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

Haran, N.

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TOUS POUR UN, UN POUR TOUS: THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF BRABANTSTAD

BrabantStad (Dutch for “BrabantCity”) is the name of a Regional Collaborative Association (RCA) of five cities located in the southern province of North-Brabant. The association’s area lies between three major urban agglomerations: the Dutch Randstad, the Flemish Diamond and the German Ruhr area. As the name suggests, the cooperation wishes to emphasize the *urban* features of North-Brabant, an area traditionally associated with a serene, rural character. By collaboration and coordination, members of BrabantStad wish to harness the urban cores of their RCA for increased regional competitiveness and attractiveness for investments from public and private investors. The ambition of the collaborating parties is bold: *“BrabantStad has the ambition to cooperate towards a complementary supply of top locations and top services, to expand itself towards a coherent urban area... and to manifest itself as one of the leading knowledge and innovation regions of Europe”* (BrabantStad 2004a p.8).

This chapter will examine the capability of this voluntary RCA to guide spatial economic developments according to principles of competitive strategic planning. It will also trace the impact of power on the RCA’s strategic capacity. The formulated hypotheses postulate that, due to the voluntary character of BrabantStad, this RCA should not demonstrate high strategic capacity (first hypothesis). However, the limited number of collaborating members should increase the collective ability to produce content-based strategies and promote coordinated development (second hypothesis). The expectation is that the compact size of BrabantStad will moderate the expected negative impact of its voluntary character on strategic capacity.

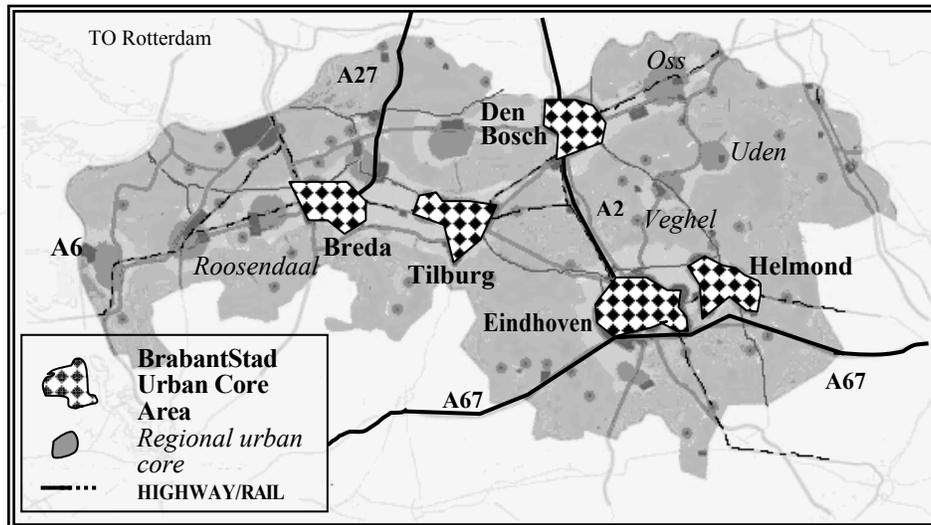
The BrabantStad case is described and analyzed as follows: The first part (3.1) describes the context in which BrabantStad operates and will provide the background, the organizational setting, and the strategic output of the RCA. In the second part (3.2), the strategic capacity of BrabantStad will be analyzed based on the analytical model introduced in chapter two. In this part, the involvement of stakeholders (‘reception’), the ability to define long-term strategy, to make bold choices and combine activities coherently (‘consolidation’) will be revealed. Bringing strategic decisions towards implementation (‘realization’) is the complementary component that will be traced in the evaluation of BrabantStad’s strategic capacity. Reflections about the relations between the voluntary character of the RCA, the level of inclusion and the observed

strategic capacity will complete this section. The third section (3.3) provides the institutional analysis of the relation between the three types of power distinguished in the hypotheses (external, internal and collective power) and the RCA's strategic capacity. The chapter will end with a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions and the formulated hypotheses (3.4).

3.1 THE POLYCENTRIC URBAN NETWORK OF BRABANTSTAD

BrabantStad represents the cooperation of five medium-sized cities in an urban network which has a relatively strong polycentric character in social and economic terms (see appendix 1). The population in the five participating cities is quite evenly spread (Central bureau voor statistiek 2007): Eindhoven and Tilburg form the largest municipalities (respectively 209,000 and 202,000 residents in 2006), followed by Breda (170,300), Den Bosch (136,000) and Helmond (86,000). Functionally, the region is highly differentiated in its economic profile. Western municipalities (Breda and its surrounding municipalities) are characterized by maritime-related industries and services as they have strong economic relations with the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp. Eindhoven, Helmond and Den Bosch, on the other hand, have stronger high-tech industries, and technology-related financial and juridical services (Ministerie EZ 2004 p.63-65).

Figure 3.1: The North-Brabant province and the BrabantStad cities (Based on Provincie Noord Brabant 2006)



3.1.1 Background and initiation of BrabantStad

With their varied population, the five cities of BrabantStad belong to the medium-sized category of Dutch cities, smaller than the larger cities of the Randstad (Amsterdam, Rotterdam the Hague and Utrecht). Partly because of the prime economic and demographic position of the larger cities of the Randstad, the BrabantStad cities have traditionally perceived the spatial economic policies of the national government as biased. Indeed, the region's desire to moderate the perceived bias of the central government in favor of the Randstad was the prime pretext for the initiation of BrabantStad. In the early 1990s, the fourth memorandum for national spatial planning concentrated investments and policies on the growth of the Randstad. The area of North-Brabant was conceived in national policies as the hinterland of the Randstad by which future growth of the Randstad could be accommodated (Priemus 1998 p.446). Not only perceived central governmental bias but also initiatives to promote administrative reforms were seen as threats by North-Brabant province and some of its cities. For instance, the initiative to create a separate governmental entity in the form of a city province around Eindhoven (see paragraph 1.3 in the first chapter) was viewed as a threat to the unity of the North-Brabant province. These threats brought the province and its larger cities to reaffirm regional unity and radiate regional liability that would secure administrative integration and would increase competitiveness with the Randstad (Janssen-Jansen 2004 p.199-200).

The first opportunity to exercise this unity and influence central government occurred when the National Program for Large Cities Policy (*Nationaal Programma voor Grootstedelijk Beleid*) was launched by a specially-appointed minister to tackle the social and economic problems of the larger cities in the mid 1990s. In this program, the central government offered financial support for strengthening the socio-economic profile of designated large cities (Priemus and Mariën 2002). The national program prompted the commissioner of North-Brabant to create a discussion forum between the province and its larger cities where parties coordinated and advised each other on how to apply the central government program for the benefit of North-Brabant's large cities.

The commitment of the province towards its urban municipalities grew even further with the formation of a parallel regional cooperative in the south-east of the province: City Region Eindhoven. The emergence of City Region Eindhoven alarmed the province. It was afraid of losing influence in Eindhoven's area, so it tried again to strengthen the relations with and between the cities (Janssen-Jansen 2004 p.199).

The combination of central governmental focus on Randstad cities in national policies and the reduction of provincial influence on its south eastern part brought the province to combine a strong affinity with its rural cores with the strengthening of its collaboration with its cities (ibid.).

The joint effort of the province and its cities to radiate integrality and vitality on a national scale achieved official acknowledgement when the fifth national memorandum on spatial planning appeared at the beginning of 2001. In this

memorandum, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of Spatial Planning) introduced the concept of ‘Urban Networks’ (*Stedelijke Netwerken*) as the guiding principle for national policies and central governmental investments. One of the essential urban networks defined by the central government was the urban network of BrabantStad (Ministerie VROM 2001 p.189).

The subsequent national memorandum, ‘Space’ (nota ‘*Ruimte*’), officially designated BrabantStad as the second national urban network after the Randstad. This status brought the Ministry of Spatial Planning to encourage the cities to produce integrated and coherent spatial policies within the network (Ministerie VROM et al. 2006a p.67). However, the ministry’s vision of BrabantStad as an integrated single spatial network of cities was not shared by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. According to this ministry, the region had a different spatial spread of clusters which did not form an integrated economic network. For example, Breda, as part of West Brabant, had strong relations with the logistic and harbor economic core, while Eindhoven, Helmond and the rest of South-east Brabant formed a cluster of innovative industries. This innovative cluster got its own national status as “Brainport” – a national economic motor for the knowledge industries (Ministerie EZ 2004 p.64).

