Dutch Spatial Planning: From implicit towards explicit sustainable urban development

1. Introduction

Since the 1960's the containment of urban growth and the maintenance of a certain level of concentration within the urban pattern are policy goals In the Netherlands. With hindsight this so-called 'concentrated deconcentration' can be understood as an *implicit* strategy towards sustainable urban development. The *explicit* discussion on sustainable development that started around 1987 focused strongly on environmental issues, and lead amongst others to environmental standards.

More recently urban development strategies are more *explicitly* focused on sustainable development using the well-known frame of people, planet and profit. Together with this shift of focus the future – or the long term – became a more intrinsic part of the policy formation process. The triple-P frame of reference has been used for a strategic study for the Randstad Area for the period 2020-2040 currently undertaken. Striking in this study is that with the shift of focus towards triple-P the environmental issues have disappeared from the spatial agenda. Using the Randstad case as a pièce de résistance we will discuss the continuities and discontinuities in the ways of understanding of and intervening in sustainable urban development in the Netherlands.

In order to distinguish between the contribution to implicit and explicit sustainable urban development of spatial planning and environmental planning respectively we start this contribution with a short historical review of urban planning (either spatial or environmental). After this sketch we look into the concept(s) of sustainability and sustainable development (SD) more in depth in order to evaluate these contributions and to analyse the continuities and discontinuities in the development of planning for a sustainable urban development.

By and large we will give in this article an overview of the way sustainable development is translated into concrete spatial, territorial and environmental policies. We will show the – slow! – evolution towards a more serious long-term assessment of ecological, economic and social-cultural effects of new developments, as well as the – as slow! – translation of these integral assessments into directional concrete sustainable policies. It will try to show how the 'meta-concept' of sustainable development – focusing on the integrality and the belief SD should be a binding principle between all activities from the world community – can be combined with the notion that SD provides for a value in policy deliberations – the value that the ecological base may not be endangered by human acts.

2. A bird's-eye view of planning and sustainable development

If we overlook the period from 1960 towards 2010 from an environmental perspective we can divide this period in three periods:

- the **first wave of environmental awareness**, starting in the sixties and with the first UN-conference on the human environment in 1972 as an important turning point
- the **second wave** in which the invention and start of the promotion of **sustainable development** culminated in the second UN conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.
- the **third wave** stipulating the **long-term aspects** of sustainable development, starting around the third UN conference in Johannesburg (2002) and reaching its peak after the release of 'The inconvenient truth' on climate change and global warming, culminating in the Bali Conference in 2007.

During the whole period 1960-2010 the relationship between spatial and environmental planning has been a dialectical: different attitudes and mindsets searching at one time for unifying concepts and on other moments stipulating their differences.

First wave of environmental awareness

The sixties were a turbulent period, also for spatial planning in his infancy. In 1966 the Second Policy Document on Spatial Planning was published. The content was very innovative, partly because of a new focus on the shortcomings of representative democracy, doubts on a policy only focusing on economic growth and the first signs and publications of environmental problems related with industrial production (a.o. Packard, 1960; Carson, 1962; Briejèr, 1967). Both environmental 'planning' and spatial planning go back to the international social hygiene movement acting upon the situation in the slums at the end of the nineteenth century. Although both share the same historical roots they also diverge in terms of what can be called professional attitudes. Spatial planning is rooted in a tradition that primarily looks for solutions in working and especially 'building' (in a wider sense – town and country planning) in order to arrive at an the improvement of environmental conditions. As a result, working on spatial planning is done by 'designers' or architects, whereas people who work on environmental planning primarily act according to an ecological viewpoint. In the Netherlands this difference shows itself clearly in organisational terms: in 1971 the ministry of Human Health and Environmental Hygiene (VoMil) was established, while the National Spatial Planning Agency (RPD) was part of the Ministry of Housing.

The second wave: the start of the sustainable development strategy

Important for the acknowledgement and the success of the concept of Sustainable Development (SD) is that it was (and still is) seen as a coalition of discourses. It relates the problems of the world ecology with those of the world economy. The concept made it possible to bridge the developed 'North' with its' severe overdevelopment (a.o. environmental) problems and the 'South' with its' equally severe underdevelopment problems.

In the 1990's the – limited – cooperation between spatial and environmental policy was further elaborated. The germ for this careful survey of integration was laid in the 1980's, when the ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) was established. In 1990 the Action Plan on Territorial Policy discerned the more sectoral territorial (environmental) policy – for example on soil and ground water – and a more comprehensive territorial policy, the so-called ROM-policy (Ruimtelijke Ordening and Milieu: Spatial Planning and Environment). The formal responsibility for this integrated territorial policy was given to the Directorate-General of the Environment (DGM).

One of the results of this ROM-policy was the 'City and Environment'-policy, that tried to find a solution for the problem that the aim of building 'compact cities' with a relatively high density led to environmental problems – because it meant more houses in (or near) critical areas in the city (e.g. railway stations, highways, etc.). The 'City and Environment' policy introduced a structural way to be able to apply a more flexible implementation of environmental norms to enable spatial developments without endangering the quality of life.

