communities, such as regions. For instance, in his research on the decline of social capital, Putnam (1995) discovered that networks in larger communities are less balanced 'centres of discourse' than they are in small communities. This may be a weakness of regional governance (for a more elaborate discussion of communicative/collaborative planning: see Voogd–Woltjer, 1999).

Regional governance and social dilemmas

A fundamental problem of collaborative planning, and hence of governance, is the existence of so-called *social dilemmas* (Voogd, 1995, 1999a). A social dilemma is a conflict between the choice an actor would make to maximize its self-interest and the choice that would be best for the collective. In planning we are often confronted with situations in which private interests are at odds with public interests. A classical example is Hardin's 'Tragedy of the Commons'

² The term 'community' is not unambiguous. Traditionally, the term refers to a set of people living in the same locality in which at least some resources are shared. Yet today, communities can range geographically from neighbourhoods to small rural hamlets to regional or even global scales. The term also connotes other definitions of an abstract nature in which physical boundaries are no longer implied (e.g. the 'internet community'). In our mobile societies, it is possible to share resources with many different people in different places and thus be a member of many communities. 'Community', therefore, has become a loose concept; it is no longer a self-contained entity which can be easily defined.

(Hardin, 1968). He describes how individual farmers have access to grazing grounds that are held in common by all. Each can make a personal profit by adding successive cattle to the commons and each continues to do so. Adding an extra animal implies costs in terms of pasture consumed, but these costs are consumed by the collectivity. A tragedy comes into being because every farmer is inclined to increase his own herd, while leaving the costs involved to the collectivity. But, as this process continues, as a result far greater costs are likely to be generated than individually absorbed benefits. Ultimately the commons will be destroyed. This is an example of a group of individuals who are faced with the problem of how to maintain their collective good and who – if they give in to their individual ‘greed’ – actually produce a collective undesired product.

In order to prevent such an undesired collective situation, individuals have to restraint themselves. This is not an easy affair. Any individual in the above situation may consider two possibilities. First, if others do exercise restraint, one can personally enjoy the fruits of their restraint without having to contribute to its costs. That is, by being a so-called ‘free-rider’, one profits from the fact that others prevent the collective bad situation. Second, one may consider the possibility of being a ‘sucker’ who incurs a cost when nobody else does, perhaps ending up carrying the total cost. But why should one do this?

The implications of this behaviour can have far reaching effects for all aspects of life. Jay Forrester researched this phenomenon in the 1970s. His famous study of ‘system dynamics’ led him to believe that some of the causes of pressing public issues are grounded in the very politics to solve them. These policies are too often the result of superficiality and social acceptability, which devise interventions that focus on obvious symptoms, not the underlying causes. The problem is that this produces short-term benefit, with little or no improvement in the long run. Forrester (1971) illustrated that when more symptomatic interventions are needed and used, a cycle begins with detrimental consequences.

Different types of social dilemmas can be distinguished, for instance based on the number of people in the group, the nature of contributions (continuous or once-only), the nature of rewards or utility (proportional or step), jointness of supply, and so on (Axelrod, 1984). An interesting distinction of social dilemmas from a planning point of view relates to the quality of the initial collective situation, viz. the *maintenance* of a public good and the *provision* of a public good, respectively. The social dilemma of Hardin’s metaphor refers to dilemmas in which the initial situation is desirable from a collective point of view. But it asks for costly individual actions to keep it desirable, in other words, to maintain the current situation. Examples are all around us: the protection of our cultural heritage, nature areas, historic town centres, and so forth. But we can

also distinguish situations where the initial situation is an undesirable one: derelict land, heavily polluted areas, areas with urban blight, etc. This demands costly individual actions to make the situation desirable from a collective point of view.

Research from social psychologists, however, revealed no fundamental difference between the behaviour of actors in 'take some games', directed towards maintenance of a public good, and 'give some games', focussing on the provision of a public good (Rutte et al. 1987). This suggests that in both perspectives actors be inclined to burden others with the costs of the maintenance or the provision of collective goods.

Social dilemmas are products of rational thinking. Rational thinking means that a utility framework is used for analysing and understanding actors and processes. According to such framework an action is rational if it has the highest utility of all options *recognised*. Here it is assumed that a utility framework does not necessarily require that the information available is correct and exhaustive. If an action is based on a utility assessment of erroneous information, it still remains a rational action. Evidently, social dilemmas can be easily theoretically 'removed' by rejecting this interpretation of rationality. But if it is accepted that actors do not behave rationally, why should we embrace governance based on collaborative planning? Why should 'irrational' behaving actors accept a governance system, which is also intrinsically based on a utility ('win-win') framework?

