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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

[Link to publication](#)

#### **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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## **CAN THE NORTH WING FLY? THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF AMSTERDAM METROPOLITAN AREA**

Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is a voluntary Regional Collaborative Association (RCA) situated in the northern part of the heavily-populated Dutch city ring, Randstad. As of 2008, it embodies 36 municipalities located in an area that stretches from the North Sea – in the west – to the cities of Almere and Hilversum in the east (see figure 5.1). The main objectives of the RCA are to increase regional competitiveness and to attract public and private investments to the Amsterdam area (Noordvleugel 2005a p.15).

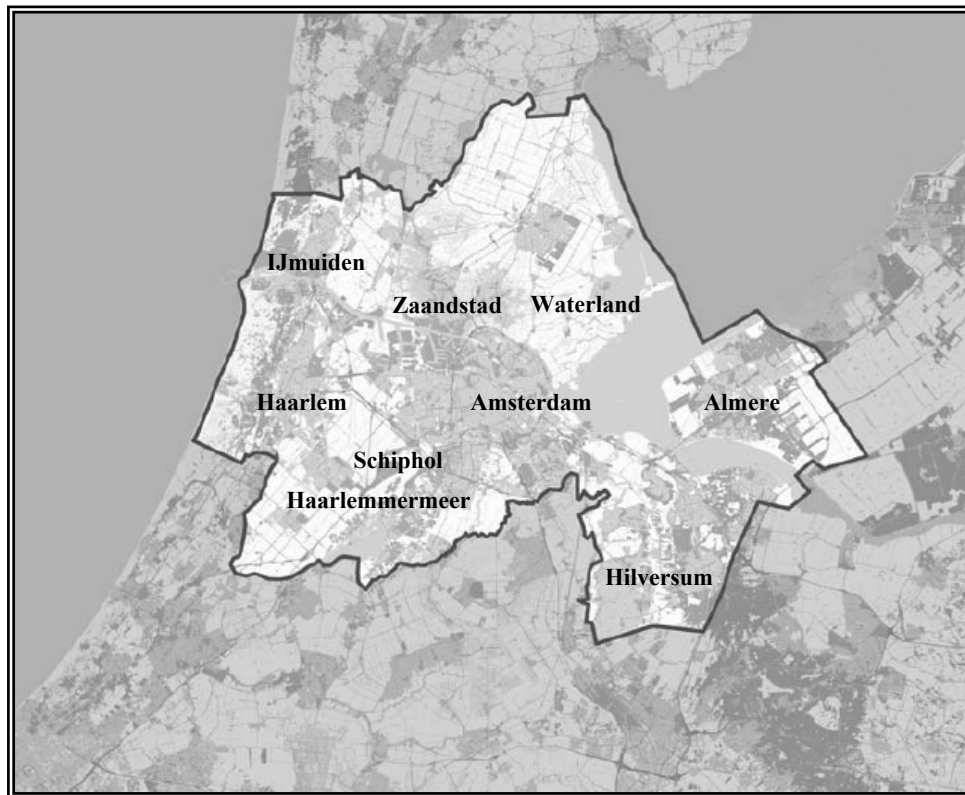
The case presented in this chapter will shed light on the relation between: the voluntary character of the RCA and its strategic capacity (hypothesis 1); the level of inclusion and the ability to produce bold strategic output (hypothesis 2); and the role power relations have in stimulating such strategic capacity (hypotheses 3-5). The Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is an inclusive RCA which is open for new municipalities and is collaborating voluntarily. Prior to 2008, the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area operated under the name “North Wing” (*Noordvleugel*). When referring to these years in this chapter, the old name of the RCA will be used.

The case is analyzed as follows: The first part (5.1) describes the context in which the RCA operates. It provides a short description of the background from which the North Wing emerged, its organizational setting, and its strategic output. In the second part (5.2) the strategic capacity is analyzed. This part appraises the capacity of the RCA to involve stakeholders (‘reception’), define long-term strategy, select and combine activities (‘consolidation’) and bring them towards implementation (‘realization’). As in all cases, the prime sources of analysis are documents and interviews held in the years 2006-2007 with different practitioners. In this section, attention will also be given to the postulated negative relation between the voluntary nature of the RCA and its strategic capacity and the relation between wide inclusion of many stakeholders versus the capacity to designate clear strategies and bring them towards realization. The third part of the chapter (5.3) provides an institutional analysis concerning the relation between external, internal and collective power and the demonstrated strategic capacity of the North Wing. The chapter ends with conclusions (5.4) regarding the relation between the hypotheses and the empirical findings.