Inspired by these first – but also limited – steps towards co-operation there were also attempts to develop an unifying concept in which space and environment would became logical partners. DGM proposed the 'stock concept' and tried to start a discourse with the spatial planners of the RPD on 'space as stock'. The RPD declined this opportunity, supposedly because it was "not invented here". (Zwanikken, 2001) The 'struggle' between the environmental and the spatial department of the ministry dragged on. In 1995 the then minister of VROM Margreeth de Boer published the so-called 'green booklet' – *Environment, Space, Living* – which was partly based on the stock concept. It happened to be the run up for the *Environment and Space*-project, that was directed towards the development of an integral Living Environment Policy Report in the

second half of the nineties. That integrality didn't succeed – because of an internal dispute over areas of responsibility – so the report was never published.

The third wave: embracement of the long-term

Thanks to the climate change, the IPCC, a number of publications and Al Gore, long term issues returned on the political agenda and as an issue of concern in society. Generally speaking the new sense of urgency of long term (political) issues has produced a more positive political attitude towards the explicit and broad notion of sustainable development. Formulated as 'sustainable living environment', long term issues – including spatial issues – have become an important pillar of the new Dutch coalition government programme. How to (re)relate general, long term issues with spatial and environmental planning is the issue, which is a.o. addressed in a long term strategic study for the Randstad area for the period 2020-2040.

The question how to deal with the long term – and the future generations – in policy was already asked in the eighties. The survey *Concern for Tomorrow* was the first of a series of environmental surveys (once every four years) that looked for 25 years or more into the future. In the domain of spatial policy there were the almost yearly published Spatial Reconaissances that gave impressions of the far future (for example 2050). A special project painted four future spatial developments in the year 2030[1]. And the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) started in 1992 to publish long term scenario's, the first with the title *'Scanning the Future - A long-term scenario study of the world economy in 1990-2015'.* It was elaborated in a study of the physical developments in the Netherlands: *'Economy and Physical Surroundings – Policy Statements and directions for solutions 1995-2020'* (1997). In 2003 the second long-term study was published, under the name *'Four Futures of Europe'*, followed by a study of the physical and spatial effects (*'Welfare and Physical Surroundings'*, 2005).

All these long-term efforts show the quest for an adequate method of bringing future concerns into current policy balancing processes. Although in all the attempts to get a grip on the future in present policies the P's of People, Planet and Profit are taken into account, you can see through the years a clear improvement in 'dealing' with the future. Where in the first wave the challenge of sustainable development was primarily translated into environmental terms, in the second wave the term sustainable development got a more comprehensive interpretation (People, Planet, Profit/Prosperity). Attempts to take into account the future generations didn't succeed overwhelmingly. Only in more recent years also the future is becoming a serious item. Looking back, we can say that the interest in the future is slowly expanding from the more scientific, reflective platforms also towards the stage where policymakers rule the roost.

3. Sustainability and Sustainable Development

3.1 What is sustainable development?

Since the publication of 'Our common future' in 1987, sustainable development has received much attention in the Netherlands. The policy plans that came out the following years all mentioned 'sustainable development' as (one of the) main goal(s) for the policy in that field. That was the case for the first national environmental policy plan or *Nationaal Milieubeleidsplan* (NMP1, 1989), and also for the Second Transport Structure Plan (SVV-2, 1989). The Fourth Spatial Policy Plan (1988) didn't mention sustainable development as such, but did introduce some concepts that could be understood as implicit forms of sustainable development policy. Like the 'compact city policy' that was introduced to curb the trend of suburbanization. The Fourth Spatial Policy Plan Extra (Vinex, 1991) doesn't mention the term 'sustainable development' either, but does – apart form the compact city policy – pay attention to

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environmental problems. The use of raw materials, energy and waste and especially the reduction of car use get attention.
It happens to be rather difficult to find out what in all plans is the exact meaning of 'sustainable development'. More precise it is often unclear on the one hand what the precise definition is the authors of these policy reports use of sustainable development, and it is equally unclear how they 'translate' this definition of sustainable development into concrete goals in those policy plans. You could even say it is unclear how sustainable the policy plans are, because there seems to be a gap between the abstract level of goal setting and the level of operational decisions. That makes it impossible to give a well-founded judgment on whether new initiatives or developments in an area are sustainable or not.
A possible explanation for this omission in those first years could be that the – very complex – discussion on how to deal with sustainable development had not had the time to come to conclusions yet. On the other hand, the lack of clarity has persisted up until now. Even in recent policy plans there is no clearer definition of 'sustainable development' other than that it deals with finding a good balance between 'people', 'planet' and 'profit' (or 'prosperity') – the three P's, sometimes supplemented with a fourth P from 'participation'. The plans do not elaborate *when* the balance is 'good' or 'harmonious'. In short: nobody seems to know what sustainable development and sustainability mean or which interpretation is used in different documents and policy plans. As a result all kinds of products, developments or intentions are called 'sustainable'. Sustainable motorways, sustainable economic growth, sustainable energy, sustainable transport, sustainable aviation, etcetera. It leads to the question how sustainable these items really are.
According to the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy "many groups appeared that want to contribute to a sustainable world, as well as there are many who qualify themselves or their activities as 'sustainable'. This is for example the case for groups of farmers, certain cities or chemical industries that want to distinguish themselves from earlier practices or from others." (WRR, p. 13) In short: sustainable development has foremost a comparative function: one alternative is more sustainable than another because it is 'better' – one way or another. Whether that 'better' leads to real sustainability or is merely 'less worse' is no point of debate.