Hardin (1968) expressed the belief that social dilemmas can only be solved by some kind of mutual restraint and that solutions which do appeal to individual co-operation are doomed to be unsuccessful. Research of social psychologists into this matter did show that in general an actor has a strong reluctance to hand over one's decisional freedom to a superimposed authority (Wilke et al. 1986; Rutte et al. 1987). This reluctance can be overcome, however, when one is sufficiently compensated. A certain loss of control is accepted when faced with a situation in which there is a thread of a collective catastrophe or when there are large social discrepancies in the allocation of outcomes. These results, derived from psychological gaming, suggest that the framing of a situation as one in which large inequalities or an impending catastrophe is at stake, will make decision-making by a superimposed authority acceptable.

Given these opinions and research results, it would be a logical next step to proclaim government as a superimposed authority that should solve social dilemmas. However, this is less obvious as it may seem. It depends on the quality of government whether they are willing and able to recognise social dilemmas and whether they want to act accordingly. This recognition of social dilemmas by the government is very important, especially if we acknowledge the results of psychological research that in case of social dilemmas *voluntary co-opera-*

tion alone does not work (Rutte et al. 1987). For example, we know that there is little chance of successful environmental voluntary action by citizens due to the social dilemma phenomenon. Environmental planning can never be successful without a government enforcing rules and constraints. Heritage planning would be a failure if it would only depend on voluntary sacrifices; the provision and preservation of a broad spectrum of culture cannot carry on without the support of government. Health care facilities, high quality public transport, etc. would never reach the thinly populated periphery of a country without national and regional government support, and so forth. 'Here' will always be more important than 'there', and 'now' more important than 'then', if the masses have to decide (Vlek-Keren, 1992). These observations support the conclusion that the importance of the role of government, being the most important actor for solving social dilemmas, must not be neglected in regional governance.

Regional governance and government

There is no question that for ethical, political and 'marketing' reasons 'bottom-up' regional governance, as reflected in participatory, communicative, collaborative, etc. planning, are much to be preferred to 'top-down' government. However, as outlined in the previous section, certain social dilemmas call for 'top-down' government. This problem is usually dealt with by introducing the *subsidiarity principle*, which means that the decision-making authority should reside at the level most appropriate to the problem being addressed.³ Unfortunately, this is not an unambiguous criterion, as discussions in and about the European Union clearly illustrate (CEC, 1992; Toulemonde, 1996; Merkel-Heinz, 1997).

With respect to the role of the superimposed authority, three elements should be distinguished. The first element concerns the level at which authority should be vested for specific policy areas. Which tasks should be delegated to a regional government or regional co-operative? This relates to the well-known debate over centralization and decentralization (Eichenberger, 1994). Decentralization can allow government to respond more effectively to variations in local needs and preferences; to lower costs of planning and administration; provide opportunities and incentives for policy innovation; and give citizens greater choice and voice in policymaking. Centralization, on the other hand,

³ In the Treaty on the European Union, Article 3b, it is described as: "In areas which are not under its exclusive power, the Community shall act in conformity with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states and can therefore, by reason of the scale and efforts of the proposed action be better achieved by the Community".

enables government to address problems having cross-border (or spillover) effects; protect consumers against product risks; exploit available economies of scale; co-ordinate policies more effectively; and promote equality and political homogeneity across a larger domain to reflect 'shared values'. The theoretical advantages of centralization and decentralization counterbalance each other, suggesting that the precise nature of an optimal allocation of authority may prove to be highly context-dependent. The second element regards the question of how intrusive policy-making of a regional authority should be. Evidently, it should not render superfluous local policymaking. Clearly, the demands and needs of local stakeholders must be addressed. The third element addresses the question of how individual stakeholders can retain some control over a policy area that is delegated to the regional authority. This calls for dialogues in a network context.

These dialogues might be most effectively promoted by the rules suggested by Healey (1997, 297), i.e.:

- By broadly-based rights of voice and influence for concerned people;
- By provisions to ensure that all parties who can demonstrate a stake in an issue have the opportunity to challenge decisions in superimposed arenas;
- By a right to good quality information available to all parties to assist them to consider what is a stake;
- By a right available to all parties to call any governance agency, formal or informal, to account for failure, with respect to the duties and responsibilities which apply to the exercise of responsibilities of the superimposed authority.

A Dutch experience: regional transportation governance

Regional governance, especially of urban regions, is often seen as a problem in the Netherlands. All urban regions in the Netherlands have multiple governmental authorities. For the seven largest urban regions (In Dutch: *kaderwet gebieden*) 'umbrella' organisations now exist, that covers the entire regions. But these organisations are not founded on direct public elections, which means that their democratic legitimacy is often questioned. Their power is therefore limited.