The distinctive character of South-East Brabant and the cities of Eindhoven and Helmond were further accentuated by the inter-ministerial national program for the area launched by the central government (see 1.3 in chapter 1). The Minister of Economic Affairs was appointed to be the head of the inter-ministerial program that consulted with the region’s stakeholders over potential central governmental investments in South-East Brabant. The five cities of BrabantStad collaborated therefore under different spatial conceptualizations of the different ministries. Their status as integrated urban network was embraced by Ministry of Spatial Planning but it was not shared by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

3.1.2 Organization

BrabantStad is a voluntary collaboration of the province and its five largest cities. It has neither legal status nor a legislative body. It consists of a collective steering committee and theme groups composed of aldermen and provincial executives. Every city sends one alderman (usually with the local portfolio for spatial planning, transport or economy) which together with the provincial executive for BrabantStad form the executive committee of the RCA. This committee distributes different issues to be further debated by the groups of aldermen and civil servants responsible for spatial planning, mobility, social issues and economic affairs. The city mayors and the provincial commissioner form a support team for the activities of the steering group, representing the interests of BrabantStad externally to ministries and other potential stakeholders.

Every six weeks, on Thursdays, the aldermen and the mayors from the five cities gather in the province house for consultations (“The Thursday consultation rounds” as known in the collaborative jargon). Divided by theme groups according to their portfolios, the aldermen discuss current matters regarding different projects with regional relevancy prepared jointly by the civil servants of the five cities and the province. BrabantStad makes use of a special coordination bureau managed by an external manager. This bureau coordinates and facilitates the collaborative process by maintaining communication and coordination between partners and monitoring of processes and the fulfillments of the agreements. The activities of the bureau and other collective expanses of collaboration are financed by an annual contribution of the BrabantStad members to a collective budget. The yearly budget for current expenses of the collaboration is estimated at approx. €390,000 (BrabantStad 2008b, p.14).

Next to the internal consultation rounds taking place six to eight times a year, BrabantStad members consult twice-yearly directly with the central governmental administrative platform for BrabantStad (Ministerie VROM 2006a p.68). In this platform the five mayors and the commissioner of the province meet the ministers of spatial planning, transport and water management for broad consultations over regional issues of direct relevance for the central government. The ministries of agriculture and economic affairs are represented in these consultations by high-ranking civil servants.

3.1.3 Regional Strategic Output

Acknowledging BrabantStad as the second-most important national urban network by the central government (Ministerie VROM et al. 2006a) has tightened the network’s cooperation and led its members to produce a series of shared documents specifying their collective intentions for the years to come. Since 2001, BrabantStad has produced different studies and policy documents in which the collective short and long-term ambitions have been spelled out. As of 2008, BrabantStad has produced three short-term programs and made an attempt to draw up a long-term vision for the region.

1st BrabantStad Program (2002-2003)

The first program (composed in 2001) was the first collective document BrabantStad issued immediately after the acknowledgement of the RCA as an integrated city network by the central government. The program included projects and ambitions originating from the collective program the cities and the province composed to apply for the National Program for Large Cities conducted in the 1990s. The ambitions formulated originally for the previous socio-economic large-cities policies were shifted for the first BrabantStad program, which defined four key policy areas for collaboration (Provincie Noord Brabant 2001):

1. Realization of a robust accessibility to and within the BrabantStad urban network;
2. Integration of rural areas with the qualities of urban built environment;

3. Provision of a rich supply of different services for a varied population;
4. Strengthening city centers through concentrating development around transit stations.

While composing the first program, some studies and consultation rounds took place in order to learn more about BrabantStad's network characteristics. The report "Top Facilities BrabantStad" explored the potential and the needs for top facilities in the region in the fields of sport, culture, welfare and education. This report explored the synergetic effect different potential projects would have on the network. Projects submitted already by the cities were ranked according to their regional importance (rather than their local significance) and according to common willingness to finance and promote them collectively (BrabantStad 2003 p.4). In its advice, the report prioritized only the realization of an Olympic swimming pool in Eindhoven as a single project eligible for the immediate financial *and* lobbying support of BrabantStad. Other projects, including the creation of BrabantStad medical school in Eindhoven and Tilburg, the foundation of a green campus in Helmond and the projects of (renewed) congress centers in Den Bosch, were found eligible only for the collective lobby support of BrabantStad (but not for collective financing). Other projects explored in the study were not acknowledged as even eligible for the collective lobby because of their limited relevancy to the region as a whole. Those projects included among others a music hall in Den Bosch, a textile museum in Tilburg and a graphic museum in Breda (ibid. p.21-22).

2nd BrabantStad Program 2004-2008

The second program composed in 2003 declared the ambition to promote the region within Europe and become a recognizable urban entity utilizing internal complementariness and enhanced competitiveness to become a leading innovative region (BrabantStad 2004a p.9). In this program, the participants followed the four policy lines specified in the first program (2002-2003) as their basis for defining projects to be realized collectively. These projects were quite eclectic in nature and included the expansion of the public transport network between the cities, the realization of a green buffer around the cities, the development of a vision for the national landscape 'De Groene Woude', the setting up of a BrabantStad shared cultural festival and the conduction of collective promotion campaigns for the region. Some projects, like the development of the station areas in all five cities and the creation of enabling conditions for transport via the rivers, had a generic character as they were valid to all five cities.

The majority of the projects that were gathered in the five years program had a local character as they were submitted individually by the different municipalities. These projects included:

- Realization of a new southern station area ("Via Breda") and realization of a shuttle connection to the HSL network via Rotterdam and Antwerp;
- Expansion of Eindhoven's airport;

- Development of an east-west corridor for Eindhoven;
- Development of top services in the five cities;
- Tackling bottlenecks in the regional road network, and improving accessibility to the City Region Eindhoven from the east;
- Establishing a medical school and a green campus in Helmond;
- Establishing a graphic museum in Breda;
- Establishing a textile museum in Tilburg;
- Establishing an aquatic stadium in Eindhoven;
- Expanding the Brabanthallen congress center in Den Bosch.

Surprisingly enough, projects like the graphic and textile museums that were tagged as ineligible for the RCA's collective lobbying efforts in the report regarding top facilities in the region (BrabantStad 2003 p.21), did find their way into the five-year program for BrabantStad (BrabantStad 2004a).

3rd BrabantStad Program 2008-2012

The third BrabantStad program for the years 2008-2012 was composed after the elections for the provincial council in 2007, and was based on six policy lines defined during the formation of the provincial coalition. The municipal councils of the five collaborating cities adopted the policy lines of the province and used it as a basis for the new BrabantStad program (BrabantStad 2007b p.1). Six program lines were defined as the backbone upon which projects would be initiated (BrabantStad 2008 p.17):

1. *Attractive cities*: upgrading urban areas in the vicinity of train stations and developing the banks along the canals;
2. *Green cities*: maintaining robust open and green spaces between cities;
3. *Dynamic cities*: investing in education, knowledge-base industrial centers and cultural events (including promoting BrabantStad as the European Capital of Culture in 2018);
3. *Perspective cities*: investing in the social dimension of urban problems;
5. *Accessible cities*: improving the accessibility of BrabantStad and of its main centers;
6. *Connected cities*: communicating the idea of BrabantStad to citizens, potential stakeholders and the private sector.

Some of the project's specifications in the six policy lines (e.g. development of station areas, and improving transport infrastructure) were not new. They originated from the former program of 2004-2008. But the more socially-oriented projects (especially *Perspective cities*), were a fresh initiative of the executive board of the province (BrabantStad 2008a p.1). And in contrast to the 2004-2008 program, where no financial arrangements were specified, in the 2008-2012 program BrabantStad's partners reserved a budget of €1.4bn to realize the new program and the more than 60 projects it featured. Some €600m would be reserved for the individual cities and €350m invested by the province. The remaining €450m would be financed by external actors in the future, primarily the central government and the EU (BrabantStad 2008a p.18). By the time the program was composed (mid 2008), however, no concrete agreement with external parties concerning the financing of the program had yet been reached.

Long term strategy BrabantStad 2035 – Brabant Mosaic Metropolis

The three programs composed by BrabantStad focused on short term actions over five years and had no long term strategy or shared regional vision. An attempt to create a long-term strategy for BrabantStad took place in 2006. For this purpose, BrabantStad's partners created 'BrabantStad Workshop' (*BrabantStad Atelier*) in Tilburg, a studio where representatives of the partners could meet, reflect and discuss spatial concepts and future scenarios for BrabantStad. The time horizon for the strategy was 2035, and in an attempt to create a shared basis for long-term spatial economic strategy, different parties from the private sector, NGOs and cultural organizations were invited to reflect on and to give their own insights to BrabantStad.

A year of consultations and negotiations resulted in a working document that acknowledged the unique character of BrabantStad as a 'mosaic' – an area where a delicate reciprocated relation between the cities and their green hinterland existed. Based on this mosaic character, three scenarios for potential visions for the coming 30 years were sketched out. Each of the scenarios was accompanied with a set of measurements for potential implementation.