3.2 Sustainability as a 'value' and as a 'meta-concept'

Sustainable development was – when the term was introduced in policy by the Brundtland-Commission (WCED) in 1987 – especially greeted by the Dutch department of environmental policy, more than any other department. Shortly after the publication of *Our common Future* the ministry of the Environment asked the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) to do a survey of the Dutch environmental situation. In 1988 that led to *Concern for tomorrow – A national environmental survey 1985-2010*, giving an overview of the Dutch environmental situation. On the basis of many data the report concluded that environmental pollution of all kinds should have to be decreased with an average of 80% to meet the aims of the national government and those of the European Community. When those aims would have been reached, the Netherlands would have acquired a state of 'sustainability'.
Our common future and *Concern for tomorrow* gave an enormous impulse to the translation of sustainable development in Dutch environmental policy (Houtsma & Van der Schot; 1997). One year later, in 1989 the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NMP1, *Choose or loose*) was published, in which sustainability ánd the environmental filter by the RIVM-report served as a guiding principle. The NMP1 tried to achieve a comprehensive environmental policy, and was not only signed by the ministry of the Environment, but also by those of Economic Affairs (EZ), Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries (LNV) and Transport and Water Management (VenW). A good starting point for an integral approach, it seems.
The need for an integral approach was introduced by the WCED with the term sustainable development itself. According to the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy or WRR

(WRR, 2002), there are two aspects of sustainable development. The first aspect of sustainable development is that it can be interpreted as a 'value'. "The penetrating message [from the Brundtland Commission] is that acts that bring forth irretrievable environmental damage have to be refrained from, that renewable stocks may not be used beyond their regeneration ability, that from non-renewable stocks enough has to be saved for future generations and that the biodiversity has to be kept intact. Ultimate limits thus ought to be respected. The Brundtland Commission herewith formulated a *new value*, expressing that the ecological base may not be endangered by human acts." (p. 14)
The second aspect of sustainability refers to sustainable development as a 'meta-concept': "a principle that acknowledges that all values, demands, institutions, time- and spatial scales are connected and that assumes that a balance between these is advisable." According to the WRR this meta-concept comes from the statement of the Commission that "*in the broadest sense* the objective of sustainable development is 'to promote harmony between people themselves and between men and nature (1987: 65)'. This requires – so it states – a political system that allows an effective participation of the citizen in decision-making, as well as an economic system that generates a surplus and technical knowledge on a sustainable base, a social system that provides for solutions for unharmonious developments, a production system that respects the ecological base, a technical system that continuously looks for new solutions, an international system that stimulates sustainable trade and financial patterns, and finally en flexible administrative system with the ability to correct itself continuously." (p. 15) To achieve such a stack of connected systems you truly need a comprehensive policy. This interpretation of sustainability as a meta-concept can be found for example in the concept of triple-P (Elkington, 1997).
According to the WRR these two aspects of sustainable development (as a value and as a meta-concept) can easily hamper each other. "When the preparation of policy is so arranged that all conceivable momentaneous and dynamic connections are checked […], then it would – even if it would be possible – […] aggravate the necessary prioritization directed at sustainable development-as-value. (p. 17)

4. From small to broad and from implicit to explicit perceptions of (spatial) sustainable development

4.1 More explicit meta-aspect of sustainable development in Europe (ESDP)

As we discovered in the previous section the two aspects of Sustainable Development (as value and as a meta-concept) can hamper each other. If we analyze the adoption of SD in spatial planning it is important to recognize that SD as a meta-concept - integrating ecological, socio-cultural and economic policy goals – is more or less core business in this planning field but was never called 'sustainable development' and for that reason remained *implicit***.** On the European level this handling of the meta-aspect of SD in spatial planning can be traced more *explicitly* as we will illustrate with the European Spatial Development Perspective or ESDP (CEC, 1999). During the best part of the 1990's the ministries responsible for spatial development of the EU together with the European Commission (DG Regio) cooperated to produce the European Spatial Development Perspective, in its final version published in 1999 (Faludi & Waterhout, 2002). Centrepoint of the ESDP is the notion of *sustainable spatial development.* This notion combines various approaches, not only the 'classical' ecological sustainability approach but also a so-called cohesion and competitiveness approach. These three sustainability approaches are summarized in a schematic framework included in the Spatial Reconnaissance's 1999 of the Dutch National Spatial Planning Agency, one of the key contributors to the ESDP (NSPA, 2000).

