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The power to collaborate : How judicious use of power accelerates the strategic capacity of regions in the Netherlands

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Publication date
2010

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Citation for published version (APA):

Haran, N. (2010). *The power to collaborate : How judicious use of power accelerates the strategic capacity of regions in the Netherlands*. Eburon.

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STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF REGIONS, GOVERNANCE DILEMMAS AND THE ROLE OF POWER

The desire to improve regional competitiveness has encouraged cities and municipalities within regions to cooperate. However, Regional Collaborative Associations (RCAs) in the Netherlands are struggling to find suitable modes of governance to allow them to bring their resources together in the best possible way. Many cooperation initiatives have taken place, but the end result has been frustrated voices and little progress. In and outside the Netherlands, numerous studies and reports confirm that the road for finding satisfying solutions for regional cooperation is filled with potholes. This chapter will elaborate on the challenge RCAs face in their attempts to improve regional competitiveness through collaboration. It will discuss the strategic aspects RCAs need to address, and reveal the governance questions they raise. In an attempt to identify potential improvements in present practice, this chapter will discuss institutional conditions which might lead to better regional collaboration. Hence, this chapter will discuss theories not only to define the concepts at the heart of this research, but also in order to develop tools to appraise present practice of regional cooperation, define success and reveal conditions that can explain it.

2.1 THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF THE COMPETING REGIONS

The competitive environments in which regional economies operate and the complex relations between stakeholders, policies and interests, raise the need to adopt a 'strategic approach' to planning (Salet and Faludi 2000, Albrechts et al. 2003). The multidisciplinary character of strategic planning and its uses in different policy contexts requires a short introduction to the term and a finer definition of the way it will be understood and used in this study.

2.1.1 Strategic Planning – definitions and approaches

Despite its common use in public administration and spatial planning, the origin of the strategic approach to planning came from other disciplines where competition and rivalry dominated the operative context. Nowadays there is a desire to intensify collaboration within regions in the belief that collaboration between regional stakeholders increases the ability of the region to compete with other similar regions.

The competitive context in which regional collaboration is set in this study entails therefore a focus on the competitive elements that lies at the basis of strategic planning.

Strategic planning originated in the great wars of history from which strategic approaches evolved to serve the needs of competing armies. Later on, the strategic approach to planning was adapted to modern ‘battles’ in business administration (Albrechts 2006 p.1151). Tzu’s *Art of War*, written originally in the 6th century BC, is considered the first document to give systematic attention to the strategic capacities of armies in battle (Lee et al. 1998). Tzu documents the strategic principles armies should be aware of when conducting military campaigns. The principles form a continuous process: assessing the situation; formulating military goals; devising, evaluating and implementing strategies (Lee et al. 1998). Principles of strategic planning gradually evolved from the military to the disciplines of business administration and later, to public administration.

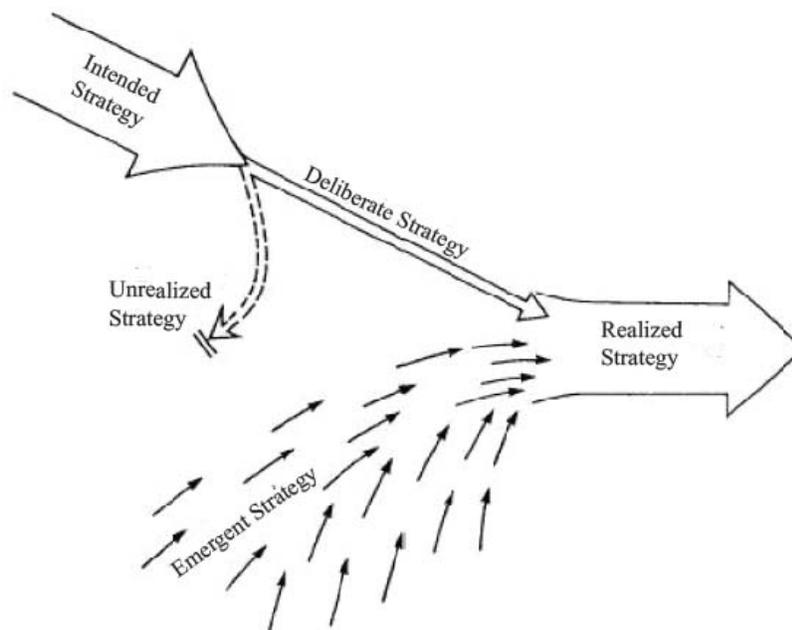
In the second half of the 20th century, professionals from public administration got interested in the principles of strategic planning for public policies in general, and spatial planning in particular (Albrechts 2006, Healey 2007 p.180-181). Public interest in strategic planning grew as a result of the dissatisfaction urban and regional planners experienced regarding planning practice and its lack of any clear strategy and internal coherency. The traditional, technocratic approach to land use planning was dominated by architects and engineers; it paid little heed to ordinary people’s preferences. It proved to be adequate for preventing *undesired* development, but it could not reliably ensure the realization of desired developments. Furthermore, the technocratic approach to planning failed to amalgamate with other relevant policy fields and was considered unresponsive to changing circumstances and to the variety of preferences held by stakeholders (ibid.). The growing desire to link vision with action, and to proactively adjust to changing socio-economic circumstances, brought spatial planners to adopt businesslike strategic approaches to their practice.

Yet the evolution of strategic planning did not stop in the transplantation of its principles from one discipline to the other. Intrinsic variants and changes within the strategic approach to planning caused a gradual shift from a purely *deliberative* approach to strategic planning, to an *adaptive* one (Mintzberg and Waters 1985, Healey 2007 p.183-184). The deliberative approach considers strategies as tools used to reduce complexity and promote consistent behavior within organizations: “*Strategy answers two basic questions: where do you want to go? And how do you want to get there*” (Eisenhardt 2003 in Wiechmann 2007 p.2). Presuming a linear planning process, the deliberative approach suggests that planners’ intentions are clearly formulated before actions are taken (Mintzberg and Waters 1985 p.258). Preferences are shared by all participants and are realized as intended without any external interference. The deliberative approach represents a strongly rational attitude to planning. It defines intentions *before* designing strategies and implementing working frameworks. The deliberative approach conceives strategies as instruments that give a sense of purpose and direction. Mintzberg (1994) pointed out that this approach is contradictory to complex reality which accentuates the need for strategic thinking and flexibility to

react to uncontrolled dynamics in the environment of action and competition. By contrast, the *adaptive* approach conceives strategies as emergent phenomena. Strategies evolve as a result of patterns set by decisions which cannot be controlled or defined in advance. The adaptive approach denies the ability to predict future dynamics and to design related suitable strategies. Strategies emerge from interrelations and mutual influences which are rarely controlled by actors (Mintzberg 1994, Healey 2007 p.183).

In practice, however, strategies are never purely deliberative nor purely adaptive (Mintzberg and Waters 1985 p.259). The actual realized strategies combine elements from both emergent and deliberative strategies as illustrated in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Deliberate, emergent and realized strategies (Mintzberg 1994)



The general distinction between the deliberative and the emergent approaches to the formation of strategies serves as a basis for further definition of several types of strategies, based on the ratio between emergent and deliberative features in them (for an illustrative description of those see Mintzberg and Waters 1985).

I. Competitive Strategic Planning

Strategic planning contains further subdivisions and approaches (e.g. Salet and Faludi 2000). Some further definition of the way the concept will be treated in this research is therefore necessary. According to Bryson, strategic planning is a highly-varied approach: “*Strategic Planning is not one thing but a set of concepts, procedures, and tools that may be used selectively for different purposes in different situations*” (Bryson in Friedmann et al. 2004 p.57). The growing focus on the competitiveness of regions within the global economy and the growing use of inter-regional competition to stimulate regional collaboration calls for a further discern of the competitive features of strategic planning. RCAs here aim to improve regional competitiveness through joint actions. This justifies and necessitates the focus of *competitive* strategic principles when analyzing and evaluating the collaboration within competing regions. Even though competitiveness can be interpreted as an abstract goal, it does not entail the adoption of a purely deliberative approach to strategic planning. Nor does it exclude the emergence of non-deliberate components into the eventual strategies that emerge. On the contrary; diffusion of external influences on the realized strategies in competing organizations is the result of the capacity to adjust to changes in the external environment of which the competing organization operates (Mintzberg and Waters 1985 p.261).

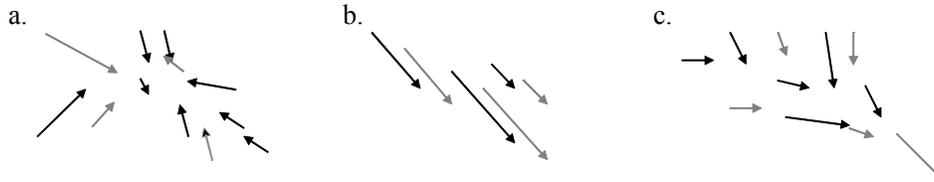
Since it operates under conditions of rivalry and competition (between armies, companies, cities, regions), strategic planning has some strongly rational features. Albrechts distinguishes between four sorts of rationality at the core of strategic planning. Those include *value rationality* concerning the design of an envisioned future, *communicative rationality* that refers to the need to involve a large number of actors, *instrumental rationality* that focuses on the best way to achieve a desired future and *strategic rationality* that sets a clear and explicit strategy for dealing with power relations (Albrechts 2004 p.752). Naïve as the rational approach to strategic planning may be (Lindblom 1959), regions that use competitive strategic planning to improve their competitiveness are expected to meet the demand for comprehensive analysis to enhance reflective capacity.²

In the business arena, the corporate competitive approach to strategic planning accentuates other features crucial for strategic planning in competing organizations. It accentuates the importance for companies to develop a unique position in the markets in which they operate. The unique position is achieved by developing products or services other competitors will find hard to imitate (Porter 1996 p.72). Finding and defining a unique position requires high selectivity and capacity to narrow down the endless possibilities to clearly-defined strategic courses of action. Selecting strategic actions is therefore a crucial component of any strategic capacity to plan effectively and competitively. But it is not an easy matter. Often, management has a natural

² The importance of information gathering for the assessment of a situation and the generation of potential actions is strongly represented in the military and the corporate contexts. In both, the acting organization performs in a hostile environment where plans must be constantly reviewed and shaped in a struggle against competitors (Porter 1996 p.65, Lee et al. 1998).

reluctance to make a sharp and clear choice, afraid of being blamed for making a wrong decision (ibid. p.75). The importance of creating a unique position or advantage *vis-à-vis* competitors raises the importance of achieving a high internal match between the strategic outputs of the organization. Coherent policies and actions produce a synergetic advantage and accelerate competitiveness (Porter 1996, 2001). Figure 2.2 illustrates schematically different levels of fit between activities of complex competitive units and the creation of synergy.