The three scenarios expressed different degrees of urbanity and economic activity (BrabantStad 2007d):

1. "*Burgundy BrabantStad*" emphasized the authenticity of BrabantStad and embraced its quiet serenity;
2. "*Dazzling BrabantStad*" favored the enhancement of urban vitality and the introduction of a new élan to urban culture in the five cities;
3. "*Booming Brabant*" represented the development of BrabantStad as an urban network with international impact through intensive development and increased economic activity.

The outcome of the BrabantStad studio's activities was quite vague. It recommended promoting complementary relations between the cities, based on their spatial characteristics, but it did not specify how those spatial differences would lead to concerted complemented spatial and economic developments of the cities.

3.2 THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF BRABANTSTAD

The analysis of BrabantStad's strategic capacity focuses on the three strategic elements of competitive strategic capacity defined in the second chapter: reception, consolidation and realization. An RCA with high strategic capacity is seen as capable of maximizing and integrating all three strategic components. According to the first hypothesis, the voluntary character of BrabantStad is likely to yield mediocre strategic capacity that should accentuate the limits of voluntary collaboration. However, the second hypothesis suggests relatively high consolidation capacity for BrabantStad's six

members as it assumes that the limited number of involved stakeholders will increase collective decisiveness and coherent strategic output.

3.2.1 Reception

The variety and the intensity to which different stakeholders are involved in the strategic formation process indicate the degree to which relevant information is diffused into the RCA and knowledge is created. Knowledge helps portray the right strategic actions resulting from considerations of external conditions, internal resources and potential synergies. This section presents an overview of the degree of involvement of various actors from the public sector: governments (within the region, neighboring regions and from higher governmental levels), the private sector (corporate representatives and private companies) and the not-for-profit sector (NGOs, research centers and education centers).

I. Local and regional governments

BrabantStad is an exclusive organization limited to the province of North-Brabant and region's five cities. No other municipality in the region joined BrabantStad since the initiation of the collaboration at the end of the 1990s. Neighboring medium-sized municipalities like Oss, Bergen op Zoom, Waalwijk, Uden and Roosendaal which showed an interest in joining the collaboration were not allowed to take part in the regular consultations. Prohibiting new municipalities from taking part created a certain degree of animosity among the excluded municipalities. Some of them initiated alternative strategic engagements in the region where their local interests could be better promoted.³ BrabantStad members however, informed other municipalities over the outcomes of their internal consultations. Every member informed and involved smaller municipalities located in their immediate hinterland. Levels of information and involvement varied, but non-members of BrabantStad had no real possibility to influence BrabantStad directly and break their exclusion from the RCA.

II. Neighboring regional governments

BrabantStad's members did not engage other municipalities or provinces from neighboring regions in their composition of the RCA's programs and the long-term strategy for 2035. When interactions with other municipalities from neighboring regions did take place they were initiated locally by an individual BrabantStad member (for example, the collaboration between Eindhoven and the cities Leuven and Aken in the fields of innovative industries). Local collaborations between individual members with other stakeholders were not integrated within BrabantStad's strategic formation process. An exception was the collaboration with Venlo, a municipality at the north of

³ Local alliances of excluded municipalities were created by Oss, Uden and Veghel in the east, and by the several municipalities in the west of Brabant. The Province of North-Brabant regularly consulted seven middle-sized municipalities in a parallel forum to this of BrabantStad.

the Limburg province. Since 2005, it has enjoyed tighter collaboration with BrabantStad. Venlo's agricultural and food industry, together with its strategic position in the central governmental inter-ministerial program for South-East Brabant and North Limburg – stimulated BrabantStad to consider this city as a strategic partner (BrabantStad 2006 p.6). With the engagement of Venlo, BrabantStad hoped to create a 'bridge' to the neighboring German state of Nordrhein-Westfalen. The collaboration, however did not yet lead to enduring consultations over the relations between BrabantStad and Venlo. Comparable bilateral consultations between the province of North-Brabant and Flanders in Belgium did not bring representatives of Flanders to the regular consultation meetings of BrabantStad, either.

III. Higher tiers of government

Ministries maintained communication with BrabantStad during the formation of regional programs and long-term strategies. The Ministry of Spatial Planning encouraged the formation of a long-term strategy and co-financed with the province the activities of the BrabantStad Workshop. Representatives of the ministry observed and advised during BrabantStad's consultations. They were also present in some of the consultations of the BrabantStad Workshop. The Ministry of Economic Affairs, however, showed little involvement with the strategic formation process of BrabantStad, despite its role as a coordinator of the national program for South-east Brabant and North Limburg. Nevertheless, some of the projects BrabantStad promoted enjoyed financial support from the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Next to the recurring interaction between BrabantStad and representatives of the ministries, a top level consultation platform took place between representatives of the ministries of spatial planning, transport, agriculture and economic affairs and the five mayors and the commissioner of North-Brabant Province. These were high level meetings in which discussions and updates between the region and the central government took place. At European level, BrabantStad had its own active lobby in Brussels aiming to identify and exploit potential subsidies and relevant European programs.

IV. Private sector and societal organizations

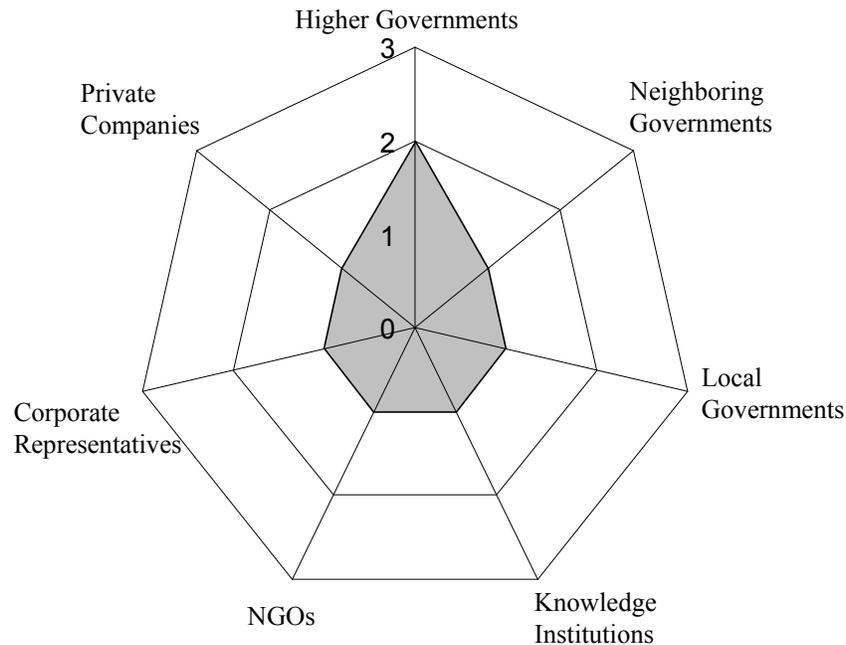
As a public sector-oriented collaboration, BrabantStad had little engagement with private organizations and NGOs during the composition of its five-year programs. When such dialog did occur, the involvement was mainly conducted with private sector representatives (Chamber of Commerce) and seemed to have an incidental character. Such engagements were often ad hoc or limited to occasional private sector participation in the discussions conducted in "BrabantStad Workshop" during the formation of the regional vision for the year 2035. During the composition of this vision there was an attempt to involve parties from the private sector in several earlier workshops and include their insights and preferences in a defined regional strategy. The private parties and the NGOs, however, were not involved in the decision-making process that took place during the composition of the long-term strategy itself. They were invited to inform and to share their positions, but they were not engaged further for the consolidation of concrete integrated strategy. Many of the respondents asserted

during interviews that private companies (with the exception of real estate companies) were not keen to join open sessions for the composition the long-term strategy in the “BrabantStad Workshop”. Planners from private consultancies and scientists from regional universities played a more active role but their contribution to the composition of BrabantStad’s five-year program remained equally limited.

V. The strategic compass of BrabantStad

Figure 3.2 illustrates the channels of knowledge diffusion in BrabantStad. The relatively introverted position of the RCA is evident as parties other than the central government were only incidentally involved in BrabantStad’s strategic forming process. Municipalities other than the five BrabantStad members were only incidentally represented in the formation of BrabantStad’s programs or its long term strategy. BrabantStad had tighter relations with higher governmental tiers, especially the central government and the ministries of spatial planning and transport with whom consultation took place every so often. Communication and collaboration with European institutes or with neighboring regions was limited and did not extend to lobbying. Representatives of NGOs and the private sector as well were only incidentally involved in the strategic formation of the primarily inter-governmental BrabantStad.