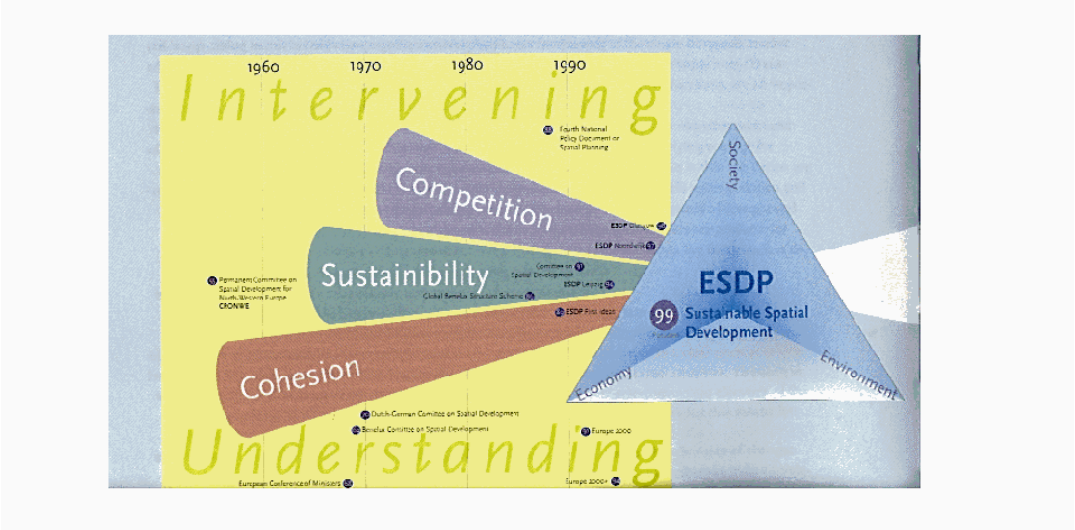


Figure 1: Three discourses at work in the European Spatial Development Perspective (Source: NSPA, 2000)

In the ESDP sustainable (spatial) development is clearly not just related to environmental issues but also to social and economical issues. These issues are represented in three objectives. The (social and economic) cohesion objective is mainly about what is considered a fair distribution of income and employment across the European territory. It has long been a basic objective of European policy. The sustainability objective is about 'prudent management of natural resources' – a fundamental goal in the ESDP. And the competition objective is about improving or sustaining the competitive position of cities and regions on the international level. The ESDP is an indicative, non-binding document adopted by an informal ministerial council. That does not mean its contents have not been applied since its adoption, on the contrary (Waterhout & Stead, 2007).

4.2 From the ESDP to the European Sustainable Development Strategy (ESDS)

The broad conception of sustainability (as a meta concept) has been accepted on other political levels as well. At the Gothenburg Council of June 2001 the leaders of the EU launched the first EU sustainable development strategy (ESDS) based on a proposal from the European Commission. In tandem with the 'Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs' this strategy aims for a more prosperous, cleaner and fairer Europe. Five years later, in June 2006 a review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) has been adopted including as key issues:

- Environmental Protection
- Social Equity and Cohesion
- Economic Prosperity
- Meeting international responsibilities

In the ESDS it is stipulated that the EU SDS and the Lisbon Strategy "complement each other. The SDS is primarily with quality of life, intra- and inter-generational equity and coherence between all policy areas, including external aspects. The Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs makes an essential contribution to the overarching objective of sustainable development focusing primarily on actions and measures aimed at increasing competitiveness and economic growth and enhancing job creation. The EU SDS provides the overall framework within which the Lisbon Strategy, with its renewed focus on growth and jobs, offers the motor of a more dynamic economy to support social and environmental objectives. These two strategies can reinforce each other and should therefore advance together."

This perception and proposed complementarity implicitly implies a shift from only environmental urgent issues towards long-term urgent issues. We can illustrate this with the following diagram (figure 2). The arrows in this diagram indicate that the dominant perspective in terms of time within each sector needs to encompass other time horizons as well. The figure shows a turning of the debate: from a discussion about sustainable developments along the vertical lines (with distinctions between different 'sectors' with their own 'values') to a discussion along the horizontal lines (illustrating the growing attention for the meta-concept of sustainable development as well as for the long-term).

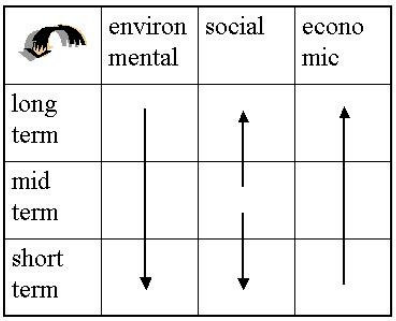


Figure 2: Shift of the discussion about sustainable development from vertical (sectoral) to the horizontal (integral, long-term) point of view.

5. Making implicit concepts of sustainable urban structure explicit

A key component in discussions on sustainable *urban* development are ideas and perceptions of urban *structure*, i.e. the spatial organisation of cities and urban regions. In this section we present a brief historic overview of concepts of urban structure. We discuss whether spatial planning has been addressing issues which are at present considered as important in terms of sustainable spatial/urban planning. After all present day planning and policy have to deal with the planning legacy of preceding decades. What we basically do is making implicit concepts of sustainable urban structure explicit. Spatial concepts are extremely important ingredients of framing policy situations. Although the boundaries between various sorts of frames are not always clear we would like to suggest that in policy in general and planning in particular frames exist at three different levels. First of all various professional *disciplines* contribute towards spatial planning. Secondly perceptions on spatial development and spatial structure can be grouped into *discourses*. When such discourses become part of spatial planning policies for a longer period of time they have become *planning doctrines* (see Goedman & Zonneveld, 2007). We use this distinction because novel approaches towards guiding urban development often originate on the level of disciplines, become part of policy discourses but do not enter the realm of policy doctrines.