Figure 2.2: Three levels of strategic fit (based on Porter 1996)



Different activities may frustrate each other and fail to match (a). Activities could reach a higher level of fit when they do not offset each other (b). In a high level of fit the activities produced are inter-related in a manner that a single activity has both direct immediate impact and an indirect, reinforcing impact on other activities (c). The “*Optimization of the strategic effort*” (Porter 1996 p.72-73) can therefore be considered as the link between the continuous exchange of information and the constant coordination between activities in order to increase synergetic effect. The principles of strategic planning in general and those with regard to competing organizations in particular lean heavily on corporate-based features. Competing regions, however, are not registered commercial companies. Moreover, spatial economic strategies in the regions of the Netherlands are driven by the public sector. Transplanting ideas originated in a certain institutional context (like the corporate world) and applying those in another (public administration), always requires caution and reflection (de Jong 1999).

II. Applying principles of corporate strategic planning in public context

The applicability of strategic planning principles originating from the corporate world to the public context of regional spatial planning has not escaped the attention of scientific literature. Even though the competitive dimension is evident in both sectors, the applicability of the corporate approach to the public context has raised eyebrows in academia. Even though “*effective organization in the public sector must understand the forces at work within its ‘industry’ in order to compete effectively*” (Bryson and Roering 1987 p.18), competing communities do not function as ‘industries’ in the corporate sense of the term. A simple competitive analysis is therefore not applicable

because it is often hard to know what the ‘industry’ in the public context actually is, let alone recognize which forces affect it (ibid.). Others, however, are keener to apply corporate strategic planning principles to the public sector. Kaufman and Jacobs (1987), for example, contend that the failure of the technocratic approach to planning to produce complete, detailed and long-term plans, justifies the need to borrow from the corporate world. The faults of technocratic comprehensive planning prompted public demand for planners to focus on results: particularly, on action-oriented programs and on the speedy and efficient implementation of plans. Not surprisingly, these are exactly the strategic planning principles embedded in the tradition of competing corporate organizations (Kaufman and Jacobs 1987 p.25). Another argument in favor of adopting corporate principles of strategic planning to public affairs is the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, wherein niches for suitable activities are defined and realized in a single, coherent planning process model (ibid. p.27). Broad involvement within the public domain of strategic planning can lead to deeper and broader insights and responsiveness to the existing interests and forces during the planning process (ibid. p.26). In the specific context of regional strategic planning, the logic of using corporate principles in public strategic planning is broadly shared (Roberts 1993).

2.1.2 Defining the strategic capacity of regions

Existing literature identifies three basic principles crucial for the capacity to act strategically when competing. These principles include the flow of knowledge into the competing organization (‘reception’ capacity); the ability to choose among alternatives and create a coherent combination of actions (‘consolidation’ capacity); and the ability to maintain discipline within the organization for implementing and complying with the selected strategy (‘realization’ capacity).

1. Reception capacity - Infusion of information and involvement of stakeholders

Armies act based on intelligence. Companies base their strategies on market analysis, and knowledge of competitors and clients (Lee et al. 1998 p.100). Whatever the situation, it seems clear that diffusion of information and increase of the base of knowledge are indispensable for the competing organization. The same holds true for regional spatial economic planning. The rise of the network society (Castells 1996) and the global economy are driven by the continuous flow of information. Those who succeed in the knowledge-based arenas and hold leading positions are the communities who keep their feelers out, constantly learning and adapting (Booher and Innes 2002 p.224).

In planning, continuous flow of information is a precondition for producing adequate SWOT analyses and devising strategies, as external trends need to be detected and weighed against regional resources. Finding niches for gaining strategic advantages requires a great deal of creativity and insight (Porter 1996). However, the increasing complexity of functional networks, the multiplicity of actors, not to mention the

different meanings they grant to the information, all accentuate the need to open the strategy forming process to a large group of stakeholders (Albrechts 2006). Spatial regional policies formulated with principles of strategic planning, require not only facts but also insight into the social values of stakeholders, their perspectives and norms. In order to grasp the complexity of urban conditions and their normative interpretation, there is a need for '*epistemological consciousness*' that will increase awareness and secure the continuous search for new ways of knowing and imagining spatial conditions and future potentials (Healey 2007 p.243, van den Berg et al. 1997 p.269).

Broader knowledge that exceeds positivism and reaches a social constructivist perspective may mobilize the distributed intelligence of an organization's members and let the organization as a whole 'learn' by encountering multiple frames of references and social production of knowledge (Healey 2007 p.243). The affinity with the collaborative approach to planning inspired by Habermas' communicative action (1984) is not accidental. The core of the strategic process according to advocates of the collaborative approach (Forester 1989, Healey 1996, Healey 1997, Innes and Booher 1999) is inclusiveness and the design of a framework to encourage stakeholders to take part in open dialogue (Albrechts 2006). Regions with a high reception capacity will adopt an inclusive approach striving to engage with a wide magnitude of stakeholders. By combining stakeholders' perspectives and resources, regions can create shared frames that serve as a basis for concerted collective action for the benefit of the region as a whole.

II. Consolidation capacity – achieving selective and coherent combination of actions

The ability to select among options and create high internal coherency between activities is a crucial factor for organizations. The capacity to select niches of action is the basis upon which strategic advantages are created. These advantages emerge from developing a well-defined reputation and from creating internal coherency within the strategies (Porter 1996). Decisions are made with an eye on long-term needs. However, making these choices is not a simple matter as "*much of the strategic process lies in the making of tough decisions about what is most important for the purpose of producing fair structural responses to problems, challenges, aspiration and diversity*" (Albrechts 2004 p.752).

In contrast to comprehensive planning, strategic planning acknowledges institutional and financial constraints that hinder the execution of everything which is needed or desired. Strategic planning must be oriented to issues that really matter. The internal tension within the competing region is therefore high as different interests and potential actions compete with each other for collective acknowledgement and adoption. This is the arena in which the ideas and interests of actors compete with each other for collective recognition (Bryson and Corsby 1993 p.185). Similarly Healey describes the tension in producing selective choices in collective action as the filtering of ideas in which a "*struggle for the prioritization of interests, rights and claims for policy attention is taking place*" (Healey 2007 p.187). At a certain point along the collective process, stakeholders should name and frame ideas to give different expressions of

recognition (ibid.). Contrary to her earlier work (1997) Healey does not contend that consensus building is the optimal way, let alone the only way to achieve collective prioritization.

Next to the capacity to select between options and set clear priorities comes the ability to create an internal fit between these choices. This ability is crucial to the regional consolidation capacity. The interrelations between the activities and the way they are coordinated with each other, in terms of substance and time, is the crux upon which the whole envisioned synergetic potentials of the coordinated strategic action is based (Porter 1996). In regional public matters, high strategic capacity emphasizes the vertical and horizontal integration of different levels of governments and other stakeholders. With the interweaving of stakeholders' activities, the likelihood of preventing costly duplication of efforts and the chance of exploiting potential synergies is raised (Albrechts 2006 p.1158). Lack of coherence within the different activities produced in the process will reduce synergy within the collective strategic output and might lead to disappointing, suboptimal results (van den Berg et al. 1997 p.260).

III. Realization capacity – bringing strategies towards implementation

“Strategic Planning relates to implementation. Things must get done!” (Albrechts 2004 p.752). This quotation epitomizes a third component of strategic capacity: bringing consolidated strategic decisions to realization (Albrechts 2004, Albrechts 2006, Healey 2007). Strategic planning needs to find links between political authorities and other actors since its practice is not only a contingent response to wider forces but also an active force designed to enable and guide change (Hillier 2002). Strategies are not always the immediate linear result of agreeable action, especially not in the Dutch planning tradition (Faludi and van der Valk 1994). Planning schemes receive different amendments before they get implemented, sometimes years after their official approval. In strategic planning, therefore, decision making and coordination efforts are continuous so the future remains open; concrete physical actions do not flow automatically from the plan (Faludi and Korthals Altes 1994 p.410). Implementation may take place as series of decisions that eventually realize the plan, but often this happens long after the initial plan is approved.

The ‘gap’ between plans and their realization has prompted growing calls to better link the planning and implementation phases. In strategic planning, a special role is granted to formal and informal mechanisms that may ensure realization of strategic decisions consolidated by stakeholders. ‘Courts’ are the metaphorical domains where conflicts are managed, sanctions levied and other managerial methods used to realize the consolidated strategic output (Bryson and Corsby 1993 p.187). Such a compliance mechanism might be imposed or stimulated by certain actors (Dietz et al. 2003). The strategic intention and the definition of goals is thus only one part of a much more complex process that needs to bring the collective strategic output into realization.

The production of potential mobilizing energy must be therefore channeled towards the appropriate alignment of the organizational components that underpin the strategy

(Hardy 1996). Competitive strategic capacity is thus enhanced not only by defining the ‘right strategies’ through internalizing knowledge and filtering ideas but also by ensuring that they materialize. Here, the relation to collaborative planning is evident as well. Considerations of realization are among the reasons advocates of the collaborative approach to strategic planning recommend the wide involvement of stakeholders. Participants in a strategic planning process are encouraged to find ways to pragmatically achieve their planning desires and not simply to agree and list their objectives publicly (Healey 1992 p.155).