Figure 3.2: Strategic compass BrabantStad (0= No Participation, 1= Incidental participation, 2= Enduring participation, 3= Permanent participation)



VI. Multiplicity of collaborative policy fields

BrabantStad composed short-term programs that included dozens of projects related to different policy fields. Most of the projects were related to transport and infrastructure, economic issues and the relation between the built environment and open green areas. The multiplicity of policy fields BrabantStad engaged in during the composition of its programs was also expressed by the twice-yearly top consultations between BrabantStad's political leadership and the representatives of the ministries of spatial planning, transport & infrastructure, economic affairs and agriculture. However, housing and spatial strategies remained a local matter to be handled individually by the five municipalities and found no trace within BrabantStad's collective activities. Bringing issues from different policy fields into the collaborative regional consultations created opportunities for synergy. Whether the BrabantStad members managed to exploit these synergetic opportunities will be discussed in the coming section (3.2.2) when the second component of competitive strategic capacity (consolidation) will be analyzed.

3.2.2 Consolidation

The second component of the strategic capacity of BrabantStad is the aggregating process in which ideas, interests and ambitions of the different parties involved are consolidated into shared strategies and collective strategic decisions for the region. The analysis of this strategic component focuses on the region's collective capacity to designate integrated strategies for the region, coordinate actions and produce a coherent set of activities to be carried out by the participating actors. The synergy which enhances competitiveness is derived from the achieved level of fit and the degree of affinity between the selected projects.

I. Content-based strategy, selectivity, and internal fit

The strategic output of BrabantStad is composed of a series of short-term programs consisting of independent projects the members of the RCA agreed to promote. These programs were not based on agreed-upon spatial economic strategic concepts or on any defined complementary profiles in the cities. Instead, the projects chosen were the result of a tendency to exploit immediate opportunities to generate and finance new projects rather than really coherent strategic base that could guide regional development. The first program of 2002-2003 was produced immediately after the publication of the Fifth Memorandum on spatial planning and focused on the promotion of nine projects originating from the Structural Economic Investment (*ICES Bijdragen*) of the central government for economic support (Gemeente Den Bosch 2002). The projects mentioned in the first program are those which the BrabantStad members considered more likely and easy to promote. The coordinating team of the first program advised RCA members to start with a limited number of projects where positive results could be quickly achieved (*ibid.*). BrabantStad's second program

(2004-2008) included a richer list of projects from different sectors (including transport, economic, cultural and spatial projects). This program, however, reflected the sum of local projects submitted independently by the cities, with limited selectivity or internal prioritization. Moreover, it included projects that earlier agreements (BrabantStad 2003) deemed unqualified for collective promotion since their importance for the region was quite limited (see 3.1.3). Actual capacity to select and prioritize among the submitted projects was not observed during the composition of the program 2004-2008.

Respondents contended that the BrabantStad city members saw in the composition of the 2004-2008 program a unique opportunity to promote their local ambitions along with projects they planned to promote anyhow. As the program included local ambitions and lacked any regional content-based guidelines which could have promoted selectivity and prioritization there is little wonder that the ambitions to promote complementariness between the cities yielded limited results. The five cities were reluctant to agree upon any strategic decision that might regulate the functional relations between them and guide their future land-use patterns (Provincie Noord Brabant 2004 p.12). The absence of a content-based strategy, and the inability to prioritize between projects did not escape the attention of the Ministry of Spatial Planning. Watching the process closely, the ministry urged the RCA parties to be more selective and to present coherent reasoning when pleading for co-financing for certain projects mentioned in the program.

The lack of a content-based strategy, which could supply reasoning for the selection and combination of projects, was one of the reasons why the ministry encouraged (and co-financed) the initiation of the BrabantStad Workshop in 2006 and supported attempts to produce a long-term strategy for the region. The BrabantStad Workshop yielded neither concrete long-term strategy nor clear selection of a desired scenario for future development. Parties participating in the workshop did not provide a clear spatial concept that could generate future regional development and create links between new projects. Defining a distinctive functional profile for the cities as a base for future cooperation in development or the promotion of complementariness proved an ambition too far to reach at this stage of the collaboration.

The absence of a designated spatial economic strategy did not stop BrabantStad's partners from composing another five-year program (2008-2012). Many of the projects mentioned in the previous program (e.g. development of the station areas, tackling mobility problems and conducting collective regional marketing) had a long-span implementation process and thus were also included in the new program. The 2008-2012 program maintained the tendency to accumulate projects of different levels and urgencies, with little capacity (or desire) to select among them or combine them towards integrated and coherent regional development.

An effort to coordinate and increase coherence between the five cities concerned the development of train stations in each of the five city centers. All five cities adopted the concept of concentrating urban development in the vicinity of transit hubs. Initially,

however, they started the development with no coordination with one another. The province and the management of BrabantStad were aware of the potential risks coming from uncoordinated simultaneous development and therefore hired external consultants. The consultants were asked to monitor and analyze the different plans of the cities for their station areas and point out internal competition. The consultants' findings confirmed the suspicions of the BrabantStad management regarding the alarming similarity of the different development programs. The plans of the five station areas carried similar content and were scheduled for the same period. That meant double-edged risks concerning potential rise in construction prices and to a flood of offices available on the market at the same time (Buck Consultation International 2006). Despite the alarming signals coming out of the advice, the parties did not initiate an inter-municipal coordination regarding aligning development of their station areas in time and content.

The projects mentioned in the different programs came from different policy fields (economy, culture, transport) and met no prior analysis at the level of the RCA. The exception was the network analysis for transport (BrabantStad et al. 2006). But matching policy fields and detecting opportunities for combined projects from different fields did not occur. Although multiple policy fields entered the BrabantStad discussions, they were not combined into a coherent strategy. Just like with the individual projects, economic, transport and spatial development took parallel independent courses consisting of merely incidental interactions.

II. Showing unity and achieving prioritization

Much of BrabantStad's collective efforts during the first years of collaboration were dedicated to lobbying to promote its members' projects. Attracting external investments into the region was an explicit aim of the RCA during early years; the 2004-2008 program was primarily considered an administrative vehicle to secure and maximize investments in the region (BrabantStad 2004a p.10). Respondents from BrabantStad's management said that the leading tactic during the composition of the program was to increase the amount of local projects entitled for funding. With this tactic they aimed to reduce the negative effect of internal competition between the five cities for the limited resources available within the region. By efficient lobbying, BrabantStad aimed to increase the likelihood for more local ambitions to be financed through the collective effort. Efficient collective lobbying, however, required discipline among RCA members. Respondents emphasized that success in attracting private and national investments was dependent on the capacity of RCA members to radiate unity and consensus towards external parties.

Simultaneous and intensive lobbying for a long list of projects raised eyebrows among some ministries. The Ministries of Spatial Planning, Economic Affairs and Transport urged BrabantStad members to show more selectivity and prioritize between potential projects in order to be eligible for central governmental funding. Respondents from the province and the different cities confirmed that the critical position of the central

government urged them to prioritize between potential projects for lobbying efforts. However, the absence of a content-based strategy that could distinguish the projects that serve the region best did not stop the RCA members from achieving enough selectivity to satisfy the ministries. Instead of content-based selection of the different projects submitted for lobbying, BrabantStad members developed a sequential alternative in which each of the municipal projects got the active support of the other BrabantStad members by turn. When the Ministry of Transport, for instance, cut its budget for financing station area development in all five cities, members internally agreed to push forward only the developments of the station areas of Breda and Tilburg. The development of the stations in Eindhoven, Helmond and Den Bosch were collectively promoted at a later stage. With the principle of sequential distribution, the five cities could collectively appeal for a single project and achieve the unity needed for effective lobbying.

Similarly, BrabantStad's members prioritized different infrastructure projects. They detected the most acute bottlenecks with the most cost-effective interventions as revealed by the network analysis (BrabantStad et al. 2006) and used this knowledge to specify a limited number of projects for which they lobbied the Ministry of Transport. The infrastructure projects consisted of the following:

- In south-east BrabantStad: improving the A2 motorway between Den Bosch and Eindhoven, the N279, the A67 towards north Limburg, and the A27 in the west;
- Tackling bottlenecks in corridors of public transport (Amsterdam-Eindhoven-Maastricht and Den Haag-Eindhoven-Ruhr area);
- Short terms projects: introducing Dynamic Transport Management system, realizing a third platform in Breda's central station.

Respondents revealed that the sequential principle was used to prioritize between regional projects as well. The BrabantStad members decided to lobby together first for tackling the accessibility problems in the east, (A2 and A67) and only at a later stage, to lobby for the projects related to the western part of Brabant, along the A27.