5.1 The urban and the rural as one spatial system

National spatial planning in the Netherlands is grounded on plans about the development of the territory called reports or *nota's*. The earliest one dates from 1960, prepared by a national spatial planning agency in its infancy. This was a period when young academics outside this agency, inspired by mainly Anglo-Saxon literature, were proposing new spatial concepts in order to understand processes like urban deconcentration and developments towards the formation of urban regions, i.e. constellations of urban centres of various sizes and replacing the old style concentrated, well-delimited stand-alone city.
Novel insights like this did not make it into the first, 1960 national report on spatial planning. That some people would be inclined to start to live outside the city because they were preferring the

small scaled living environment to be found in villages and small towns was noticed, but the writers of this report didn't believe that this would lead to a fundamentally different urban structure. So initially no policy discourse around the notion of a deconcentrated urban region developed, let alone a full blown planning doctrine.
What did start to become a cornerstone of planning was the concept of the Green Heart, the metropolitan green belt in the west of the country surrounded by a rim of cities for which the metaphor of Randstad or Rim City was used. But behind the latter concept was not a clear idea about the functional interrelationships between the cities forming the Randstad. Nevertheless we may say that this points to the acceptance of a basic principle of sustainable urban development: urban development should be contained to avoid the disappearance of the countryside. Above that: urban areas and vacant, rural land are considered as part of one spatial system.

5.2 The inclusion of transport and mobility

Matters changed profoundly a couple of years later though. The national spatial agency started to accept the novel ideas about urban structure and regional urban systems. So deconcentration became regarded as the basic, underlying trend of urbanization, but this was not supposed to turn into outright sprawl for various reasons, the most important ones being the crumbling of the demographic foundation of many urban services (here the concept of urban hierarchy comes in) and the encroachment of the countryside: an urban society needs open space for rest and leisure. The advocated deconcentration of urban functions was supposed to be guided towards a limited number of urban centres, the most important ones designated as spillover centres (*overloopkernen*). There were no worries about the rising use of the car, on the contrary. Planners foresaw a total 'motorization' of society and that was good: it would offer people freedom of choice.
The spatial frame for this advocated process of concentrated deconcentration was the *urban region*, while towards the turn of the century these urban regions would merge into large scaled *urban zones* or *conurbations*, some of them dozens of kilometers long. These concepts were the core of the 1966 Second Report on spatial planning. But although this second report was officially a *policy* report it was not followed up by vigorous operational decision making. Nevertheless one can say that concepts about urban development did indeed leave the realm of professional disciplines to become part of policy discourse. The coalition behind this discourse was, however not very large, principally formed by researchers and designers within the ministry of spatial planning. Nevertheless concepts about urban structure and particularly concepts on the green structure within the country were embraced by others outside the ministry as well. A concept like the Green Heart could count on considerable support from the Ministry of Agriculture and national and regional corporatist organizations within the agricultural sector. The preservation of open spaces between and around cities, towns and villages would imply the preservation of valuable agricultural land. So the concept of concentrated deconcentration together with such ideas as the Green Heart could count on the support of a coalition with powerful members in the domain of agriculture.
The coupling between urbanization policy and transport policy, nowadays considered as crucial in terms of sustainable urban development remained rather loose though. In a very late stage in the making of the 1966 Second Report national road engineers came up with a 'structural scheme for main roads'. This scheme was simply shoved in the Second Report, obviously not clearly related to such concepts like the Green Heart. The scheme caused some staff members within the National Spatial Planning Agency to raise their eye brows but they could not stop its insertion into the Second Report (Siraa et al, 1995: 44). The awakening environmental movement did protest however and during the latter half of the 1960's the planning agency took considerable effort to enlarge its influence to the Ministry of Transport. The harmful effects of rising car ownership and car mobility started to take root in the agency with the 1970's coming

closer (ibid.: 48). So implicit notions of sustainability were widened: urban containment and the protection of the countryside were combined with – initially – rather vague ideas about the relationship between infrastructure, mobility and the pattern of urbanization.

5.3 Cities at the centre: the inclusion of social cohesion

In terms of policies directed to what is called now sustainable urban development, the 1970's are of crucial importance. The first environmental wave, internationally peaking around 1970 was beginning to influence various policy fields in the Netherlands, including spatial planning (see the introduction). One of the main conclusions drawn in a third policy report on spatial planning was that the concept of concentrated deconcentration almost completely failed. That was mainly because the national overspill policy did not take off the ground and provincial councils were not able to control growth ambitions of villages and small towns. The encroachment of the countryside was not the main issue which lead to a revision of urbanisation policies though, nor the rising use of the car. It was the enormous shortage of houses which formed the prime reason to start with the largest implementation programme in Dutch spatial planning so far, in terms of the volume of houses build only surpassed by the VINEX policy of two decades later. This was the so called growth centre policy (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994: 163 ff).
What we witness here is an integration of two discourses. The first one entails the ambition to concentrate urban deconcentration at certain favored locations. The other one is to get rid of the post war housing shortage while at the same 'modernize' late nineteenth and early twentieth century neighbourhoods including the composition of the population. This ambition was embraced by the Directorate-General of Housing, part of the same ministry as the National Planning Agency. So what happened is described by some as a marriage of convenience between the housing sector and the spatial planning domain (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994).