IV. Modeling strategic capacity of competing regions and defining the research aim

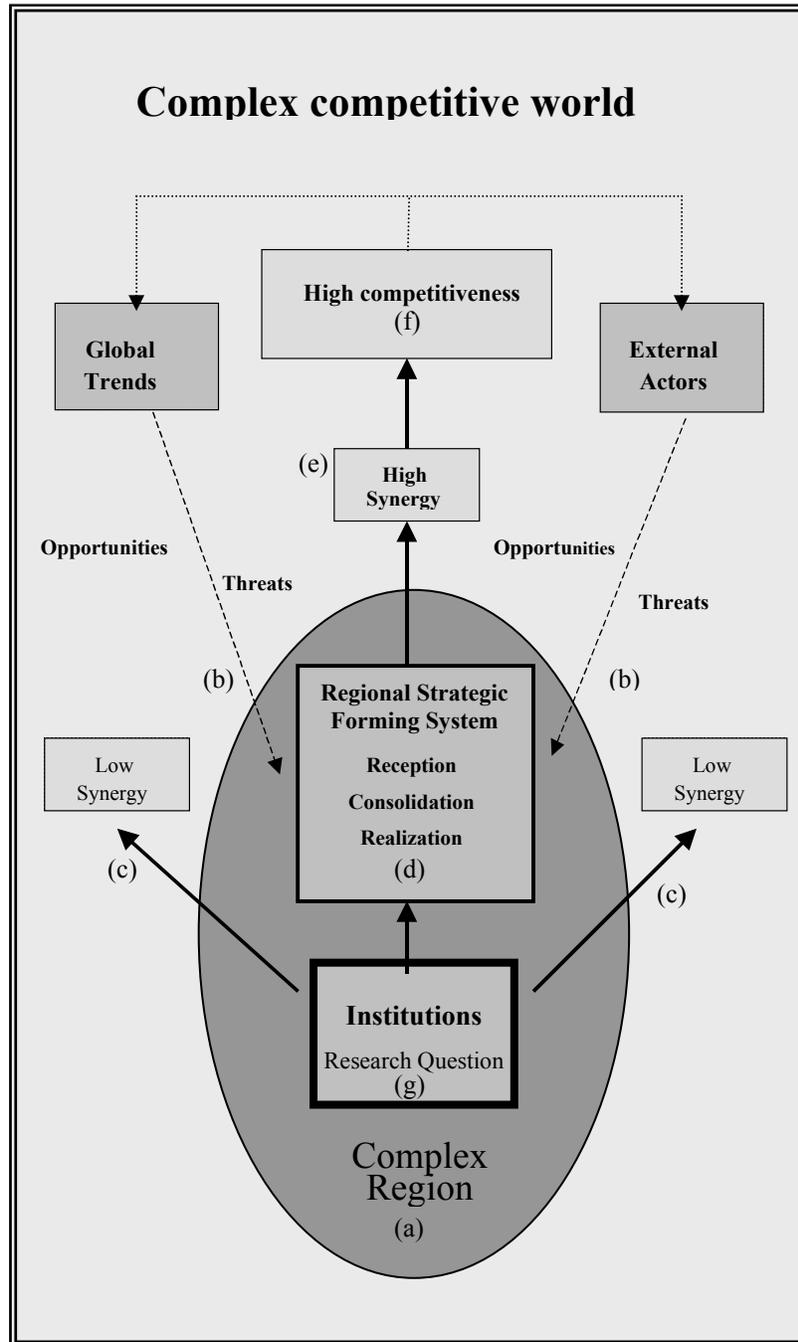
The strategic capacity of Regional Strategic Associations that aim to improve their regional competitiveness can be defined as the capacity to successfully integrate principles of strategic planning in their collective attempts to produce competitive spatial economic strategies. The strategic capacity of RCAs therefore will be defined as *the capacity to involve a wide number of stakeholders while producing well-defined strategies with high selectivity and internal coherency, and bringing those to implementation while maintaining the support and commitment of collaborating members.*

The strategic capacity of the competitive regions can now be fully illustrated in their competitive environment (see figure 2.3 at the following page). The competitive and complex region (a) operates in a complex mix of flows and interrelations resulting from multi-scaled forces that intersect in the region. These flows are formed by global trends and by the policies conducted by actors external to regional stakeholders (b). Regional actors may choose to discern these forces individually, identify opportunities or threats and react to those autonomously. Uncoordinated responses, however, decrease the likelihood of achieving a high level of fit between stakeholders’ activities and therefore result in limited synergies dependent on *ad hoc* engagements and the mercy of coincidence and chance (c). Alternatively, regional “strategic forming systems” (d) enable regional stakeholders to: (1) systematically receive and analyze external signals coming from the competing environment (opportunities and threats); (2) define adequate spatial economic strategies and; (3) mobilize regional forces accordingly. These systems generate a higher degree of synergy (e) and therefore a higher level of competitiveness (f).

The “strategy formation system” integrates all strategic components distilled earlier:

- ‘*Reception*’: continuous incorporation of knowledge concerning external trends and stakeholders’ preferences;
- ‘*Consolidation*’: filtering and selecting from the different thoughts, ideas, desires and alternative actions, and prioritizing between potential paths of action;
- ‘*Realization*’: maintaining strategic durability and the commitment and docility of stakeholders to carry out strategies and implement agreed actions.

Figure 2.3: Strategic capacity of competing regions – conceptual model



RCAs with high strategic capacity are therefore the ones that can integrate and maximize the three components of reception, consolidation and realization in their collaborations. The overarching aim of this research refers to a search for the institutional conditions that enable and support the achievement of high strategic capacity in the regions:

Research aim: Gaining insight into the institutional conditions that enhance the strategic capacity of competing Regional Collaborative Associations, and enable them to engage a wide circle of stakeholders, produce sharp and coherent spatial economic strategies and bring these towards realization.

The overarching approach in this research is therefore an institutional approach to strategic planning. This approach focuses on evolving patterns that shape social frameworks (Salet and Faludi 2000 p.7). Institutions are understood as patterns of behaviors derived from structural norms, rules and repetitive practices in social contexts. Institutions contain informal constraints (taboos, traditions, societal codes) and the formal rules of law. Institutions provide the incentive structure through which we create order and attempt to reduce uncertainty. They are the ‘rules of the game’ that define the most basic relationships in social life (North 1990).

The research question that lies at the heart of this research relates to the institutional conditions that enhance the strategic capacity of RCAs (‘g’ in figure 2.3):

Research question: Which institutional conditions enhance the strategic capacity of competing RCAs, and enable them to engage a wide circle of stakeholders, produce sharp and coherent spatial economic strategies and bring those towards realization?

2.2 THE GOVERNANCE DILEMMA

“In a fragmented world the issue is how to bring about enough cooperation among disparate community elements to get things done and to do so in the absence of an overarching command structure of a unifying system of thought.” (Stone 1989 p.227)

High strategic capacity of a competing region might be an objective easier to define in abstraction than actually achieve in practice. The fragmented region is a sum of different autonomous stakeholders which, in order to achieve high strategic capacity, are required to define collective goals and agree on suitable means to achieve them, goals which are seldom clearly defined (Christensen 1999). Furthermore, the nature of the regions as competing entities differs tremendously from the nature of other competing entities that operate in military or corporate contexts. The regions are compounded by a multiplicity of parties that carry different interests and have heterogenic relations with each other. Armies and companies have tighter internal relations and stronger hierarchical connections than regional cooperative initiatives (Armies have clear chains of command, and companies are guided by the tones set by shareholders and consolidated management).

Achieving high strategic capacity is not a simple matter in the hierarchical systems of the corporate world, either. Businesses are warned of two hurdles that may limit their strategic capacity: firstly, a lack of insight that can lead to a misguided view of the competition; secondly, failures to achieve selectivity and high level of internal fit (Porter 1996 p.75). The complex environment in which competing regions operate, together with internal complexity and fragmentation, increases the likelihood of poor insights and managerial faults, limiting the strategic capacity of regions. The challenges of adopting competitive principles of strategic planning in public organizations have not escaped the attention of those who advocate them in the context of spatial planning. Attempts to promote strategic planning within regions face the inability to provide suitable mechanisms of regional governance capable to integrate plans and realize them (Roberts 1993 p.761, Sagan and Halkier 2005). These shortcomings have ignited growing interest in the challenges regarding the governance of regions. The acknowledgement that the organizational capacities of regions are crucial preconditions for regional competitiveness and successful regional strategic planning (van den Berg et al. 1993, Keating 2001, Deas and Giordano 2003) makes the governance question even more crucial.

2.2.1 Coping with complexity – two approaches to regional governance

The complexity of the external world in which regions compete is high, ambiguous and has external and internal dimensions. The external dimension refers to the complexity of the spatial economic relations between places and flows (Castells 1996). The internal complexity refers to the relations between the various regional stakeholders that directly and indirectly influence (or are being influenced) by the decision-making process within the region. This complexity is fuelled by the multiplicity of potentially

clashing interests, rationalities and resources of the different stakeholders. Clashes impede efforts to achieve consensus about regional goals and ways to reach these, both within governments (Christensen 1999) and within a broader scope of non-hierarchically inter-related stakeholders (Bryson and Crosby 1993, Kickert et al. 1997). The multiplicity of actors that carry different, sometimes contradictory interests, and the fact that preferences are not fixed and can change over time, make conduction of strategic planning processes and the production of shared policies thorny and difficult (Kickert et al. 1997 p.16).

Decision-making under conditions of high complexity can be conducted while applying different perspectives on complexity and the way it can be managed. These can be bluntly distinguished between (1.) the 'order seeking' perspective (*ordentelijk*) and (2.) the 'disarray tolerating' (*wanordelijk*) one (Teisman 2005). Although the two perspectives independently may come across as naive and in practice they may (and should) be combined, the analytical distinction between them reflects the tension between the desire to simplify regional governance by conducting official rules and the desire to maintain flexibility and potential for innovation from the variety that comes with high complexity. The 'order seeking' perspective seeks simplification in a given complex situation; complexity is seen as part of a familiar and manageable system. It assumes a possibility to simplify the situation based on the rationality of the familiar system. Supporters of this approach tend to call for the reduction of administrative layers by expanding the power of a limited number of stakeholders in tandem with the reduction of power of others or, more drastically, their exclusion (ibid. p.27). Supporters of the 'order seeking' approach try to reduce fragmentation and increase unity within the organization in order to ease collective decision-making and promote a consolidated output (ibid. p.134). By contrast, the 'disarray tolerating' perspective attempts to create order while embracing complexity rather than striving to reduce it. This perspective wishes to use complex systems as rich interactive arenas where developments can co-evolve and where an innovative mix of synergetic engagements can take place. The emphasis within this perspective lies on the meaning stakeholders grant to different matters rather than to rational and instrumental use of knowledge (ibid. p.31). Advocates of this approach make use of serendipity and employ chances and creative search processes to promote shared collective decisions (p.134).