## **5.1 THE MONOCENTRIC AMSTERDAM METROPOLITAN AREA**

The Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is a cooperative of 36 municipalities and two provinces (North-Holland and Flevoland) where circa 2.2 million people live and work (CBS 2007). One third of the region's population lives in Amsterdam and the rest are residents of smaller growth centers like Almere (181,000) Haarlemmermeer (131,000) and Haarlem (146,000). Amsterdam functions as the economic center of the region as most jobs and companies are concentrated within its municipal boundaries. The spatial concentration of residents and jobs within a single municipality gives the region a strong monocentric character (see appendix 1). Commuting patterns accentuate the monocentricity of the region. The absolute majority of the daily commuters travel to Amsterdam from its hinterland, forming radial spatial patterns (Gemeente Amsterdam 2008 p.34). Regional commuting patterns are influenced by the fact houses are concentrated in the east part (Almere, Gooi, IJburg) while jobs are concentrated in the center and the west parts of the region (Amsterdam and around Schiphol airport).

Figure 5.1: Administrative borders of the North Wing (Metropoolregio Amsterdam 2008)



### **5.1.1 Background and initiation of the North Wing**

The North Wing, as the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area was called before the year 2008, originated in 1998 after an attempt to introduce new regional government in the area failed. In the mid 1990s, some administrative turbulence took place in the statutory governmental regional system in the Netherlands. During this time, the Dutch central government introduced the concept of the ‘city province’, a new form of regional government aiming to increase steering and coordination capacities in several designated regions around larger cities. With the new metropolitan governmental tier, the Dutch legislator hoped to increase spatial economic coherency within regions, especially between core cities and their hinterlands. This process of regional government forming was never completed and the statutory reform was never implemented. The residents of Amsterdam rejected the idea to create metropolitan government in a local referendum in 1995. Citizens were reluctant to exchange their existing municipality (Amsterdam) for a higher and more distant body (van der Lans 2006 p.18).

The rejection of the new metropolitan government brought local politicians to search for alternative arrangements that could help promote coherent regional development. The city region of Amsterdam, a temporarily coordinating organization operating as a prequel to the envisioned city province, was considered insufficient to encounter the regional issues at stake and their growing spatial impact.<sup>5</sup> The city region Amsterdam, as a coordinating body of only 16 municipalities, was geographically too limited to tackle the urgent spatial economic challenges facing the region. The actual daily urban system and the economic interrelations were of a scale larger than the area represented by the city region. Important regional centers like Almere<sup>6</sup>, a new city in the east, and Haarlem, the capital of the province, had no part in the city region. Neither did the media center of Hilversum nor the port town of IJmuiden. Another shortcoming was the city region’s limited legitimacy and poor democratic accountability towards the voter, who had no direct influence on the council’s composition (Salet & Molenaar 2003, van der Lans 2006). In order to coordinate spatial economic development in an area larger than the temporary city region Amsterdam, a new solution was needed. Under this background the municipality of Amsterdam and the province of North-Holland initiated the forum of ‘Regional Cooperation Amsterdam’ (*Regionale Samenwerking Amsterdam – RSA*) in 1998. Regional Cooperation Amsterdam, in turn, launched a new coordinating platform - “The North Wing” (Salet & Molenaar 2003 p.42).

The crude territorial division of the Randstad into northern and southern wings was adopted by the central government in its national long term spatial economic policies

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<sup>5</sup> The City Region of Amsterdam (*Stadsregio Amsterdam*) is the equivalent *WGR-plus* administrative arrangement to the City Region of Arnhem-Nijmegen and the City Region Eindhoven the reader encountered in the previous chapters.

<sup>6</sup> Almere was originally part of the City Region but it stepped out of it at the beginning of the 90s in order to secure administrative autonomy and reduce the influence of Amsterdam on its local policies.

(Ministerie VROM 2001, Ministerie VROM et al. 2006a p.66). The division led to differentiation of the specific tasks delegated from the central government to the different regional stakeholders. To the North Wing, the Ministry of Spatial Planning appointed the task of coordinating the development of 150,000 new houses required by the year 2030. This specific construction task brought members of the North Wing to organize ad hoc conferences in which representatives of provinces and municipalities got together in an attempt to meet the central governmental challenge. The division of the Randstad into two ‘wings’ had also consequences for the manner in which central governmental policies for the Randstad were implemented. The central government considered the North Wing as a core national economic area (*Nationale Economische Kerngebied*) in need of an integrated policy approach (Ministerie VROM et al. 2006a). Accordingly, the central government launched its own inter-ministerial program for the North Wing (comparable programs were composed for three other regions – the South Wing of the Randstad, the Green Heart, and South-east Brabant/North Limburg). The program was set up to promote coherency within policy sectors and accelerate the execution of projects by stimulating tight consultation between the central government and the region (Ministerie VROM et al. 2006b p.35).