The growth centre policy was constructed around 1971/1973. Environmental concerns came at a slightly later stage. The growth centre policy embodies a kind of paradox. The location of the majority of the growth centres was initially determined by the idea that the distance between them and their donor city should be large enough for the growth centres to turn into genuine towns themselves. Their location was also determined by the large scale urban concepts of the 1960's. And although the marriage of convenience between housing and planning proved to be extremely productive, what happened sat uncomfortably with new concepts about urban structure on the regional level to be developed in the course of the 1970's. The boundless conurbation of the 1960's was no longer seen as desirable. Urban deconcentration should ideally take place on a scale far less grand and linked to the characteristics of the public transport system. So national government introduced standards for new housing locations outside the city, related to the travel time needed to reach the city centre: 35 minutes for the four large Randstad; 25 minutes for a number of medium sized cities and just 4 kilometers for all other cities. This shift in emphasis also meant that inner city problems, including social and employment issues, became one of the main topics of urban policies. To borrow modern terminology: social cohesion entered the policy arena. Theoil crisis of 1973 suddenly made planners realize that a car dependent urban structure is vulnerable. So they set their eyes on the public transport structure, i.e. the national rail network as the Netherlands does not know a mass public transport system at the regional level.
Summarized, what we see from the early 1970's onwards is a national spatial planning policy more directed towards intervention and being effective. The discourse coalition around national planning policy became larger, integrating a 'partner' being extremely powerful because it controls resources which the planning system itself does not have, namely (very) large funds. Sustainable urban development was becoming ever more explicit and from now on also included issues of social cohesion.

5.4 The compact city and the inclusion of competitiveness

The national government published its Fourth Report in 1988. What seemed a novel element was the fact that national spatial planning started to pursue the goal to improve the competitive position of the country while previously the issue of economic development was left to the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Partly because of the 'not invented here' syndrome this ministry did not easily accept some of the new spatial-economic concepts introduced by the National Spatial Planning Agency (Van Duinen, 2004).
In 1991 an addendum of the Fourth Report was published (the VINEX), with which the national spatial planning returned to its core business: the management of urban deconcentration through large-scale house-building programmes. The Randstad-Green Heart 'doctrine' turned into a somewhat rigid spatial perspective to consolidate the demarcation of 'red' and 'green'. The Green Heart even acquired its own demarcated borders not to be crossed by urbanization from the cities surrounding the Green Heart (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000: 341).
Parallel to this the concept of the urban region changed into that of the compact city according to which house-building locations are ideally located within city perimeters or immediately adjacent to them. The assumption was that this would lead to a reduction in the growth of mobility.
Another major drive was the believe that the compact city approach would improve the economic and demographic and therefore competitive position of cities. One can even say that on the level of discourse coalition spatial planning received the support from a new group of stakeholders: the administration of larger cities.
As the government turned proactive and started to think of strategies to improve the competitive position of the Netherlands, a new 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 – lacking 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. As the ICES developed its profile, it de facto started to overlap more and more with the official planning circuits. Moreover this alternative 'circuit' works with its own discourse which can be 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. Some of these projects, like plans to expand the Rotterdam harbour into the sea and to create a dedicated freight railway line towards Germany, were heavily attacked by environmental groups.
All in all we can witness a strong doctrine, supported by an array of key operational decisions, while on the level of discipline and discourse there is a lot of turmoil on the content of spatial planning policy as well as on the role of (central) government.

5.5 New approaches towards sustainable urban development

After long and protracted deliberations, a new, Fifth Policy Report on spatial planning appeared in 2001 marking a remarkable shift in government policy, for it was teeming with the concept of the complete city (Zonneveld, 2005). This report almost seems to repeat the 1966 Second Report by emphasising the emergence of *network cities* at a regional level in a constellation of "urban centres and nodes" (MVROM 2001: 179 ff). These urban networks would form integrated and self-contained housing and labour markets with excellent internal connections thanks to a well-designed system of regional public transport, at least this is what it is hoped for.
What marks the Fifth Policy Report is that, from now on, the entire territory of the network city would form the search area for new urban developments. The watchword is no longer 'concentric' urbanization (the 'centre' located in individual cities). Moreover, the urban network as a whole – rather than individual cities – would be self-sufficient in terms of urban functions. This is repeated in an updated version of the Fifth Report, the National Spatial Strategy (Vink & Van der Burg, 2006; Zonneveld, 2005).