III. Conflicts, their impacts and resolution mechanisms

The success in bringing BrabantStad's members to radiate unity behind selected projects during lobbying did not eliminate rivalries and competition between the six members. Occasionally conflicts arose. The first type of conflicts emerged from unilateral initiatives of projects which were not agreed upon during the composition of the five year programs. In 2005, Tilburg decided to invest €13 million in a new ice-skating stadium. Other cities, particularly Breda, fiercely objected to Tilburg's initiatives, worried that Tilburg's rink would draw visitors from existing facilities in their municipalities. Breda pressurized Tilburg to change its plans, blaming it for jeopardizing BrabantStad's attempts to create complementariness between the five cities and reduce internal competition in the region. The protest, however did not lead to the abolishment or the revision of Tilburg's plan (BN De Stem 2005). More severe

conflicts centered on another Tilburg initiative – the realization of a shopping centre of a commercial area of more than 100,000sqm. Tilburg informed its partners in BrabantStad over its intentions, but did not let their furious reactions affect its plans. Just as in the case of the ice rink, the objection of the four other cities was to prevent undesired inter-municipal competition. With their objection to the mall they tried to avoid the potential threat to their local retailers.

The protests brought Tilburg to investigate the consequences of the planned mall on the regional retail market. The other four cities, however, did not trust Tilburg's investigation and demanded to freeze the plans for the mall pending their own investigation. Tilburg initially did not agree to wait for external research conducted by the other BrabantStad cities or to freeze its plans. Newspapers cited angry politicians expressing their disappointment that unilateral local initiatives were *once again* revealing the fragility of BrabantStad and its inability to restrain local ambitions and promote complementariness (Brabants Dagblad 2008). After two parallel investigations took place (one by Tilburg and one by the other cities) and as the commotion around the mall continued, the municipality of Tilburg decided to let the decision be made by its own residents in the form of a referendum.

Other strife occurred when members of the RCA did not act according to collective agreements. That was occasionally the case when new subsidies from the central government became available for regional investments. For example, during the 2004-2008 regional program, some of the BrabantStad cities had to be reproached by the other members for failing to act in accordance with the sequential distribution agreements upon which their collaboration was based. During the composition of the central government's integrated investment plans for the region (MIT and Projects, Ministry of Transport et al. 2008a) Tilburg was planning to submit its own station development plan as a project eligible for central governmental funding. But Tilburg had already enjoyed the backing of the other BrabantStad members in a previous funding round in 2005 (€13.8 million from BIRK funds), and according to BrabantStad's internal agreements it was now the turn of Den Bosch and Eindhoven to be collectively supported in their lobby for their own station development plans. Tilburg's application was perceived by the other BrabantStad members as a break of the sequential distributive principal for regulated subsidy applications. The program manager of BrabantStad, backed by the province, eventually convinced Tilburg to drop its application for national funding and to stick by the agreements made. Consequently, a humble Tilburg withdrew its own application and joined the collective BrabantStad's support for the station areas of Eindhoven and Den Bosch.

Conflicts between RCA members delayed other strategic issues as well. Internal conflicts limited the collective capacity to produce strategic choices and promote cohesion between the cities. The five cities could not agree on their relative distinctive features in a manner that would be used as a base for functional distinction and distributive guidance for spatial economic investments. Despite the efforts to promote such distinction during the composition of the long-term strategy in BrabantStad Workshop the collaborating cities proved incapable of openly acknowledging and

defining each other's relative advantages. As one of the participants of the BrabantStad Workshop noted, *"agreeing on the strong and weak sides of the cities is a difficult process...it costs time before everybody admits that the innovation industry belongs to Eindhoven, and that tourists are geared to visit Den Bosch. Obvious as these differences may be, it was not possible during the discussions in the BrabantStad Workshop to determine these distinctions"*.

The initiators of the BrabantStad workshop, the province and the Ministry of Spatial Planning, initially faced suspicious and reluctant representatives of the five collaborating cities. According to the respondents interviewed in this research, the cities were reluctant to invest time and money in the strategic formation processes that took place regionally. The municipalities were keen to maintain their local autonomy regarding strategic matters such as the development of spatial economic profiles. This fact prevented the collaboration from determining distinctive features between the cities and accentuating functional differences that would have promoted intra-regional complementarity.

3.2.3 Realization

The third component of the analytical model focuses on the commitment of the collaborative parties to the consolidated output and their collective capacity to realize it. Implemented projects, contracts signed, budgets reserved and decisions made by the province and the different city councils are all expressions of the realization component as understood in the strategic capacity model for RCAs. The progress of the different projects mentioned in the program 2004-2008 was specified in a report of the executive platform of BrabantStad (BrabantStad 2007c) and is presented in table 3.1.

Many of the projects defined in the program were realized or got financing guarantees from the central government. From all the projects specified, only one, the realization of the large industrial zone in Moerdijk in the west of Brabant, was listed as a stagnated project.⁴ Other projects, like the expansion of Eindhoven airport, the reduction of transport of dangerous goods passing through the city centers and some of the station area redevelopment projects encountered local barriers that postponed realization. The majority of projects, however, as reported in the report, showed satisfying progress (ibid.).

Some of the infrastructure projects signaled from BrabantStad's network analysis (BrabantStad et al. 2006) found their way to MIRT – the "Long Term Program for Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport (Ministerie V&W et al. 2008a). The network analysis of the BrabantStad transport network conducted in 2006 resulted in the prioritization of a number of projects. The regional consultations with the Ministry of Transport yielded commitments of the latter to include some of the projects within

⁴ The project of industrial zone Moerdijk is not mentioned in the table since it is located outside of the jurisdictions of the five BrabantStad cities. Still, BrabantStad defined lobbying for its realization as one of its projects.

the national funds (expansion of the A2 highway between Den Bosch and Eindhoven, expansion of the A58 between Bergen op Zoom and Eindhoven, and investments in the station areas of Den Bosch and Breda). In some other cases the Ministry of Transport decided to start its own study before prevailing on the matter (e.g. in the expansion of the A67 highway between Eindhoven and Venlo). However, other projects that gained high priorities within BrabantStad were not adopted by the national program (e.g. the A27 between Breda and Gorinchem/Utrecht). Future agreements concerning the A27 were postponed to future rounds of central governmental investments in the region (BrabantStad, 2007a).

Table 3.1: Summary progress agenda BrabantStad (BrabantStad 2007c)

| PROJECT | SPECIFICATION | STATUS IN 2007 |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RAIL STATION DEVELOPMENT | Coordination of office development around stations | Inventory of planned offices |
| | Collective lobbying for co-financing of station plans | Central government contribution to projects in all five stations |
| | Limiting transport of dangerous materials through the cities | Agreements with transport firms and the central government over alternative routes |
| REGIONAL ECONOMY | International economic promotion | Promotion of individual projects and not of collective issues |
| | High-tech Campus Eindhoven | Incorporated in Brainport program |
| RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT | Realization of medical school Realization of green campus Helmond | The medical school as knowledge broker without a medical faculty |
| CULTURE AND IDENTITY | BrabantStad festival in the cities and buffer area | Practiced since 2005 |
| | Candidacy for Cultural Capital of Europe 2018 | Lobbying continues |
| | Graphics museum, Breda | Realized |
| | Textile museum, Tilburg | Realized |
| | Olympic swimming-pool, Eindhoven | Realized |
| | Conference center 'Brabant Halls', Den Bosch | Realized |

Table 3.1 (cont.)

| PROJECT | SPECIFICATION | STATUS IN 2007 |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IMPROVING EXTERNAL ACCESSIBILITY | Realization of shuttle connection from Breda to the high speed train line | In realization |
| | Expansion of Eindhoven airport | Incorporated within Brainport program. Difficulties with the Ministry of Defense |
| | Improving access from Eindhoven to the east (connection A50/A58 and the N279, connection to A67) | Agreements upon central governmental co-financing |
| | Operating night train between the cities and the Randstad | Experiment for 3 years, financed by province |
| IMPROVING INTERNAL ACCESSIBILITY | Realization of public transport network BrabantStad | Agreements upon central governmental co-financing |
| | Dynamic transport management | Co-financed by central government |
| | West ring Breda | Third platform realized. |
| | Expansion of train station platform | |
| | Ring Den Bosch | In realization |
| North-West tangent Tilburg | In realization | |

3.2.4 The strategic capacity of an exclusive voluntary RCA

The strategic capacity of BrabantStad reviewed above demonstrates the competences but also the limitations of voluntary RCAs to promote competitive collaboration. The observed strategic capacity of BrabantStad supports the postulated hypothesis regarding the limited capacity of voluntary RCAs to produce content-based strategies and concentrate their investments selectively and coherently. BrabantStad did not produce a content-based strategy related to its relative strengths and weaknesses. The RCA's members did not define policy lines that might accentuate functional or spatial differences between the five cities. Furthermore, the province and the cities did not show a high level of selectivity in the selection of projects to be promoted nor did they search for synergetic interrelations between them. The internal fit between the projects of the program 2004-2008 was limited. The list of projects was eclectic and had limited

regional coherency as it included large numbers of local projects with weak or no relation between them. There was hardly any coordination of development between the cities neither in terms of magnitude (building volume) nor in term of content (functional program).