In 2005, the central government appointed the national transport minister as the coordinator of the national program for the North Wing. Representatives of the ministry coordinated the consultations between representatives of other municipalities and the members of the North Wing in order to define strategic projects to be promoted at central government level. At the end of 2006, the Ministry ‘finalized’ the national program for the North Wing. However, the new government formed after the elections that year shifted its attention from the separated North and South Wings in favor of the scale of the Randstad as a whole. Consequently, the program for the North Wing was abandoned and a new inter-ministerial program was composed, this time, for the whole of the Randstad (Ministerie V&W 2007, Ministerie VROM 2008).

### **5.1.2 Organization**

The North Wing, as a voluntary collaboration that lacked any juridical status, had two parallel operational trajectories. The first trajectory was the conduction of general themed conferences of the type launched for accommodating housing construction in which all the municipalities and the two provinces participated. In those conferences, the collaborating parties collectively formulated and publicly declared their shared strategic standpoints regarding various spatial economic issues. Decisions made in the conferences, however, were always provisional since they were not (legally) binding and were all dependent on the actual adoption of these agreements by the individual participating parties. The official representatives of the municipalities, provinces and city region were still required to defend and promote these standpoints within their own grassroots and city councils.

The administrative core group of the North Wing, composed by board executives of the two provinces, the city region of Amsterdam and aldermen of the larger municipalities (Amsterdam, Haarlem, Almere, Haarlemmermeer, Zaanstad and Hilversum), prepared

the conferences and formulated the standpoints to be discussed and agreed on during the symposia. The second operational trajectory was the consultation within theme groups that elaborated the general standpoints agreed on during the general conferences, and fine-tuned policies and local activities. Groups were composed of aldermen of the collaborating municipalities, reporting to the regional coordination commission, an integral coordination team of city mayors (intermittently chaired by the mayor of Amsterdam and the commissioner of North-Holland province). The commission monitored the coherency between the policy fields and interfered only when difficulties occurred or conflicts erupted.

The RCA of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area pursued the following consultation themes:

- *1. Platform Accessibility North Wing (Platform Bereikbaarheid Noordvleugel)* was chaired by a member of the provincial executive board. The team discussed and coordinated the improvement of internal and external accessibility in the region through the creation of a lobby in favor of certain major infrastructure projects. Representatives of the Ministry of Transport took part in this group;
- *2. Platform Companies and Office Location (Platform Bedrijven en Kantoorlocaties – PLABEKA)* was chaired by the alderman for economic affairs of the municipality of Haarlemmermeer and focused on the creation of an adequate supply of office spaces and industrial areas to meet market demand;
- *3. Commission Peaks in the Delta (Progamma Commissie Pieken in de Delta)* was chaired by the alderman for economic affairs of Amsterdam and coordinated, together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the selection of projects for promoting regional economic performance;
- *4. Administrative Core Group Schiphol (Bestuurlijk Regiegroep Schiphol)* was chaired by a provincial executive member and focused on the coordination of airport development and aviation-related industries;
- *5. Platform Masterplan North Sea Canal (Bestuursplaatform Masterplan Noordzee kanaalgebied)* was chaired by a provincial executive member and focused on the economic development of the North Sea canal stretching from Amsterdam to IJmuiden;
- *6. Administrative Core Group North Wing (Bestuurlijk Kerngroep Noordvleugel)* was chaired by the Alderman for Spatial Planning of Amsterdam. Responsible for the coordination and formulation of general regional spatial economic standpoints to be elaborated and lobbied for while engaging with the central government. This group prepared and coordinated the general thematic conferences taking place annually.

### **5.1.3 Strategic Output**

Since its establishment at the end of the 1990s, the North Wing produced a series of shared viewpoints that formed the basis for both lobbying and initiating of new shared projects. Over the years, the conferences shared strategies elaborated in multi- and bilateral agreements between RCA members and the central government. This section

will specify the shared strategic policy lines of the North Wing that emerged through the seven conferences conducted between 2001 and 2008.