The distinctions between approaches that strive to reduce complexity and approaches that strive to act within complexity have some traces in the context of regional governance. Many attempts have taken place in regions in Europe and North America to promote coherent spatial economic development and increase competitiveness under conditions of high complexity (Sagan and Halkier 2005, Heinelt and kübler 2005). In some regions there were attempts to reduce complexity by adequate legislation and the amendment of the official institutional settings in which the regions operate (Salet et al. 2003). With these statutory amendments the legislator wished to promote order and coordinating capacity within the regional territory. Such interventions usually strove to promote governmental reform that would set a new regional governmental tier (metropolitan government) in charge of spatial economic development for a designated region. In a similar way, legislative intervention would strive to reduce fragmentation

by limiting the number of parties involved in regional development issues, through annexations or fusions of smaller municipalities. Alternative practices of regional governance consider complexity as a given, and therefore concentrate their collaborative efforts on finding ways to produce collective action and coordinate spatial economic developments in the fragmented region while maintaining stakeholders' autonomy (van den Berg et al. 1997 p.257, Heinelt and Kübler 2005 p.11-13, Hulst 2005).

I. Reducing formal complexity – promoting regional governmental reforms

Attempts to introduce regional governments responsible (and capable) to guide spatial economic developments in the regions peaked during the 1960s and 70s in North America and Western Europe. The impetus for these attempts was socio-economic deterioration of city centers relative to their hinterland. Supporters argued that creating single regional governments to administer the territory of the whole region would increase efficiency in guiding and controlling regional development, improving the balance between core cities and peripheral municipalities and decreasing wasteful investments (Lefèvre 2001, Keating 2001).

The metropolitan reform approach surged in Europe during the 1990s. The wave of attempts to promote regional reforms came as a response to the growing competition *between* regions for attracting public and private investment. This competition raised the need to increase regional coordination in order to reduce wasteful uncoordinated investments, limit zero sum competition between municipalities within the same region, and create a critical mass for large-scale projects (Keating 1998 p.58-9). In order to increase coherency in development for enhancing regional competitiveness, the popularity of ideas for statutory reforms grew high again and new attempts to promote regional reforms took place. Just like during the 1960s and 70s, those attempts sought to reduce regional complexity by promoting vertical hierarchy and decreasing horizontal fragmentation by the fusion of municipalities and the creation of elected regional governments. Advocates of governmental reforms believed that by creating new regional governments able to produce and implement authoritative decisions, the likelihood of guiding coherent development and of realizing regional projects would rise (Norris 2001b).

II. Embracing regional complexity – promoting collaborative regional governance

Contrary to the introduction of metropolitan legislative reforms aiming to reduce regional administrative complexity, collaborative approaches to regional governance aim to promote collective action within the given administrative setting and promote coordination within a complex environment of official and unofficial practices. The collaborative approach accentuates the need to break through static governmental structures and unbolt these to complement open processes that involve all relevant stakeholders. It suggests a shift from the continuous search for an optimal formula of formal governmental settings and a turn toward the adoption of flexible and informal

coordinating modes of governance aiming to connect stakeholders and promote coherent collective action in the regions (Roberts 1993 p.765).

Flexible forms of coordination come in abundant forms and modes – from voluntary composition of regional councils of local governments (Miller 2000) to broader collaborative associations that involve stakeholders from both public and private sectors. Through negotiations, partnership building, voluntary participative forums and other forms of collaborative arrangements, alternatives are created to the need for new legislation and governmental reform (Lefèvre 1998 p.18). In North America, the collaborative approach is associated with the rise of ‘new regionalism’ (Wallis 1996, Hamilton 1999) characterized by comparable collaborative approach to regional governance. This ‘wave’ in the metropolitan debate in the US (Wallis 1994) has offered an alternative to the creation of new regional governments, “*favoring instead more flexible, decentralized approaches to problem solving which promote ‘cooperation, coordination and collaboration’ rather than ‘structural consolidation’*” (Brenner 2002 p.9).

III. Persistent regional complexity

With only few exceptions (for example Greater London Authority and Verband Region Stuttgart), almost all attempts to reduce regional complexity by creating new regional or government failed during the 1990s (Keating 2001, Brenner 2002, Hulst 2007). Municipalities and political/administrative elites that wished to maintain their power and status (together with interest groups that wished to protect their already-established channels of influence) resisted the initiatives to create overarching regional governments in most occasions in the US (Brenner 2002) and Europe (Salet et al. 2003). Regions in The Netherlands were no exception (Kantor 2006). Furthermore, expanding the competencies of metropolitan regions ran counter to the cultural preferences expressed especially in the US for keeping government as small as possible with powers exercised closest to the people affected (Wallis 1996 p.17). Salet et al. (2003) summarized the limited perspectives for creating metropolitan government: “*If the idea of metropolitan governance is to teach us anything it is undoubtedly that solutions to the problems of coordination and spatial planning are not to be found in the mere establishment of a new encompassing territorial government but in new methods of ‘organizing connectivity’. The institutional problem is not so much the fragmentation of policy actors but the disconnectedness of learning practices and policies*” (Salet et al. 2003 p.377). The governance challenge of the regions entails a search for an intelligent match between the formal and the informal engagements as well as between the official administrative structures and the flexible modes of interaction.

As the establishment of new regional governments meets persistent resistance and suffers limited likelihood of being introduced successfully, the collaborative alternative for regional governance seems to be more liable in leading coordinated spatial economic development for enhancing the competitiveness of regions. Efforts to exercise regional competitive strategic planning therefore will be more likely to be

conducted within the collaborative approach to regional governance and by voluntary modes of RCAs that would function as the cement that links the official administrative blocks. Such an association would have to promote coherent development within the given complexity of formal and informal relations of regional stakeholders.

2.2.2 Can voluntary RCAs achieve high competitive strategic capacity?

If an open and voluntary organizational alternative for regional governance is conceived more feasible for conducting coherent strategic planning in the competing region, the question remains as to what extent this mode is capable of doing so.

Voluntary RCAs that wish to enhance competitiveness through strategic planning are required to do so under conditions completely different from the hierarchical and centralized conditions from which strategic planning originally emerged (2.1.1).

1. Competitive strategic capacity of voluntary RCAs – discouraging experiences

Empirical evidence of past research may raise doubts concerning the likelihood of voluntary RCAs to meet the objectives of competitive strategic planning. The success of voluntary regional cooperation in producing strategic collaboration in European and North American regions has often been discouraging. Cooperation initiatives that came in response to a government request provided often poor results (Norris 2001a). Based on experiences in American and English regions, Norris concludes that tough and controversial issues that affect the region's entire territory are not addressed effectively when the regional cooperation is voluntary. Meaningful collaboration in spatial development would not occur under voluntary conditions because of a *“lack of a mechanism to compel local governments in a region to work together, to address area-wide issues or to compel compliance with decisions that might jointly be taken”* (ibid. p.533). The lack of a mechanism to ensure commitment to agreements or decisions by participants is devastating for the collaborative potential. According to Norris, *“regional governance under voluntary cooperation is nearly always a victim of the lowest common denominator phenomenon. Any single unit can scuttle decisions made and policies adopted for the good of the overall territory”* (Norris 2001b p.567). Other critics maintain that voluntary regional collaboration will not be able to supply the foundation for firm and continuous regional cooperation (Visser 2004 p.60-61). Observations of suboptimal voluntary forms of inter-municipal cooperation in American regions revealed incapability to tackle controversial and threatening regional issues. This incapability was often attributed to the voluntary characteristic of the cooperation (Miller 2000 p.3).

Potential shortcomings caused by the voluntary character of the collaboration have also been acknowledged by some advocates of the collaborative approach to regional governance. Some admitted that efforts to grant voluntary arrangements sufficient power to be effective can easily provoke demands for accountability and protest that would *“perversely undermine their capabilities”* to move quickly and effectively on

opportunities and threats (Wallis 1996). Those potential limitations brought advocates of the collaborative regional approach to call for more pragmatic methods when exercising voluntary regional collaboration (Hoch 2007).

The failures to introduce overarching hierarchically regional governments on the one hand, and the doubts concerning the capacity of voluntary governing to provide alternatives for producing coherent development on the other, might arouse gloomy expectations concerning the capacity to introduce principles of competitive strategic planning in the regions. As open and voluntary modes of regional collaboration appear to be the mode of governance required to promote coherent development in the fragmented region, while at the same time critics doubt the suitability of such modes to meet the challenges that face competing regions, the first research sub-question will be formulated as follows:

Question 1: Are voluntary RCAs capable of integrating principles of competitive strategic planning in their collective efforts to produce spatial economic strategies for the regions?

Due to the non-compulsory nature of the structure, critics argue that voluntary RCAs are unable to tackle broad regional issues and suffer from limited and short reaching competitive strategic capacity. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Voluntary RCAs will not manage to integrate the three principal components of competitive strategic planning in their collective efforts to produce spatial economic strategies for the regions, or will show limited capacity to do so.

II. Competitive strategic capacity of voluntary RCAs – a disturbing internal tradeoff

The postulated incapability of voluntary RCAs to achieve high strategic capacity might not come as a surprise. The empirical evidence that led to the first hypothesis might be backed by intrinsic paradoxical relations between the different components of strategic planning and their most suitable modes of governance that give no chance for voluntary RCAs to succeed. Voluntary, inclusive and collaborative modes of governance are assumed to serve the ‘reception’ component of regional strategic capacity – the internalization of knowledge, the mapping of stakeholders’ interests and their capacities for identifying potential synergies (Innes 1995, Healey 1997). At the same time, however, broad inclusion of stakeholders in a voluntary process might frustrate other dimensions of competitive strategic planning. The ability of RCAs to make sharp strategic decisions (‘consolidation’ capacity) and ensure stakeholders’

compliance to the collective agreements ('realization' capacity) might require a level of decisiveness that large and inclusive RCAs cannot produce voluntarily. In order to achieve collective decision-making capacity, and mobilize stakeholders effectively towards realizing agreed strategies, a hierarchical approach and exclusion of parties might turn to be more adequate.

The literature concerning spatial strategic planning and its governance applications refers to a tension between the expansion of the circle of involved stakeholders and the need to make collective decisions. Strategic planning advocates an open process and the broad participation of stakeholders but at the same time it demands clear and decisive definition of strategic aims and internal coherency within activities carried out by participants (Albrechts 2006 p.1156). Generating rich ideas from broad collaborative interaction and eventually deciding which ideas to execute remains a great challenge within strategic planning. This challenge occasionally creates desire for a control mechanism to ensure that agreements and plans find their way to implementation (Roberts 1993 p.760).