Much more than its predecessors the Strategy puts emphasis on development, meaning lowering the restrictions on building houses and creating business estates. This is a reflection of the improved relationships – although some would say a shift in the balance of power – between the ministry responsible for spatial planning and the ministry of economic affairs, the latter always a stance advocate of removing barriers to development. Here a change in the discourse coalition surrounding national spatial planning can be witnessed. Together with the application of the subsidiarity principle the present National Spatial Strategy (NSS) does no longer give criteria to determine which kind of development can take place at which sort of location like the VINEX did. As a result currently especially the provinces, the intermediate level of government that has to take up the challenge of defining spatial planning strategies at the regional level, are seeking for new spatial concepts and spatial criteria for future urban development.
Next to the revised policy on concentration the National Spatial Strategy embraces two other approaches to foster sustainable urban development. The first approach is called *basic quality standards*. The NSS defines a set of basic values which the national government seeks to guarantee. For example, in the context of the economy, infrastructure and urbanisation, the basic quality standards concern the urban concentration policy, the location policy, a good balance between red (urban) and green (rural)/blue (water-based) functions, environmental legislation and safety. In the context of water, nature and landscape, the basic quality standards are laid down in areas such as the 'water test', functional combinations with water, and the green spaces in and around the cities. The basic quality standards may involve requirements for the content or processes, but they may also involve more financial principles.
The layer approach is the other approach the NSS is following. One can picture land use in the Netherlands as consisting of three layers: groundlayer (water, soil and the living organisms in those environments), networks (all forms of visible and invisible infrastructure) and occupation (spatial patterns due to human use). Each layer influences the spatial considerations and choices with respect to the other layers. The rationale is that urbanisation, intensive agriculture and other forms of occupation are considered far too long as separate, unrelated elements, without sufficient consideration to the demands created by the other layers. Water for example sets intrusive constraints on long-term, sustainable location policies. Slowly developing trends such as rising sea levels, increased water drainage and more precipitation forces changes about the use of water and water systems. The NSS states that in planning, the processes in the different layers need to be considered more in relation to each other. This can prevent conflicts between different users of the same land, as well as creating greater coherence in the measures to be taken. All these concepts and new approaches are currently the object of processes of elaboration and clarification.

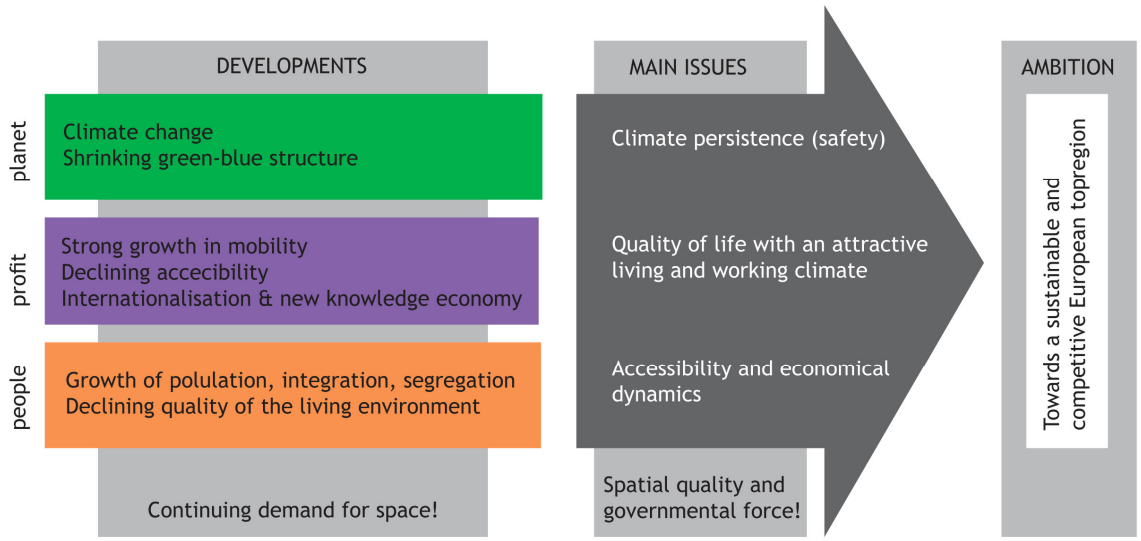
6. More explicit Sustainable Development in Randstad Strategy Agenda for 2040

Where the Fifth Policy Report on Spatial Planning and the National Spatial Strategy introduce concepts as the basic quality, the layer approach and urban networks, they do not elaborate these concepts very well. But they do put forward sustainable development as a more explicit policy goal. This development can be traced in a more elaborated way in a recent project analysing the most important components for the sustainable development of the Randstad area for the period 2020-2040. A long quote illustrates extremely well that sustainability, the long term and comprehensive policy are seen as three sides of the same picture.
"The Randstad is facing some serious challenges on which a sustainable answer must be found. Challenges like global economic dynamics, adequate protection against floosing water, water storage, new combinations and ways of living and recreation, tackling traffic congestion, maintaining and developing high qualitative green spaces including the Green Heart in the Randstad and green networks, as well as tackling the social problems in the cities (housing, safety, labour market and making space for new economic developments). Even more when you take into account that the Randstad is a region with highly complex spatial and administrative

needs. There is an urgency to find an answer to these challenges in a long-term vision for the Randstad. […]
With 'Randstad 2040 – Starting memo' the Dutch national government puts the important long term subjects on the agenda for a spatial development of the Randstad towards a sustainable and competitive European top region in the coming years: a region in which prosperity and economic growth go together with social, cultural and ecological desired options for this and the future generations. In the future, the Randstad is an attractive area from different perspectives as a destination and in which people with different styles can make true their dreams. Because of this ambition on the long term, we now have to make sustainable choices in many (future) problems, take chances to redevelop an\d to profit from challenges. We need unique qualities to compete with other European regions and to facilitate sustainable growth. The qualities are not only on spatial aspects, but are also more general qualities like a good school system, good labour relationships, reliable rules, and integration, emancipation and participation of different groups in the society.
In the first step of making the vision there are three topics nominated:

- The consequences of climate change;
- The economic dynamic processes (like globalization, effects of ICT, the growth of the services economy) and the expected growth of the mobility (of people and goods);
- The (negative) effects of the explosive growth of people (immigration), integration and segregation, and a high demand for space with [possible negative consequences for the spatial quality is also very important to take in regard.

Sustainability is a key value in the selection and choices the cabinet want to follow and take into mind. Because we think more than 30 years in the future, the importance of sustainable choices is very high and desired. In the starting memo, the Randstad is analysed with the three dimensions of sustainability: people, planet, profit and the layer approach (underground, networks and occupation). This is also translated to five different parts of the Randstad, which have comparable issues and developments. These parts also cross the borders of the Randstad and the Netherlands: they show their relations with surrounding areas.
From the developments and issues for the Randstad, and the five parts of the Randstad, three main issues for the Randstad are selected, and seven topics on which the dilemma's are described, and on which choices will have to be made for the sustainable development of the Randstad towards 2030."



Sustainable?

A key assumption behind the Randstad 2020-2040 vision exercise is that sustainability, the long term, the layer approach and the comprehensiveness belong together. But the choice and elaboration of topics that should reflect this interpretation of sustainability are rather selective, for example the growth of transport infrastructure for cars – which is a development that will for the time being not become sustainable for all P's without enormous efforts – is facilitated without providing information on how that will affect the sustainable ambitions and what the road to sustainable transport should look like.

For the short-term policy on the spatial development of the Randstad, there has already been formulated a Randstad Urgency Programme (UPR) before the vision-making process started. This UPR doesn't contain a traceable change of policy in comparison with the former Randstad policy, as a result of a more explicit reflection on sustainable development of the area. So in effect the very promising formulation of the sustainable approach of the Randstad 2020-2040 vision, does risk to have no effect on concrete policies and decisions.

7. Conclusions and perspectives

Over the past decades more and more dimensions of what is presently called sustainable development, are explicitly addressed in national spatial planning policies and strategies. Especially the layer approach, developed bottom up by professionals involved in processes of regional plan making, points towards an acceptance that a comprehensive and long term perspective is needed in order to arrive at sustainable urban development. What is still lacking though is the perspective that an urban region – like the Randstad for instance – could be seen as an ecological system, where flows enter and leave the system and where households (people, companies etc.) have a foot print outside the urban region in question. In spite of the rise of comprehensive thinking in the Netherlands, what is still considered as the most important component of sustainable urban development is the maintenance of the contrast between 'red' and 'green' areas. This doctrine remains that strong that novel approaches developed at the level of disciplines and discourses face tremendous difficulties to get accepted at the political level.

With the Randstad 2040 trajectory the transfer from more implicit towards more explicit sustainable urban/spatial development however gets an important momentum on the level of Sustainable Development defined as a *meta-concept*. The method used can be compared with the one used in a famous study from 1971 for the South Western part of the Netherlands using an environmental, economic and socio-cultural model to analyse the problems and potentials of this area. The outcome of the models were related with each other using a multi criteria analysis including different weights for the different values. After this analysis the implications for the spatial structure of the area were elaborated in a way comparable with the Randstad 2040 trajectory.

The question if Sustainability as a *value* is properly handled in Randstad 2040 is more difficult to answer: we can only make some preliminary remarks on that point:

- The Planet values seems at first sight to be reduced to the problems of climate change and shrinking green-blue structures only.
- The issues of sustainable mobility and sustainable living environment for instance are more related with "profit" and "people "respectively
- However making the shift to the seven topics we discover a more interrelated and integrated approach on the level of these policy topics.

The Randstad 2040 trajectory is related with the so called Randstad Urgency Programme. This implies a relationship between the realisation of more short term projects and a more long term visioning process. We could call this a mixed scanning approach. Although this approach became known almost four decades ago (Etzioni, 1967) currently there seems to be a revival because many planners see the relationship between general visions, perspectives and

Leitbilder at the one hand and concrete operational decision making at the other hand as a sign that spatial planning matters and does make a difference (see for instance Albrecht 2004, 2006). Such a *mixed scanning* approach however is till now not fully elaborated and for that reason the impact of the Randstad 2040 trajectory is difficult to assess on this moment (either in terms of planet, profit or people)
The concentration strategy is worded as *"clustered urbanisation"* with a lot of questions still to be answered.
Crossing the borders of the Randstad implies an analysis of the relations of the Randstad area with surrounding areas. A proper understanding of these relations is only in its infancy and needs to be elaborated in this or parallel trajectories.

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