Regional public transport may also be subdivided between different institutions. Although a Bus Company has more or less a monopoly in its own specific work area, a region is often served by more than one Bus Company. Co-ordination between Bus Companies appears to be not always an easy task, because there is no formal need to communicate and co-operate. In addition, the Dutch Railway Company is an important actor. This is an independent privat-

ized organisation, whose prime interest is *not* 'how to serve the region best' but 'how to survive without a deficit' (Voogd, 1999b).

In order to improve regional institutional co-ordination, the Dutch government introduced in 1988 in her strategic national transport plan, the so-called Structure Scheme on Traffic and Transportation, a new concept. This concept was called the *Transport Regions* (see also Kerstens, 1998). It was advocated that urban regions should develop a specific regional co-ordinating institution, including both public and private stakeholders, for realizing an integrated regional traffic and transportation policy. Because of the national funding involved, within a few years time almost 30 Transport Regions were created. Although the initiative was 'top-down', the resulting process was clearly a voluntary 'bottom-up' process. Hence, Transport Regions had different organisational structures and types of participants. Most often, the following actors were involved: the municipal authorities, the province, representatives from national ministry for traffic and transportation, Bus Companies, the Dutch Railway Company, and the Chamber of Commerce.

Unfortunately, the Transport Regions never became a success (Kerstens, 1998). A very, if not most, important factor was that the national government did not adequately support her own initiative (Hensing, 1993). At the same time that the Ministry of Traffic and Transportation introduced the Transport Region, the Ministry of Interior Affairs worked on a new administrative structure for the Netherlands, especially directed towards an improvement of the administrative structure of urban agglomerations. This evoked a lot of discussion. It soon appeared that only a very few (ultimately seven) Transport Regions were also nominated for a special administrative regional status, in between a municipal and a provincial status. The other Transport Regions felt more or less abandoned by the Dutch government, which killed this promising initiative. Without national support, there was no impetus for a voluntary continuation of this regional governance initiative.

It is interesting to remark here that initially the 'bottom-up' process of creating Transport Regions was very successful. This raises the question, why different public and private participants were so eager to co-operate for realising an integrated regional policy. Unfortunately, the answer is rather down-to-earth: they expected a financial reward! It was also this reason that a number of Transport Regions did not function very well, because of internal conflicts about the division of funds that were not, not yet, or only very limited available (Hensing, 1993).

Another problem of institutional co-operation appeared to be the different 'cultures' of the actors involved. Governmental officials sometimes complained that representatives of, for instance, Bus Companies were hardly willing, or able, to think in more strategic terms than the level of a time-schedule of a bus.

This hampered the quality of the debates and the consensus-building process (Hensing, 1993).

Besides this institutional approach of regional governance, also procedural solutions have been offered to improve a co-ordinated regional planning. As a result of the failure of the Transport Regions, the National Government entered a discussion with representatives of municipalities and provinces about new procedures for regional transport planning. Special attention was given to the funding problem, since this was the major issue for municipal and provincial authorities. It was decided to have a redistribution of some parts of the national infrastructure fund to provinces and municipalities for improving regional transport planning and traffic safety. This was justified by pointing at the *subsidiarity principle* discussed before. In 1997 a covenant was signed between the national government, provinces and municipalities about the decentralization of national traffic and transport tasks and related funding. In return, it was agreed upon a further formalization of the transport planning structure in a sense that regional traffic and transportation plans should be made in order to guide decision-making and future investments.

How should we judge this development in the light of the governance-government debate? The positive view is that plan making enables public discussion, provided that a pro-active institutional and citizens involvement is stimulated. It offers, however, no guarantee that, for instance, land use and transportation policies are consistently geared to one another. On the contrary, in practice it may imply a strengthening of the transport sector and hence a strengthening of 'narrow minded' sectorial viewpoints, which may enhance, rather than narrowing down, the gap between land use and transport planning.

A Dutch experience: covenants

The agreement with respect to the redistribution of national infrastructure funds illustrates an important procedural development, which is significant for governance. This concern the use of *covenants*, being voluntary agreements based on a consensus-building process between various actors involved (Voogd, 1999b). In Dutch environmental planning covenants are regarded as an effective instrument that better reflects the joint responsibility of the government and industry for environmental improvement (Bertels-Kranendonk, 1996). The intensive consultation that precedes the signing of covenants, allows the government to obtain a better understanding of the possibilities and barriers to environmental improvement in industry, and to adapt goals, legislation and support realistically. These discussions also provide an opportunity to create increased awareness of environmental problems among industry representatives.