The need and the challenge of generating a wide range of ideas while maintaining capacity to select those to be realized, might require different modes of governance as was also acknowledged by advocates of the collaborative approach to planning. The cognitive task of internalizing knowledge requires pluralistic and open networks that engage competitive autonomous actors in a flexible but intensive manner. On the other hand, the effective solution of potential differences between such actors might more likely be found in homogenous forums of interdependent actors that share a common base and may create a stable coalition for change. Relying entirely on open networks of negotiations with many stakeholders is therefore insufficient. There is a need to combine these virtues with an ability to prevail among options even when differences between actors are present. Effective regional governance modes offer therefore an adequate mix of networks and institutions that deliver both communicative practice and the ability to achieve consolidated collaborative output (Benz and Fürst 2002 p.29).

Salet et al. (2003) see in the regional fragmentation a competitive virtue that can raise the 'reception' component of regional strategic capacity as it processes potential innovative knowledge. The 'organizing connectivity' according to Salet et al. needs to help and support the diversity of networks by bringing their innovative potentials into the cooperation. However, bringing the networks towards functional synergetic cooperation under voluntary and uncertain circumstances remains a great challenge as the cooperating parties still "*struggle to make tough decisions under uncertainty, complexity and conflicting human values and interests*" (Dietz et al. 2003 p.1907).

Suggestions of equilibrium conceive the inclusionary mode of an open collaborative process favorable for internalization of knowledge, learning and the generation of ideas. However, to realize coherent output, actors may be better served by an *exclusive* governing mode that would limit the scale of involvement and help consolidate shared

policies. The second research question therefore will refer to the existence of the tradeoff between wide inclusion and high consolidation capacity:

Question 2: Does the inclusion of many stakeholders reduce the RCA's capacity to produce clear and coherent spatial economic strategies and bring those towards implementation?

The literature reviewed suggests that a tradeoff does exist and that broad inclusion in voluntary collaboration will reduce the strategic capacity of RCAs and its ability to define strategic choices and bring those into realization:

Hypothesis 2: RCAs that involve many stakeholders will be less likely to produce clear and coherent spatial economic regional strategies compared to RCAs that involve a limited number of stakeholders.

III. Institutional conditions generating high strategic capacity

In the previous section we have seen two hypotheses concerning the (dis)ability of voluntary RCAs to achieve high competitive strategic capacity for the regions. The first hypothesis suggests low (or no) capacity of voluntary RCA to integrate strategic principles of reception, consolidation and realization (as defined in the strategic capacity model of section 2.1). The second hypothesis provides a potential explanation for the assumed low potential of voluntary RCAs. It postulates a persistent internal tradeoff between the strategic ideal of expanding the number of participants and the principle of producing sharp and content-based strategies participants can realize. It suggests that the increase in the capacity to internalize knowledge through wide inclusion and open collaboration on the one hand will lead to the reduction of the capacity to co-produce and realize clear and coherent strategies.

The formulated questions and the suggested hypotheses are a skeptical approach to the capacity of voluntary and inclusionary RCAs to exercises principles of competitive strategic planning while aiming to enhance regional competitiveness. The hypothesis, if verified, might even discourage regional parties from even taking the first steps towards voluntary and inclusive strategic collaboration. The overarching aim of this research, however, aspires to constructively improve regional collaboration. The goal is to identify institutional conditions that might enable the expansion of RCAs' capacity to collaborate strategically (2.1.2). In the revelation and detection of the enabling institutional conditions lies the prime social and scientific ambition of this research.

2.3 THE ROLE OF POWER IN ENHANCING REGIONAL STRATEGIC CAPACITY

If the absence of power mechanism within a voluntary RCA seems to be a problem, maybe in this institution (*power*) lies the potential for increasing strategic capacity in the regions. This part of the chapter focuses on the interrelations between power and collective action and the role power might have in enhancing the strategic capacity of RCAs. Focusing on power as an enabling institutional condition does not exclude the potential existence of other institutional conditions which hold a positive effect on the strategic capacity of RCAs. However, conditions like trust, leadership, human cognitive characteristics and others will not be explicitly investigated in this work, even though implicitly they are all closely related to power.

2.3.1 Distributive and collective power

Traditional approaches to power, presented by scholars like Weber and Dahl, treated power as an asset attributed to actors (individuals or groups) which enabled them to reward or punish other actors, and bring those actors to execute certain actions (Korpi 1985 p.33). Weber defined power as the ability to carry out one's will even when faced with resistance: "*Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance regardless of the basis on which this probability rests*" (Weber 1978 [1922] p.53). Another classical definition of power comes from Dahl: "*A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do*" (Dahl 1957 p.102). Both scholars treat power as a resource owned by one actor within a relationship that can be exercised over a subordinated entity. Power is distributed as a zero-sum game, as the rise in the power of one actor will necessarily lead to the reduction of power by the other (Heiskala 2001 p.243).

Weber used the term *authority* to express a state of domination in which the usage of power is perceived legitimate by the subordinated. Weber defines domination as the probability that certain commands will be obeyed by a given group of people. Every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance and an interest in obedience (Weber 1978 p.212). The dominant actor holds a means to secure willingness among other actors to comply with the dominating preferences. This compliance is a sustained relationship of dominance and subordination so that regular patterns of inequality are established. The legitimacy of the dominating actors who hold authoritative power is derived from Weber's tripled sources (ibid. p.215):

- Legal/rationality: Belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands;
- Tradition: The established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions;
- Charisma: Devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person and the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.

The distinction between distributive power, in which actors instrumentally use their material resources to influence the behavior of subordinated actors, and power derived from domination and authority, got comparable expression in other seminal works concerning the mechanism of power. Lukes (1974) distinguishes between three dimensions of power that provide explanation of the way power is used to bring the subordinated to behave as desired. He conceived distributive power as derived from ‘resources’, ‘process’ and ‘meaning’.

The first dimension, *power of resources*, relates to the identification of power bases that help actors influence decision-making processes and defeat opposition. Power is thus exercised by actors to influence decision outcomes and bring about the desired behavior using key resources others depend on (information, expertise, political access, stature and prestige, access to higher echelon members, control on money, rewards and sanctions).

The second dimension, *power of process*, refers to the power of actors to prevent certain issues from reaching collective decision-making agendas. By controlling the policy agenda, the powerful can prevent certain issues from being treated politically (ibid. p.18-19). Dominant groups can invoke political routines and procedures that exclude the subordinated from either participating or from even raising their issues within the discussion and bringing those to the political decision-making agenda. Referring to the ‘power of process’ Lukes borrows from the earlier observations of *non-decision making* (Bachrach and Baratz 1970 p.54) and the capacity of the powerful actors to determine outcomes from behind the scenes and prevent certain outcomes to appear by mobilizing the biases embedded in the dialectical process towards decision making (Schattschneider 1960).

In Lukes’ third dimension, *power of meaning*, power is used to shape the perceptions and beliefs of the subordinated so that they accept existing situation and cannot imagine any alternative. Viewed through this prism, the powerful are able to share their notions and preferences with the less powerful (through persuasion and the sharing of values, ambitions and meanings). Lukes contends that the third dimension (power of meaning) will serve the more powerful better than the first and the second dimensions. That is because the cooperation of subordinated stakeholders will be achieved with use of less resources as conflicts will be less likely to occur (Lukes 1974 p.23). The power of meaning, therefore, is the closest dimension to what Weber referred to as *authority*.

Traces of Weber’s distinction between distributive power derived from resources and distributive power resulting from authority are also found in Giddens’ work. He distinguishes between *allocative resources* – conventional materials or the media through which power is exercised, and ‘*authoritative resources*’ – which enable control over the way in which social life is organized (Giddens 1979 in Allen 2003 p.44). Based on this distinction, Giddens specifies the structural forces that shape the nature of collective action and the relations between agencies through: (1) the way material resources are allocated (allocative structures); (2) the constitution of norms, values and

regulations (authoritative structures); and (3) the frame of references, rationalities and ideology of actors and their conception of matters central in their interactions as systems of meaning (Giddens 1984 cited in Healey 2007 p.21). The authoritative structures, like Lukes' 'power of meaning' and Weber's 'authority', pre-suppose an affinity of the subordinated with the preferences of the powerful and what it represents.

Power, however, can be also conceived of as a collective asset as well. It can be exercised together by individuals in order to achieve collective ends rather than as an inherent asset which always works to the advantage of one party and to the disadvantage of another (Arendt 1958, Parsons 1963). The collective approach to power, contrary to the distributive one, conceives power as a good that can be 'produced' as a result of collaboration which reacts to an external force (Allen 2003 p.20). Collaboration thus can produce new power and extend existing powers without the dispersion of power elsewhere (Parsons 1963 p.254). Arendt conceives power as a constructive element that enables a collective to act in concert (Arendt 1970 p.44). The power of the collective has an empowering effect on the group that exercises integrative action ('*power to*') rather than the instrumental power single actors can use at the expense of another ('*power over*'). Rather than viewing the collective achievements through institutionalized political leadership, Arendt observes it solely through the association of parties. Collective power, according to Arendt, is a delicate production transferred between agents only when they come together in action and debate about shared concerns. The power created by association holds parties together in the pursuit of their agreed common ends (Arendt 1958 in Allen 2003 p.53). Effective collective reaction against a superior force and the ability of players to effectively mobilize their resources in concert in reaction to external triggers has an empowering effect on the collaborating actors.

Power can be conceived in the distributive approach as phenomena that actors own and instrumentally use upon each other. According to this approach, what one gains the other loses (zero sum game). Power, however, can also be conceived of as embedded within a collective without being attributed to an individual (structured approach to power, or the power of the collective). The question remains whether distributive and the collective power can really be considered constructive to the co-production of collective action and to enhanced strategic capacity within a group.

2.3.2 Power and collective action

The definition and description of competitive strategic capacity (formulated in section 2.1.2) puts a great challenge on regional stakeholders' attempts to produce sharp and coherent collective strategies. The two governing approaches (governmental reform versus collaborative governance) differ from each other by the way they cope with the complexity of producing strategic collective action. The two approaches are also divided by the way they conceive the role of power for collective action. While the collaborative approach seems to prefer to limit the effect of power concentration and embrace the autonomy and goodwill of stakeholders, the governmental reform approach prefers to (legislatively) create authoritative power concentration to reduce

complexity (2.2.1). The difference comes as a result of different views vis-à-vis the nature of power in network societies and its influence on collective action.