At the same time, however, BrabantStad showed impressive tactical capacity to lobby as one group for the different unrelated projects. Surprisingly, even without a shared vision or coherent strategy, the RCA members promoted collectively each other's individual projects by turn. The cities managed to receive assistance from the province and the central government for the individual projects even though they were not based on any conceptual spatial strategy for the region. The efficient lobbying of BrabantStad and the unity the RCA's members managed to radiate towards external parties proved to be sharp, coherent and efficient. The efficiency in lobbying was confirmed by respondents both within BrabantStad and by the central government. Both confirmed that the unified position of the BrabantStad members while negotiating with different ministries compelled the central government to either accept the requests of BrabantStad or give a logical explanation why demands could not be honored. By the same token, according to practitioners, when BrabantStad members expressed competing demands and failed to radiate unity, the central government was freer to conduct its own distribution preferences without taking the positions of the cities into consideration. Quite often, and not without pride, respondents from BrabantStad contended that the sequential distributing mechanism turned to be an efficient and workable tactic. The principle in which every city gets its turn for collective support had a great effect on the ministries.

Questioned about the alleged limitations caused by the voluntary character of BrabantStad, respondents were cautious. Even though some of them acknowledged the idea that the RCA lacked a content-based strategy and had limited coherency between its projects, none of them saw in this fact a reason to introduce a more compulsory alternative to the voluntary cooperative practice. The option of creating a regional body equipped with legislative instruments to designate strategy and select relevant projects for promotion (or alternatively to let the province play a more dominant role) was conceived as undesirable by all respondents. According to them, the added value of the cooperation is strongly derived from the absence of a central dictating authority. Respondents claimed that much of the achievements came because of the voluntary nature, the personal acquaintances and the informal atmosphere rather than any official or hierarchical alternative.

With regard to the second hypothesis and the assumed negative relation between engaging a wide numbers of stakeholders and the collective capacity to consolidate clear and coherent strategic output, the exclusive approach of BrabantStad sheds interesting light on that matter. Some respondents, who defended the choice to keep the RCA small and compact, claimed that the exclusive character of BrabantStad (in which only the province and the larger five cities participate) was intentional. They argued that the direct involvement of more municipalities would have made the decision-making process overly complex and would have decreased the ability of the RCA to

reach agreements and define collective projects. With this argument, they justified the rejection of other municipalities like Oss and Roosendaal which had requested to join BrabantStad but were denied. Respondents from the excluded municipalities, however, doubted this reasoning. Many suspected that their exclusion was not meant solely for the simplification of the decision-making process but rather to create a small and exclusive club that served the narrow local interests of its limited number of members.

3.3 POWER AND THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF BRABANTSTAD

BrabantStad shows an ambivalent capacity in its collaboration. It proved to be able to create ad hoc unity when lobbying for specific projects but it demonstrated only limited capacity to engage a wider circle of stakeholders and to design content-based strategy that could guide synergetic development. BrabantStad can be seen as an RCA with high tactical capacity (immediate lobby activities) but only limited strategic capacity (long-term guiding strategies).

The second set of hypotheses referring to the influence of power within collective action might help understanding the influence of distributed and collective power on collective action and the capacity to cooperate strategically as a group. First to be examined is the influence of distributive power concentrated by an external actor on the collaboration (3.3.1). The analysis of the power relations between actors within the RCA itself will follow (3.3.2). The last hypothesis postulates stimulating effects derived from the collective power resulted from the collaboration itself. How, and under which conditions, this power influenced strategic capacity within BrabantStad will be examined in the last part of this section (3.3.3).

3.3.1 External power and its impact on the regional collaboration

It is hard to overestimate the crucial role the central government had on BrabantStad during its first years of practice. The whole initiation of the RCA by the province and the five cities has been in response to central governmental action. As described in the beginning of the chapter (3.1.1), the special minister responsible for the National Program for Large Cities assigned a financial package to tackle socio-economic problems in the larger cities of the country. The financial resources available by the ministry stirred the first step towards collective action from the regional partners. The fear of the province and the large cities that central governmental bias in favor of the Randstad would reduce the chance to benefit from the program brought them to join forces and apply together for the financial aid. They believed that through collaboration they would achieve a critical mass that would force the central government to pay more financial and political attention to the region. This belief anchored collaboration in the years to come when the collaboration adopted the name 'BrabantStad' and went ahead with its collective lobbying activities.

The effort of the province and the five cities to present themselves as a united network intensified during the composition of the Fifth National Memorandum on Spatial Planning by the central government. When the Ministry of Spatial Planning introduced National Urban Networks as a leading concept in its spatial economic policies, BrabantStad lobbied to become, and eventually was acknowledged as a national network. With the production of official spatial economic policies like the national memoranda, the central government held potent legislative and financial resources which it used to drive its own goals and to trigger regional collective activity. One of the BrabantStad politicians revealed during an interview: *“For good cooperation there must be a shared enemy that brings the parties together. That was obviously the case in BrabantStad because of the dominant feeling that money from the central government was going to the Randstad and that the other regions came second.”*

The contribution of the central government, however, went beyond triggering regional collaboration and the initiation of BrabantStad. The central government also stimulated BrabantStad to produce content-based strategy and set priorities within its projects. By granting BrabantStad a National Urban Network status, the central government declared its acknowledgement of the region as a national asset. This, however, did not mean an unconditional flow of national investments. Ministerial investments were conditioned by certain criteria that triggered regional partners to produce adequate output. A respondent from the ministry explicitly commented: *“The ministry tries to stimulate cooperation within the region with the old-fashioned use of financial rewards”*. As a National Urban Network, BrabantStad was subject to more interventions by the central government regarding different spatial economic policies. The central government expected National Urban Networks to compose coherent spatial economic policies that would manifest their network relation (Ministerie VROM et al. 2004 p.63). This expectation brought the Ministry of Spatial Planning to encourage and finance BrabantStad’s attempts to compose such a strategy in BrabantStad Workshop that was set up for that matter in 2006.

The financial resources of the central government stimulated BrabantStad to bring their voices together to create an efficient lobby. The central government, however, in particular the Ministry of Spatial Planning, encouraged reasoning and coherence behind projects promoted by BrabantStad (BrabantStad 2004b). By demanding coherency the ministry encouraged members to compose a content-based strategy that would make suggested projects understandable in the broader context of the urban network. Furthermore, the different ministries did not and could not plan to finance *all* projects submitted by the BrabantStad members. The central government explicitly demanded selectivity from the RCA: *“Our role as the central government is to challenge the regions. We have a package of [financial] measures for mobility, housing, work and climate, but we cannot do everything. So we need to challenge the region to help us make the choices. We can work together with the regional parties if they are clear in their preferences and if they are selective”* (Civil servant from the Ministry of Spatial Planning).

Ironically enough, the central government itself was not as coherent as it expected the BrabantStad members to be. The Ministry of Economic Affairs considered the five municipalities of BrabantStad as an accumulation of cities belonging to separated spatial economic systems and, therefore, did not stimulate the production of an integrated economic strategy for the five cities. The Ministry of Economic Affairs was lukewarm towards BrabantStad as an RCA. It showed less involvement in the twice-yearly top consultations between the ministers (of VROM and Transport) and the political leaders of BrabantStad. The approach of the Ministry of Economic Affairs towards BrabantStad was sometimes interpreted as hostile: *“The Ministry of Economic Affairs does everything it can to remove BrabantStad totally from the map. It wishes to split it: in the east, Eindhoven, and in the west, Breda. The rest of the cabinet is starting to doubt BrabantStad as well and considers adopting the line of the Ministry of Economic Affairs”* (Civil servant from BrabantStad).

The Ministry of Economic Affairs had its own policies and programs for regional investments. Since the Ministry of Economic Affairs was also officially the coordinator of the inter-ministerial national program for South-east Brabant and North Limburg, its influence on BrabantStad was substantial. Three of the five cities (Den Bosch, Eindhoven and Helmond) were part of the designated area for which the national program was prepared under the coordination of the ministry. The contradiction between the Ministry of Spatial Planning and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the inconsistency with which their resources were spent in the region led to regional confusion with regard to the central government position towards BrabantStad. The split between the spatial dimension and the economic dimension of BrabantStad divided the eastern part of the region from its western part and brought difficulties to integrate economic and spatial policies locally. Within the same municipalities, the economic and the spatial planning departments held different conceptualizations of the urban network influenced by the inconsistent signals given by the central government. BrabantStad partners found themselves maneuvering between two influential ministries that radiated signals in different directions. In order to secure the support and collaboration of both ministries (and enjoy their resources), the production of coherent spatial economic strategies was less appealing, as it was considered impossible to satisfy both ministries. It was therefore more attractive for the regional partners to maintain a flexible position and avoid the production of a fixed and official integrated strategy.