The use of covenants in environmental planning is not without problems (*Bertels–Kranendonk*, 1996). Actors that do not want to join in the negotiations or withdraw from them, undermine the results and morale of the operation. Bad public acceptability is another problem. Voluntary agreements have received a bad image in the press because, since the negotiations between authorities and industry were held behind closed doors and not controlled by Parliament, the suspicion arose that government representatives were being lobbied and otherwise influenced by industrial interests.

Environmental groups, while they see a use for covenants, are showing some fear that covenants may engender prolonged deterioration of the environment because companies are using them to slow the process of environmental improvement (*Bertels–Kranendonk*, 1996). They therefore suggest improving the performance of voluntary agreements by making them one element within a broader package of instruments, which should also include sanctions and direct regulation in the case of non-compliance. In other words, what is needed is a 'stick behind the door' (*Houtsma*, 1994).

Covenants have also been important for the implementation of national physical planning policy. In the Fourth Report on Physical Planning (1988), and its renewed version, the Fourth Report on Physical Planning Extra (1992) – abbreviated in Dutch as *Vinex* – much attention was paid to locations for new large-scale neighbourhoods. These locations, called *Vinex-locations*, have all been situated within existing urban agglomerations. A main reason was that such locations would stimulate the use of public transport. However, this also raised quite a few problems, because most sites were not easy to develop due to their spatial characteristics (e.g. former wasteland with contaminated soils and/or close to highways or other infrastructure that causes environmental problems, such as noise nuisance or safety problems). Additional funding from national government was necessary to make these locations attractive enough for public investors and developers. It took several years before agreements between municipalities and the national government could be written down in covenants.

Covenants are also important instruments for establishing informal regional development plans and implementation agreements. A recent example is the development plan for the urban region of Groningen. This region has a special governance structure, since it is situated in two provinces (Province of Groningen in the north and the Province of Drenthe in the south) and it consists of twelve municipalities. In the past, many voluntary arrangements, among other along the lines of the "Transport Region" as described above, failed because of competition struggles and the fact that there were two formal regional authorities involved for different parts of the region, viz. the provincial governments of Groningen and Drenthe.

The voluntary regional plan for the urban region of Groningen is an integrated land-use and transportation plan. It is accompanied by an implementation covenant, stating the agreements about the organisation of the collaboration and the implementation, including the financial contribution of each partner each year for common projects.

This approach has received both appreciation and critique. The appreciation refers to the integrated approach of land-use planning, regional economic planning and transport planning and the fact that the barrier of provincial boundaries is crossed. The critique especially focuses on the democratic process, or more precise, the lack of public and political involvement in the 're-active' plan-making process. Municipal councils feel that it is a matter of 'if you don't like it, you can lump it'. There is hardly any opportunity for council members to change the covenant, since it is the product of an institutional consensus building process behind close doors between a few representatives in a 'steering committee' or alike. On the other hand, many participants will agree that if it had been 'pro-active' governance, there would not have been any agreement at all.

Some concluding remarks

This paper has paid attention to governance and its relationship with regional planning. Regional planning is in most countries unmistakable a public sector-led activity, but comprising both public and private actors. Since regional planning does not exist in a social vacuum, it has much in common with modern ideas about governance. Its outcomes will not only be shaped by discourses and power relations internal to the planning network (i.e. 'soft infrastructure' according to *Healey, 1997*), but also by a variety of contextual constraints: social, political, economic, and organisational (i.e. 'hard infrastructure'). These constraints are themselves, in part at least, the result of wider power relations, including the increasing role of the European Union.

Regional planning is in essence action-oriented, i.e. it should evoke actions to improve spatial and environmental qualities of a region, including social and economic conditions, as well as provide a protective framework to prevent a deterioration of regional resources. It is argued in this paper that it is unlikely that regional governance, without the assistance of regional government as a superimposed authority, can handle all these tasks. 'Tailor-made' planning approaches will be necessary, each beginning by identifying the set of actors involved in the governance process. Network theory shows that it is necessary not only to identify which actors are involved, but also to clarify what role each

actor can play in the process and how they may interact in the planning network.

Experiences with Dutch regional planning practices show that there should be an acknowledgement of the important role of superimposed authorities for planning, both as an arena where representatives must balance their delegated interests and as an arena where conditions (rules, regulations, plans) are shaped for dealing with the interests of stakeholders, for instance in the field of sustainable development, heritage protection, and so forth.

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