1. The communicative approach to power

Emphasizing the virtue of broad voluntary participation in regional governance, the collaborative approach leans heavily on principles associated with the communicative approach to planning (Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones 2004 p.95-96). The communicative approach is based on Habermas' ideas concerning human collaboration based on 'communicative action' – the interaction of subjects in an attempt to gain understanding of a certain situation in order to coordinate their plans by way of agreement or consensus (Flyvbjerg 2001 p.90). The communicative approach favors the conduction of an open communication process in which parties debate and reach consensus through rational argument. Participants who take part in rational communicative process overcome initial bias in favor of a rationally-motivated agreement. In this process, power is embodied by the convincing force of good argumentation (ibid.).

The communicative approach to collective action conceives participation as discursive and, as such, detached from power differences that exist between collaborating stakeholders. It is therefore often perceived as critical to power (Kahn 1988, Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998, Flyvbjerg 2001). The communicative approach emphasizes the importance of undistorted communication which is free from structural constraints resulting from power differences. When present, such power is likely to impede participants from an equal chance to express their arguments in the discourse and it can prevent the expression of latent meanings in the communicative process (Kahn 1988). Power concentration will shift the communicative process to a certain bias because the rational interactive search will be disturbed by the more powerful actors. Power is therefore regarded as destructive for communicative action as it frustrates mutual understanding within the collaborating stakeholders. Mutual understanding, according to the communicative approach, is only achievable when stakeholders are ready to withdraw from the use of their power during communication and alternatively conduct an open and sincere discussion in search for consensual planning decisions (Flyvbjerg 2001 p.91).

The collaborative approach to planning, though profoundly inspired by the ideas on communicative action, takes a milder position on power. Acknowledging the existence of power bases, the collaborative approach does not necessarily see a need to neutralize them. It considers power as a force that can be transformed through the restructuring of power relations and the social contexts in which individuals operate. Power differences should be recognized and taken into consideration by stakeholders rather than considered a hurdle that needs to be removed (Healey 1997 p.86). That some issues within the political process are kept out of the collective agenda and do not reach the debate is acknowledged: *“All forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflicts and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while*

others are organized out” (Schattschneider 1960 p.71). Explicit expression to the acknowledgement of power’s centrality in enabling collective action appeared in Healey’s later work, where power is conceived as a crucial structuring element that *“generates the force to undertake projects, to infuse protest movements and concentrate effort towards collective projects.... Power is also a generative force, expressed in potentialities – the energy to act, to do things, to mobilize, to imagine and to invent”* (Healey 2007 p.24).

II. Criticism on the communicative approach to power

Healey’s consideration of power as a structural force central to collaborative action might not be surprising, considering the fierce criticism communicative action and its applications to collaborative planning have faced since the 1990s. A growing interest in collaborative planning and consensus building (Healey 1997) has raised opposition among scholars and practitioners to the communicative approach to power (Booher and Innes 2002 p.221). Habermas’ thoughts concerning the desired restriction (if not complete removal) of power in order to eliminate its destructive impact on collective action have raised particular doubts among critics. Many claim that the ideal of limiting the impact of power during actors’ communication is unrealistic: *“Pretending that power does not exist does not make it go away”* (Hardy 1996 p.14). Critics of the communicative approach, often influenced by Foucault and Giddens’s ideas of structured power, have pointed out that communication between actors is already structurally penetrated by power. It is therefore impossible to practice communication in which power is absent at all times (Flyvbjerg 2001 p.96, Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones 2004).

Comparable criticism has described the communicative approach to collective action as naive. The idea that trust and confidence will rise and dissolve power bases when genuine communication takes pace has been heavily doubted. Trust and confidence, according to critics, are not easily built through communication, as stakeholders do not share all their information. They do not tend to reveal all the facts, knowledge and interests in the first rounds of negotiations. A truly successful communicative action is therefore impossible to conduct because power and political action remain dominant determinants. In planning, individuals will be inclined to act according to their own objectives and the power they have. Furthermore, those individuals will also form coalitions with others that share similar values in an attempt to make sure their viewpoints will prevail in any interaction (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998, Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones 2004). Other criticism of the communicative approach centers on the ability of voluntary interaction to lead to an outcome that satisfies participants (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 1998 p.1977). Critics have disputed the pervasive assumption of collaborative planning concerning the superiority of consensus and the perpetual potential to achieve it (most related to Healey 1997): *“There is a danger (if not inevitability) that seeking consensus will silence rather than give voice”* (Tewdwr-Jones et al. 1998 p.1979). Striving solely for consensus reaching, according to the critics, limits the expression of ideas and desires and decreases

pluralism – constraining rather than enabling communication. Some of the critics, as will be reviewed in the next section, have even pointed out that power should not be resented because it holds positive and constructive effects in an interactive collective process.

2.3.3 The constructive role of power in promoting collective action

In his reflections on the three dimensions of power, Lukes refers to the effectiveness of each dimension in promoting the interests held by the powerful and their ability to recruit other stakeholders to their concerns. The instrumental use of material power (power of resources) is conceived as less effective (Lukes 1974 p.23) since it entails the continuous modification of the behavior of dependent actors by the powerful and, therefore, it is limited to short-term tasks (ad-hoc decision making). In order to ensure that desired behavior by dependent actors will be sustained, the deployment of a reward/sanction mechanism must be continuously present (Hardy 1996 p.7). In the second dimension of power (power of process), in which the powerful control the collective agenda-setting, the need for a reward/sanction mechanism is less essential because certain potentially disputable issues do not even come into the collective discussion. Less energy is therefore needed to promote the interests of the powerful as the likelihood for conflicts over unspoken issues diminishes. The third dimension of power (the power of meaning) will soften the interaction between the powerful and the dependent even more. The share of meaning coming from the authority and the capacity of the powerful to bring subordinates to want what he wants, will lead to a harmonious domination of the powerful and to even further reduction of need for conflict management (ibid. p.8).

The suggested constructive impact of power on collective action is not limited to the avoidance of conflicts through exclusion of actors, their seduction or other forms to shape their preferences. The collective approach to power conceives a constructive role for power as well. It considers collective power as a force that forms the networks of collaborating actors and keeps them intact (Allen 2003 p.47). Power to grow the networks entails collaboration, interaction and negotiation between stakeholders and cities (Allen 2008). Allen refers to power as a facilitative entity based upon the ‘power to’ secure networked relationships across tracts of space and time. Translating it to spatial relations between networks of cities, Allen asserts that central cities can occupy a dominant position in their regional network interaction without actually dominating other cities. The power relation between the cities thus is not hierarchical but networked, so the alleged dichotomy of dominating/subordinated is not valid in network relations. The reason cities hold together in functional and communicative networks is because “*they hold out the prospect of positive gains that are too great for those involved not to want*” (Allen 2008). However, the beneficial outcome does not necessarily amount to equal gain for all actors and some benefits might turn to become illusory (ibid.).

Strategic planners have adopted the adjudication that both distributive power (between actors) and structured power (within the collective) might stimulate collective action and strategic planning (Forester 1989, Bryson and Crosby 1993, Hardy 1996, Healey 2007). Forester (1989) acknowledges that power held by urban planners shapes planning communication and that the instrumental use of it violates ideas of rational communicative action. However, Forester pleads for channeling this power constructively through politics in order to promote a rational and effective planning process (Forester 1989 p.120). Instead of eliminating power altogether, Forester offers to focus on the constructive usage of power through inquiry and mediation. The acknowledgement of the centrality of power in collective action and its constructive potentials brought to the emergence of ‘power school’ in strategic planning (Mintzberg and Lampel 1999). Confirming the distinction between distributive individual power and the power structured in the collective, Mintzberg and Lampel assert that *“Two separate orientations seem to exist. ‘Micro’ sees the development of strategies within the organization as essentially political – a process involving bargaining, persuasion and confrontation among actors who divide the power. ‘Macro’ power views the organization as an entity that uses its power over others and among its partners in alliances, joint venture and other network relationships to negotiate “collective” strategies in interest”* (1999 p.25). Urban regime theorists have also considered power as a crucial enabling force to promote collective action in fragmented communities that lack a unified organizational structure: *“What is at issue is not so much domination and subordination as a capacity to act and accomplish goals. The power struggle concerns not control and resistance but gaining and fusing a capacity to act – power to, not power over”* (Stone 1989 p.229).

Advocates of the strategic approach to spatial planning have made an even more explicit appeal for a growing awareness of power’s role in promoting strategic planning (Hardy 1996, Albrechts 2003). Hardy, for example, laments the fact that literature on the strategic approach has avoided the topic of power, needlessly restricting the understanding of the potential of power and thus impeding effective strategic changes (Hardy 1996 p.14). Hardy considers that strategic action is typically based on the mobilization of all three dimensions of power as expressed by Lukes (1974). When the power of resources, processes and meaning all converge, the desired strategic outcome has a fair chance to be realized (Hardy 1996 p.10).

Despite reservations regarding the distortion potential of bias embedded in rules, resources and transformation relations to communication, policy-making and implementation (Bryson and Crosby 1993 p.178), the ability to shape strategic planning processes under the enormous complexity of society is dependent on these forces (ibid. p.191). With the wide acknowledgement of the constructive potentials power might have in promoting strategic planning in corporate management (Mintzberg 1999), public administration (Bryson and Crosby 1993), urban regime theory (Stone 1988, Stoker 2000) and strategic spatial planning (Hardy 1996, Albrechts 2003) it might not be perceived as a great surprise that the collaborative approach to planning has acknowledged these potentials as well.

Healey's acknowledgement of power embedded within the collaboration of stakeholders can be perceived as a deviation from the alleged rejection of the communicative approach to power. Her reference to the beneficial impact of power on regional strategic formation is quite explicit when she considers the formation of regional strategies as "*forces drawn forward through the effort of 'summing up' conceptions of an urban area in ways that selectively lock together some transecting relations, opening up connections to encourage new synergies to emerge, creating a strategy with persuasive and seductive power, which can become itself an 'actor' in the ongoing flow of relational dynamics and have effects on materialities and identities*" (Healey 2007 p.228). The collective power of the collaborating regional stakeholders becomes an independent entity simultaneously 'owned' by the network, yet by no-one in particular. For Healey, the strategic force has an enabling rather than dominating effect ('power to' instead of 'power over'). Confirming this distinction, she asserts that in '*spatial strategic making*', power to mobilize attention and effort of stakeholders is dependent on persuasive and seductive qualities within the network rather than exercising dominance over another actor (ibid.).