Some of the respondents from the central government acknowledged that the internal split within the central government did not serve the regional interest: *“To be honest, separating BrabantStad from the national program for South-east Brabant was quite awkward. It was contra-effective to have two ministers responsible for the same area and create two tables for negotiations with the region. That proved inefficient and awkward”* (Account manager of the central government). Comparable criticism about the inconsistency of the ministries came from the Council for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment in an official advice to the Minister of Spatial Planning (VROM-raad 2007 p.7).

It is striking that the potentially stimulating influence of the private sector on regional collaboration has had no explicit expression in the practice of BrabantStad. Companies or corporate representatives did not produce any action that stimulated collaboration or inspired regional production of shared spatial economic strategies.

3.3.2 Internal power in a polycentric region

Another influential source of power postulated to influence collective strategic capacity is the power concentrated within a single actor or a small group of actors within the collaboration itself. As the fourth hypothesis proposes, an actor which enjoys significant power compared to other collaborating members within the group would be able to promote its own ambitions and mobilize other group members and by that increase capacity to produce clear and coherent collective strategic output. Consisting of five medium-sized municipalities located within the administrative borders of the sixth member (the province), BrabantStad has its own system of power relations. The province holds relative dominance in relation to the municipal partners it works with. The province is as a higher governmental tier that has its own legislative and financial resources which allow it to steer regional policies in a large part of its territory. At the same time, the municipalities maintain their own autonomy regarding local planning and two of the members (Eindhoven and Helmond) are brought officially under the authority of the city region Eindhoven. This is an official regional body (*WGR-plus*) responsible for coordinating transport and spatial policies between municipalities at the south-east of North-Brabant (see 1.3.2 in the first chapter).

1. One province

As a higher governmental tier, North-Brabant province holds juridical competences that enable it to mold and influence local policies of the municipalities. The province has officially the authority to drive regional spatial economic policies and is rich in financial resources designated to it from national provincial funds and from its own shareholdings in energy companies (North-Brabant province was in 2008 the largest shareholder of the energy company Essent). Both the financial and the legislative resources give the province a leading position articulated both by its own initiation of BrabantStad and the facilitation of its activities.

The province distributed its financial resources in regional projects according to its own policies, a fact that put it in a dominant position in relation to the other five municipalities of BrabantStad. However, the fear of losing influence within its territory brought the province to reaffirm its alliance with its cities by the initiation of BrabantStad (3.1.1). It initiated the collaboration and co-financed many of the local projects listed in the RCA's programs. Projects that failed to gain the support of the province were doomed to be omitted from the programs or were downgraded to projects of a more local scale. Breda, for example, wished to develop a regional congress centre that the province (to the relief of the municipality of Den Bosch) perceived as competing with the already designated project of Exhibition Center

BrabantStad slated for Den Bosch in the 2004-2008 program. The refusal of the province to co-finance Breda's initiative reduced Breda's congress center to a project of far lower scale aiming to serve only the local market.

The available resources of the province and its influence on BrabantStad granted it also a unique position in the agenda setting of the collaboration. BrabantStad's program for the years 2008-2012 reflected the ambitions of the new coalition that governed the province. In this program, BrabantStad adopted completely the principles agreed upon by the political parties that formed the provincial board after the provincial elections in 2007 (BrabantStad 2007b). Abundant financial and legislative resources gave the province a dominant position in relation to the cities, allowing it to set the agenda and promote projects according to its own priorities. But the unique position of the province did not appear to make a difference when conflicts between the five cities flared up. The province demonstrated a reluctant position with regard to conflict management within the region and the ability to mediate between the cities when conflicts occurred and when these prevented the collective ability to compose shared strategies.

II. Five cities

Despite the different economic profiles of the five cities, they do not significantly vary from one another in terms of population, volume of economic activity or political influence. The interdependencies and the functional relations between the cities, as inter-municipal commuting patterns show, are not concentrated around any particular city (BrabantStad 2006). Furthermore, the collaborative practice of BrabantStad did not eliminate the existing rivalry and competitive relations between the cities. The fact that Eindhoven and Breda operated within other collaborative forums and that both enjoyed prestigious projects of international scale (an international center for technology in Eindhoven and a direct connection to the high speed train network in Breda) made the two cities less dependent on BrabantStad. Having received national recognition as an economic motor for technology industries, Eindhoven in particular radiated a distinctive position within BrabantStad. Some of the respondents from other municipalities attributed this distinctive position of Eindhoven to its occasional 'arrogance' towards the other BrabantStad municipalities.

Next to the fact it is the largest city and the economic centre for innovation and technology, the unique position of Eindhoven has a formal dimension as well. Eindhoven (together with Helmond) is part of the City Region Eindhoven, which occasionally participates in the consultations of BrabantStad. Although decisions within BrabantStad are not made by vote and the majority has no official advantage, the fact that Eindhoven, Helmond and City Region Eindhoven all take part in the consultations grants them as representatives of South-east Brabant extra influence within the RCA. Eindhoven, Helmond (and in mobility matters the City Region Eindhoven) consult and coordinate with each other in their own regular meetings. Consequently, these three high-profile members strengthened their ties during their frequent consultations with the Ministry of Economic Affairs with regard to the inter-

ministerial program for South-east Brabant/North Limburg and the development of the Brainport concept aiming to set the region as global center of innovative technological industries.

Nevertheless, Eindhoven's nuanced antecedence compared to the other BrabantStad's municipalities did not grant it a leading position within the RCA. All the five cities continued to promote their own projects hoping to receive the support of the other members without any adoption of each other's agendas. The relatively evenly distributed political and financial resources between the collaborating cities prevented any of them from seizing a leading position in the group. As a group, however, the five cities managed to create and maintain collaborative practice that served their collective dominance in the region as a whole. This dominance resulted in the capacity to draw and promote their own collective agenda and prevent other municipalities from participating in the collaborative practice.

3.3.3 Collective power – the reflexive impact of cooperative network

A third source of power assumed to hold a stimulating effect on the strategic capacity of RCAs is the collective power accumulated and shared by cooperative networks. According to the last hypothesis, the collective power emerging from the regional collaboration would bind members to the RCA and increase their commitment to agreements made.

In general, respondents held positive views regarding BrabantStad and its achievements. Appreciation and sense of success was expressed by both advocates and critics of the collaboration. There was a broad conviction among respondents that much of the achievements promoted within BrabantStad would probably not have been realized without the collaborative efforts and the active support of the partners. Efficient lobbying was repeatedly mentioned by respondents as the key element that enabled the realization of infrastructure and mobility projects (station development, shifting traffic out of city centers, removing the transportation of dangerous goods out of the larger cities). The completion of local projects, like the graphic and textile museums in Breda and Tilburg or the setting of the medical school network in Tilburg and Eindhoven, were also considered by many as a fine result of the collective lobbying efforts conducted by BrabantStad.

Ascribing success to the activities within BrabantStad cannot be surprising since the tactic of '*showing plenty of success quickly*' was an explicit objective of the BrabantStad management. It explicitly chose to stimulate and promote a larger number of local projects within the RCA in order to create and spread a sense of success and appreciation among the collaborating members. With these tactics, more RCA members experienced an immediate, positive impact of the cooperation. The creation of appreciation and the gradual construction of trust in the collaborative practice were essential to create enthusiasm towards future challenges. Crucially, as a Brabant politician said: "*It will go well in BrabantStad as long as everybody gets something*".

The sense of success stimulated the strategic capacity of BrabantStad in other ways. Other municipalities (Oss, Bergen op Zoom, Roosendaal) pleaded to join the RCA to no avail. Respondents from these municipalities revealed that the success of BrabantStad stimulated their interest to join up. The political leadership of the excluded municipalities believed that participation in BrabantStad would serve their local interests by attracting more investment and by gaining a better position to influence the policies of both the province and the central government. The prevention of these other cities from taking part in BrabantStad was perceived by these respondents as proof that BrabantStad is primarily a 'lobby machine' set to serve narrow interests of its members rather than a genuine regional effort to amplify regional competitiveness.