The wide acknowledgement that certain types of power have a beneficial and helpful effect on collective action and strategic planning allows the formulation of a third sub research question that will bring the research closer to its aim. To get a better insight into institutional conditions that enhance strategic capacity of competing RCAs the third and last research question can now be formulated:

Question 3: How, and under which conditions, does the concentration of power enhance the strategic capacity of competing RCAs and enable them to engage a wide circle of stakeholders, produce sharp and coherent spatial economic strategies and bring those towards realization?

The following section will present three hypotheses regarding this question. The postulated hypotheses are all based on the synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature regarding the interrelations between strategic planning, regional governance and power.

2.3.4 The role of power for expanding regional strategic capacity

The broad acknowledgement of the constructive role power might have in stimulating collective action calls for further investigation regarding the conditions in which power may enhance regional strategic capacity. Based on the reviewed literature regarding the relations between power and collective action, three sources of power are postulated as potential stimulants for enhanced regional capacity to co-produce spatial and economic

strategies while maintaining the principles of competitive strategic planning. The three sources of stimulating power include the distributive power of an external actor from outside the RCA, the distributive power of an internal actor from within the association and the collective power structured within the RCA itself.

I. External distributive power as stimulus of regional strategic capacity

The elusiveness of defining regional scales (Lovering 1999) and the multiplicity of scales in which spatial issues may play a role (Brenner 2003) illustrate the fact that external forces may influence spatial economic dynamics within the territory for which RCAs coordinate their policies. Focusing solely on events might result in an ‘*undertheorization of causative forces and properties*’ and miss influential forces that extend the scale of the urban region (Macleod and Goodwin 1999 p.505). External forces can form a threat, or alternatively, offer an external incentive for bringing regional parties to act collectively. These communal efforts ‘*enhance their joint power over third parties and over nature*’ (Mann 1986 p.6 cited in Heiskala 2001). Coordinated collective actions, accordingly, are ignited by an external threat or incentive that brings actors within a group to produce what Hillier defines as ‘direct actions’ (Hillier 2000 p.34); collaborating parties try to break the rules of the political game without undermining the foundations of the system of domination by deliberate use of violence. The existence of external actors with resources that can be interpreted as threats as well as opportunities tends to stimulate direct action and gives power to the “*vociferous, articulate, and organized – power to the already powerful*” (ibid.). The less powerful stakeholders lack the confidence, experience and the contacts to act by themselves to the external triggers.

Specific kind of direct actions ignited by the distributive power of an external actor are lobbying activities. Hillier considers collective lobbying activities as “*intrinsically related to power*” as actors lobby by those with the greater power in order to achieve themselves more power in return (ibid. p.38). Furthermore, Hillier considers the disturbance ignited by an external party a pretext for a reactive collaboration of actors. That leads to a first hypothesis concerning the potential role power has in enhancing the strategic capacity of RCAs:

Hypothesis 3: Focal distributive power concentrated by external powerful actors operating from outside the RCA will stimulate the strategic capacity of the RCA as a whole.

The literature regarding regional governance suggests that higher governmental tiers might function as an external actor that stimulates collaboration within a RCA. Amin and Tomaney (1995) consider central states and the EU as promoters and facilitators of urban partnerships. Such institutions, therefore, must be taken into consideration in order to understand intra-regional collaboration attempts. A similar plea comes from

other scholars (Roberts 1993, Macleod and Goodwin 1999, Jones 2001, Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones 2004) asserting that the influence of central states is often neglected in research over growth coalitions aiming to energize regional and urban economies. Many of the produced theories concerning regional governance suffer from “*a failure to integrate analytically into their inquiries a relational account of the state, and theory to neglect the state’s influence in actively shaping the urban and regional fabric*” (Macleod and Goodwin 1999 p.503).

II. Internal distributive power as a stimulant for regional strategic capacity

The stimulating effect of distributive power held by an external actor on the RCA may have a comparable effect when concentrated within the RCA as well. Korpi (1985) observes that differences in power resources between two actors reduce the motivation of the weaker actor to confront the powerful in conflict situations (Korpi 1985 p.35). The weaker party will likely seek to avoid or limit the conflict. In the long run, unequal distribution of resources affects the aspirations of an actor and the degree of relative deprivation experienced in relation to another actor (ibid.). In the same way, more subtle differences in resources between two actors will increase the probability that the weaker party will choose to take a risk and confront the more powerful in a conflict.

Friedmann (1986) refers to the spatial organization of power on a global scale. Cities become, according to him, centers of command and control in hierarchical urban systems as a result of governmental and economic power differences (Friedmann 1986 in Taylor 2004 p.87). The intra-regional differentiation between cities that belong to different hierarchies of city networks leads to differentiation between them in terms of governmental and economic powers. The domination of a central city within the region may offer advantages for regional collaboration. International comparisons regarding different regional governance attempts have revealed that “*those experiments which seem securely established have become so because they are led, or strongly supported, by the central cities*” (Lefèvre 1998 p.21). Enjoying direct access to state resources, central cities gain a leading position within RCAs compared to smaller municipalities. That access to resources allows the leadership of the central cities to extend their power outside their municipal borders towards the surrounding urban areas (Nicholls 2005 p.790).

A second hypothesis concerning the potential constructive impact power has in enhancing strategic capacity of RCAs will be formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Focal distributive power concentrated by powerful actors operating within a RCA will stimulate the strategic capacity of the RCA as a whole.

The formulated hypothesis leans on the explanatory mechanisms reviewed in the theory over power and collective action. It includes a broad definition of the types of

power central actors within the RCA may exercise. Those types of power are heavily based on Lukes' differentiation between the three dimensions of power and their contribution to enhanced strategic capacity:

- The *power of resources* in which a powerful actor within the collaboration imposes its preferences on other actors in the group through sanctions or incentives;

- The *power of process* whereby some issues do not reach the collective discussion as they are blocked by powerful actors. This dimension has also been expressed by urban regime theorists who call it the '*preemptive power*' of any dominant coalition in the urban realm. Stone (1988) identifies preemptive power as the power held by a policy-setting coalition acting as a unified entity that other actors cannot simply challenge. Actors from outside the coalition must seek to reconstitute the coalition or become part of the existing one. The preemptive power of the coalition emerges from the accumulation of interrelated and complementary resources held by the coalition members to enable them to exercise leadership and responsibility within the broader community (ibid.). The preemptive power allows them to act ('power to') and mobilize bias (Schattschneider 1960);

- The *power of meaning* in which subordinated actors are brought to share the preferences of the powerful actors (whether it serves them or not). Stakeholders within the RCA which lack the confidence, the experience and the contacts to act independently might grant powerful stakeholders an authoritative position (Hillier 2000). Even though Weber related the authority derived from charisma to a person (Weber 1978 [1922] p.215) its association with organizations and cities may be equally valid. Charisma embedded by an organization or other impersonalized entity is defined as '*cooptive power*'. Cooptive power, originating in international relations, refers to a situation in which the state achieves desired outcomes within collaboration by bringing other entities to share its desire as though it were their own (Nye 1990a p.168.). An actor with cooptive power will be able to bring other actors to share its favored ideas using the unique position it occupies within the group, and its control of the channels of communication. Other actors in the group develop a strong desire to be associated with the central actor and that is the core of the effectiveness of cooptive power for promoting coherent collective action and high regional strategic capacity. The will to be associated with the central city actor provokes cautiousness in the central actor as its source of cooptive power is its reputation. In order to maintain its position the central actor is required to limit confrontations with the other actors, and occasionally make concessions (Nye 1990b).

The importance of a humble position towards the potential collaborative cities by central ones has been observed in the regional context. In many regional collaborative practices, the central cities understand that they must make concessions in order to gain the required support of their peripheral partners. The tendency of central cities to play the collaborative game as actors equal to the peripheral cities "*is because they are now aware that they need the peripheries in order to develop, or quite simply to keep their place, in the ranks of world cities*" (Lefèvre 1998 p.22). Whether through the 'process' or through the 'meaning', 'preemptive' or 'cooptive' types of power, it seems that a concentration of distributive power in the region will tighten the collaboration and increase its collective strategic capacity as the fourth hypothesis suggests.

III. Collective structured power as a stimulator for regional strategic capacity

The approach that considers power as structured in the collaboration accentuates its contributing potentials for enhancing collective action and increasing strategic capacity of regional collaboration as well. Contrary to the distributive approach, the collective approach to power does not conceive power as a zero-sum resource and power therefore may theoretically increase in its total size (Parsons 1963 p.258). The collective production of power through the joining of forces comes in Parsons' view as a reaction to an external force (see third hypothesis). The distributive power of the external actor may thus trigger collective power by the collaborating parties who react upon it. The collaboration creates collective power used for the benefits of the collaborating parties as a whole (Arendt 1970).

The useful impact of collective power is treated by regime theorists as a force that reinforces the existence and the success of a regime as a governing coalition. Once cooperation has begun, the regime itself becomes a resource to serve its coalition members (Stoker 2000 p.96). A new phase of bargaining can easily evolve between partners with past 'successful' bargaining experience who have a reservoir of trust on which to build. It also makes it more daunting for challengers to attempt and break up and replace the regime (ibid.). Expression of the increased structured power emerging from collaboration between networks of cities and regions is offered by Allen (2008). He asserts that structured power between cities within time and space "*stabilizes a pattern of relationships which enable certain city networks to exert their leverage through collaboration rather than simply domination. In this networked world of distributed authority, outcomes are held out to be positive rather than a zero sum game*" (Allen 2008 unpagged). The increasing effect of the collaboration thus can explicitly exist between collaboration of cities and stimulate cooperation rather than lop-sided domination. Increasing returns resulting from collaboration is a major incentive for the maintenance and the durability of the efforts. Allen refers to these collaborations as "*associations put together by actors who are able to enroll, translate and channel others into networks of meaning in such a way that they extend and reproduce themselves through space and time... When the network fails or the practices employed are ineffective, power simply evaporates*" (ibid.).

The stimulating effect resulting from the collaboration offers potentials for increasing the quality of collective action and the strategic capacity of the RCA. Hardy terms the collective power as the *power of the system* (Hardy 1996). She refers to power embedded deep within the collaborative organization as a whole. This power is often beyond the reach of organizational members and lies in the '*unconscious acceptance of the values, traditions, cultures and structures of the given institution as it captures all organizational members in the web*' (Hardy 1996 p.8). Other advocates of collaboration in planning have attributed the increased interests in the object of their advocacy to the potential of '*network power*' – a flow of power shared by all participants (Booher and Innes 2002). Such power has the potential to reinforce itself as it grows from its own internal dynamics: "*Network power emerges as diverse participants in network focus on a common task and develop shared meaning and*

common heuristic that guide their actions. The power grows as these players identify and build on their interdependencies to create new potentials” (ibid. p.224-225). Network power does not only create new potentials but it also binds the stakeholders together: “Creation of this power can be one of the most potent incentives for participants to stay at the table and continue to work together even after the immediate project is complete. Network power is the glue for collaboration over time” (Innes 2004 p.13).

The review of the reflections sociologists, regime theorists, geographers and strategic planners share over the stimulating effect emergent collective power is likely to have on the collaborating members leads to the fifth and last hypothesis with regard to enabling conditions for high strategic capacity in the regions:

Hypothesis 5: Collective power embedded in the network of actors collaborating within an RCA will enhance the strategic capacity of the RCA as a whole.

2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The order in which the three research sub-questions were presented in this chapter does not reflect the hierarchy between them. The research aim regarding the detection of supporting institutional conditions for enhanced strategic capacity (2.2.1) is best served by the third sub-question concerning the potential role of power for improving collective action. The three sub-questions therefore justify the use of a method most suitable to answer ‘how’ questions. These questions require explorative inquiry methods that may unfold the explanatory mechanism for the observed phenomenon and are best answered by some form of case study inquiry method (Yin 2003 p.7, Gerring 2004 p.346), and in this research a multiple-case design is applied. In the three cases of regional collaborative practice assessed in the coming chapters, the strategic capacity, as a result of different types of power mechanism, will be detected and analyzed. Analysis and comparison will assist reflection on the initial hypotheses.

2.4.1 Cross-case analysis

The search for enabling mechanisms and supportive institutional conditions that would enhance strategic capacity remained open during the early stages of the empirical study. The third research question regarding the postulated impact of power iteratively emerged during the explorative stage of the research and the analyses of the initial empirical data. This is typical practice for building theory from case studies. When existing theories do not yet offer possibilities for hypothesis formulation, concrete formulation of hypotheses may emerge from the overlapping procedure of data collection and its analysis (Eisenhardt 1989). This practice, combined with the theoretical outlines provided in this chapter, generated the insights that led to the

formulation of the three hypotheses regarding the enabling mechanisms of external, internal and collective power in regional collaborative practice.

In order to generate potential explanatory mechanisms and examine validity through literal and theoretical replication (Yin 2003 p.47) small-N cross-case analysis was used. Small-N case studies are preferred for examining contemporary events when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated as within an experiment (Yin 2003 p.7). Evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling and the study is regarded more robust when multiple cases, rather than single ones, are analyzed (Yin 2003 p.46). The logic underlying the use of multiple-case studies is therefore compared to experiments. They may provide comparisons along dimensions of time and space in a manner that emulates virtues of controlled experimental design (Gerring and McDermott 2007). The replication of the original findings allows one to consider the findings robust and worthy of continued investigation. The selection of cases should therefore be conducted in a manner that will reflect either *literal replication* by predicting similar results, or to reflect *theoretical replication* by predicting constructing results but for predictable reasons (Yin 2003 p.47).

In the theoretical replication, controlled selection of cases may define and detect the causality of specific explanatory variables that leads to different outcomes in the different cases. This is the procedure that imitates the use of controlled intervention and the usage of a control group, as practiced in an experiment, within the usage of multiple-case analyses (Mahoney and Goertz 2004, Gerring and McDermott 2007). This variant of the replication principle necessitates the usage of multiple cases in which every case serves specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry, and by that, reflects the replication logic of the findings.

2.4.2 The cases

In this research, RCAs from three different regions of the Netherlands were selected for a multiple-case analysis. The RCAs in all cases explicitly have declared the improvement of regional competitiveness as prime goal of the collaborative activities. Being all conducted within the Netherlands, the investigated cases may be sensitive to a national bias regarding the literal replication (that is, comparable results between the cases). However, the expected differences between the three cases (derived from the theoretical replication approach) reduce the sensitivity for contamination as a result of national bias. As the national context remains the same, the observed differences between the cases cannot be attributed to different national contexts. The selected cases consist of the three established regional collaborative forms practiced in the Netherlands since the end of the 1990s: city networks, city regions, and inter-ministerial program regions (VROM-raad 2008 p.15). At the same time, the three cases differ from each other in the specific variables assumed to influence their strategic capacity. The strategic capacity of all three RCAs is assumed to be *correlated* to the level of voluntarism and inclusion (the variables of the first two hypotheses) and emerging (in a *causal* way) from the presence of coherent external, internal, and collective power (as defined in the last three hypotheses).

The first case presented in the book, the city network of BrabantStad, is an exclusive voluntary RCA in a polycentric region where no city is likely to hold a dominant position upon the others (see appendix 1). The second case, the city region Arnhem-Nijmegen, is an official collaboration with a legislative status operating in a duo-centric region where two larger cities form the regional centers of an urban agglomeration. The third case, Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, is a voluntary collaboration operating in a monocentric region where one central city clearly dominates the regional socio-economic domain. The case of Amsterdam Metropolitan Area was the first case researched and it was this case which provided the data upon which the initial hypotheses were formulated.

The criteria for selecting these cases have been derived from the hypotheses and the aim to combine cross-case analysis with an internal logic that would either predict similar results (constructive influence of power on strategic capacity) or predict contrasting ones (differentiated strategic capacity derived from differentiated dynamics of power). The selected three cases of regional collaboration therefore deviate from each other in aspects regarding the main hypotheses (see table 2.1):

- voluntary vs. compulsory collaboration (hypothesis 1)
- large members' association vs. small members' association (hypothesis 2)
- different status in national policies (hypothesis 3)
- monocentric region vs. polycentric region (hypothesis 4)
- increased vs. reduced collaboration within time (hypothesis 5)

Table 2.1: Overview of the relations between the five hypotheses and the investigated cases

	1. VOLUNTARY RCAS SHOW LOW STRATEGIC CAPACITY	2. INCLUSIVE RCAS SHOW LOW STRATEGIC CAPACITY	3. EXTERNAL POWER STIMULATES STRATEGIC CAPACITY	4. INTERNAL POWER STIMULATES STRATEGIC CAPACITY	5. COLLECTIVE POWER STIMULATES STRATEGIC CAPACITY
BRABANT STAD	Voluntary	Few members	National Urban Network	Polycentric region	No prior data
CITY REGION ARNHEM- NIJMEGEN	Compulsory	Many members	National City Region (WGR+)	Duo-centric region	No prior data
AMSTERDAM METROPOLITAN AREA	Voluntary	Many members	Integrated National Program	Monocentric region	No prior data

The differentiation in the variables specified in table 2.1 provides the analytical base for examining both literal and theoretical replications. The hypotheses and the variables that guide the selection of the cases create different expectations regarding the strategic capacities of the regions and the social mechanisms behind them.

2.4.3 The research process

All three cases in all phases of the research were treated according to replicated inquiry patterns, the research protocol (Appendix 2) that included data analysis based on codified and tacit sources. Data included official policy documents, reports and local and regional media resources. The tacit sources included in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with a variety of practitioners, scholars and politicians, with varying levels of involvement in the RCAs (Appendix 3).

The research process contained three components:

1. Evaluation – in which the strategic capacity of the investigated RCAs was explored and appraised.
2. Generation of hypotheses – In which observed strategic capacity could be explained.
3. Examination and refinement of hypotheses – in which the hypotheses were confronted with the empirical findings of newly-examined cases and their capacity to explain observed variations or supply reasoning for modifications of the hypotheses.

1. Evaluating strategic capacity

The strategic capacity of the investigated RCAs was evaluated based on the three strategic components of reception, consolidation and realization:

- *Reception*: The degree to which the RCA managed to engage a variety of stakeholders in order to expand the circle of knowledge was appraised with the help of a ‘strategic compass’. This tool reflected the intensity in which a wide spectrum of potential stakeholders (governments, private sector, civic groups) was involved in the strategic formation process of the region. The level of connection of each group of stakeholders varied from full connection (RCA members), moderate connection (enduring participation), limited connection (incidental participation) or no connection at all. Potentials for integrating related policy fields were also evaluated based on the themes on which the different RCAs collaborated (see appendix 2);

- *Consolidation*: The degree to which the RCAs managed to produce meaningful action was evaluated based on their collective ability to produce content-based strategy for enhancing regional competitiveness, to conduct communal lobby campaigns, to coordinate internal complementary development and to link between projects and policy fields in a coherent way;

- *Realization*: The considerable time gaps between decision-making and project realization in spatial strategic planning (Faludi and van der Valk.1994) limited the appraisal of this strategic component to the official commitments expressed by external and internal parties of the RCAs. By ‘realization’, therefore, the evaluation focused on the collective success to influence external parties to officially adopt the regional position (lobby) and the collective success to bring internal parties to integrate the regional positions in their local policies as expressed in official decisions.

II. Generating explanatory hypotheses

The interviews were quite demanding of the respondents. Interviewees were confronted by factual, informative questions and by reflective ones. The information coming from the respondents, in combination with the codified empirical data, functioned as an engine for generating potential hypotheses. Respondents were questioned on the strategic capacity of the RCA and the explanatory reasons for the observed capacity. The answers given by respondents were coded with the help of qualitative research software (Atlas.ti) in order to retrieve and detect repetitive patterns that could lead to the generation of the hypotheses likely to explain variation in the degree of regional strategic capacity. In appendix 2 the specification of the questions and the usage of repetitive codes in the research protocol are presented in more detail.

III. Examining and modifying the hypotheses

The first case that was examined in the research is the last case presented in this volume, Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. This case provided the initial insights with regard to the explorative hypothesis and provided a solid base for generating the explanatory hypotheses. The geographical vicinity and the comparable period in which the research was conducted enabled continuous real-time comparison and reflection between the cases. The examination of the hypotheses by the other two cases detected the replicated findings which appeared to fit the expectations. The verifications of the hypotheses were the results of the integral research and are represented in the concluding chapter of this study. Along the research process, the hypotheses regarding the institution of power generated from Amsterdam Metropolitan Area case were fine-tuned to the typology introduced in this chapter as formulated in the last three hypotheses.