Preventing more municipalities from participating had an ambivalent impact on the strategic capacity of BrabantStad. By excluding new members, the RCA missed an opportunity to increase the capacity to integrate knowledge and local resources for the creation of a critical mass that would increase the impact of policies. On the other hand, as respondents from the province suggested, preventing new cities from joining BrabantStad created a sense of exclusivity among BrabantStad members. Enjoying together the taste of success, the sense of self-importance with regard to the excluded municipalities reinforced appreciation and enthusiasm the included members felt towards the RCA. The appreciation towards BrabantStad appeared to have positive influence on the collective capacity to consolidate shared strategic output even on disputable matters.

The appreciation of the benefits resulting from being part of the collaboration cast a moderating influence on the collaborating parties during conflicts and prevented them from stepping out of the RCA when rows threatened to overheat. The anger expressed by some of the parties when unilateral and uncoordinated initiatives took place (e.g. the shopping mall in Tilburg) did not lead to the abolishment of the cooperation as a whole. Appreciation of the collaborative practice stood behind the overall discipline of partners to act according to agreements and realize collective decisions. For example, Tilburg's intention to apply for a second MIRT subsidy (in violation of the internal BrabantStad agreements) could not have been prevented by any of the RCA members as no single members (including the province) had resources that could directly prevent Tilburg from using its right to apply for a subsidy. However, the pressure put on Tilburg from the other RCA members, and the demand to stick to the internal sequential code of regulating application for subsidies, forced Tilburg to drop its application for the subsidies.

The interrelation between the collective power of the collaboration and its consolidation capacity reveals another ambivalence. The success of introducing a list of projects to be lobbied for collectively encouraged the province to draw up a content-based strategy for the RCA (in the form of the BrabantStad Workshop) and to expand the collaboration from pointing out loose projects to the production of shared policies. These initiatives did not win enthusiastic support from the cities that preferred to limit

the collaboration for only collective lobbying activities and to avoid attempts to portray shared content-based strategies. Respondents from the cities rejected such attempts from the province. One of the respondents from a BrabantStad city referred to the provincial ambitions to expand the collaboration from lobbying for specific projects to detecting and actively promoting collective issues. This respondent expressed reservation: *“We should not expend the collaboration to drive collective policies. I understand that the taste of achieved success increases the appetite of the province, but then you probably would go one step too far. We should know where to stop expanding and intensifying the collaboration”*.

Respondents contended that the reluctance of the cities to use the success of the collective lobby as leverage to boost collective strategy and policies was mostly evident during the year the BrabantStad Workshop was active. During the formulation of long-term strategy, the attempts to introduce differentiated regional development based on the cities' unique profiles were frustrated by the participating municipalities. The BrabantStad experience suggests that if collective power derived from earlier success had a stimulating role on the RCA's strategic capacity; it was apparently not enough to bring the parties to drive shared spatial economic strategy. BrabantStad's success stimulated the continuation of regulated collective lobbying but not the creation of strategy and attempts to expand the collaboration to other policy fields.

The fact many of the collaborating cities in BrabantStad were also collaborating with other RCAs reduced their dependency on BrabantStad. Eindhoven enjoyed direct interaction with the central government and other strategic partners in the context of Brainport. Helmond and Eindhoven also participated in City Region Eindhoven. That led in times to a suspicious attitude towards Eindhoven; it was seen as if it wished to benefit from all collaborative opportunities. There was a comparable association in which Breda and 19 other cities collaborated in the west of the region. Even though this collaboration was of a lower scale (in scope and impact) compared to BrabantStad, it offered Breda an alternative. The dependency of these two cities on BrabantStad appeared less compared to Tilburg and Den Bosch.

When referring to Eindhoven and Breda one of the respondents revealed: *“Breda and Eindhoven, the cities on the edges of the region, can search for other cooperative associations which might be stronger than BrabantStad. They are actually doing that in different ways and it clearly weakens BrabantStad”*. The suggestion that by spreading collaborative practice among different forums the strength of a single forum (BrabantStad) becomes weak was shared by many respondents. Some of them revealed that this occasionally led to a reproaching position of the cities especially towards Eindhoven. The limited dependency on BrabantStad as a single RCA, together with the existence of alternatives, reduced the motivation of some cities to commit to a single collaborative association like BrabantStad. Collaborating in different RCAs may have been beneficial for the specific city but it clearly reduced the collective power and the binding effect of BrabantStad as a single RCA.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS

BrabantStad represents a case of an exclusive voluntary RCA that strives to improve the competitiveness of a polycentric region. The strategic output of the RCA and the interviews conducted with practitioners and politicians both within and outside BrabantStad shed light on the relation between the exclusiveness and voluntary character of the RCA and on the effect of power on the achieved strategic capacity.

3.4.1 Exclusive voluntary RCA with limited strategic capacity

In its first years of collaborative practice, BrabantStad demonstrated limited strategic capacity. The six members did not expand the basis of participation in a way that allowed more municipalities (or other stakeholders) to join the collaboration, enrich it, and increase its pool of resources. The strategic output consolidated by the collaborating members was limited for the sum of local projects. BrabantStad did not manage to produce any generic long-term strategy that could guide future development based on spatial concepts or differentiated economic features. Members did not make any strategic choice on a regional scale nor did they prevail among content-based strategic alternatives regarding future regional development. Efforts to increase the internal fit between projects, policy fields or development were not recorded. BrabantStad appeared to be used by its members for the sole task of promoting local and regional projects and executing lobbying activities. The projects were often detached from each other and had no content base that could prioritize or connect between them. However, the efficiency and the effectiveness with which BrabantStad managed to promote those projects accentuated its high tactical capacity. The RCA proved capable of efficiently mobilizing its members to create unity behind specifically agreed-upon projects. Members managed to attract political attention and financial investments from the central government to their projects through their effective lobbying. With a limited strategic capacity, however, BrabantStad could not prioritize and select between the projects accumulated for collective promotion. BrabantStad could not select the projects it would promote collectively; rather, it could choose the *order* in which those projects would be promoted and realized.

The case of BrabantStad confirms the hypothesis regarding the expected shortcomings of voluntary RCAs to yield high strategic capacity. The compactness of BrabantStad, where only six parties took part, appeared to have no major effect on the consolidation capacity of the RCA. Although some of the respondents claimed that the exclusiveness of BrabantStad was meant to increase collective decision-making capacity, the actual strategic output of BrabantStad did not meet the principles of competitive strategic planning.

3.4.2 The impact of power on regional strategic capacity

Evidently, the will to influence the distribution patterns of central government resources brought the collaborating parties to initiate BrabantStad and maintain collaborative resilience. Members believed that through collaboration, their chance of attracting investments from the central government would increase. At the same time, the division between the ministries of spatial planning and economic affairs together with their contradictory views regarding BrabantStad appeared to reduce the strategic capacity of the RCA. While the Ministry of Spatial Planning adopted BrabantStad and encouraged the regional partners to develop a shared strategy and long-term vision, the Ministry of Economic Affairs had a frosty attitude to the integration of the urban network and encouraged members to form different strategic alliances, based on existing differentiated economic profiles.

The case demonstrates that distributive power concentrated by an external actor, in this case the central government, can ignite attempts to initiate and maintain regional collaboration. Still, external power may have a destructive effect on regional strategic capacity when powerful external actors like the ministries radiate contradicting signals or use their resources incoherently. The polycentric character of the region and the lack of a dominant central city suggested an even spread of power between the five BrabantStad cities. None of the collaborating cities excelled economically or demographically in a way that granted it a dominating position among the others. The equal patterns of interdependency and the even spread of resources prevented the presence of mobilizing forces concentrated by a single actor. The cities maintained a high level of rivalry between them and were reluctant to openly acknowledge each other's relative advantages.

Holding legislative and financial resources, the unique position of the province allowed it to promote regional policy and enjoy an abundance of distributive power compared to the five cities. In a voluntary collaboration, however, this power was conditioned by the degree the five cities as subordinated members let the province use its resources to influence their collective output. The practice of the voluntary RCA showed that the five cities were reluctant to cooperate when the province demonstrated a paternalistic approach. Though richer in financial resources, the province had to search for the balance between strategic use of its resources and gaining the trust and cooperation of the municipalities. Traces of the constructive impact of the RCA's collective power on the collective strategic capacity were evident in this case as well. The success of BrabantStad to collectively promote and realize a long list of projects made it noticeable by the central government and the surrounding municipalities. One of the effects of the collective power was the desire of some potential partners to join the RCA or collaborate with it. The collective power of BrabantStad, however, got weakened by the fact that RCA members were simultaneously active in other (sometimes competing) RCAs like Brainport or West Brabant. This led to weaker interdependencies between BrabantStad's members and the reduction of their collective power. The result was reluctance of the cities to intensify the collaboration and expose local policies for regional influence and coordination.