*1<sup>st</sup> conference – An ad hoc symposium for the regional distribution of housing*

The central government calculated in its preparations for its fifth national memorandum on spatial planning that 150,000 new houses would be needed for the area of the North Wing until the year 2030 (Ministerie VROM 2001 p.110). The Ministry of Spatial Planning instructed the regional parties to tackle head on the challenge of constructing the required housing (Van der Plas 2006 p.88). The regional response was the initiation of the ad hoc regional conference in October 2001 by the aldermen and provincial executives responsible for local/regional housing. In this first conference, the municipal representatives agreed to accommodate 60,000 houses within the existing built area and another 130,000 in undeveloped areas. In order to extend the margins, the collaborating parties added an extra 40,000 houses to the central government's rather conservative prognosis (Noordvleugel 2001).

*2<sup>nd</sup> conference – Bringing transport considerations into the picture*

In November 2002, collaboration focused on the impact of the housing distribution on regional accessibility conditions. The regional objective of this second conference was to examine the capacity of existing infrastructure to accommodate the housing growth discussed in the first conference. During the conference, the aldermen of transport and infrastructure joined their colleges of spatial and land use planning. In preparation for the conference, experts detected discrepancies between the distribution of planned houses and jobs, on the one hand, and existing infrastructure on the other. The conference concluded that the realization of the housing distribution as planned in the first conference would lead to further deterioration of the already-troublesome regional accessibility conditions which suffered an unbalanced spread of housing and jobs (Noordvleugel 2002).

*3<sup>rd</sup> conference – creating an integral strategy*

The mismatch between envisioned housing distribution and the given accessibility conditions led to a third conference in September 2003. The RCA partners used the results of the former two conferences as input for an integral regional strategy in which they redistributed the required 150,000 new houses based on regional accessibility conditions (Noordvleugel 2005a p.64). Therefore, both the aldermen of spatial planning and of transport came together to make adjustments to the housing distribution plans. According to the new distributing pattern, the main development (124,000 houses) would be designated in Haarlemmermeer (19,000 houses); Amsterdam (50,000) and Almere (45,000) (see figure 5.2a. 5.2b). The designated axis supplied, according to the RCA partners, the best alternative to integrate housing and jobs with existing transport infrastructure. Members agreed to realize the rest of the required houses in Zaanstad (5,000); Purmerend (5,000); Amstelveen (6,500); and in Weesp and Muiden (5,000).

Figure 5.2a: Strategic development axis: Haarlemmermeer-Amsterdam-Almere

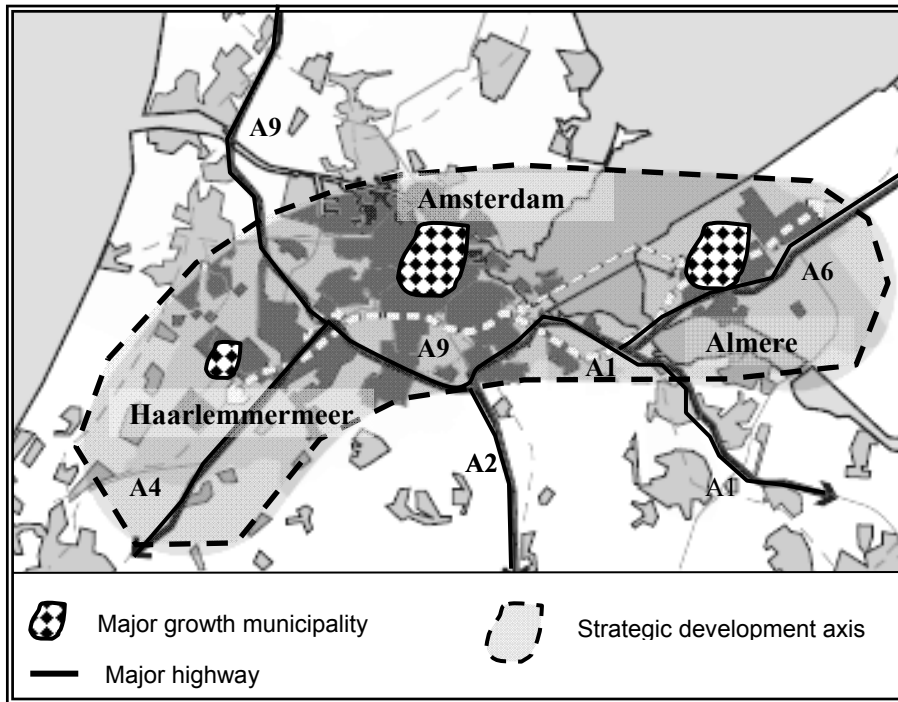
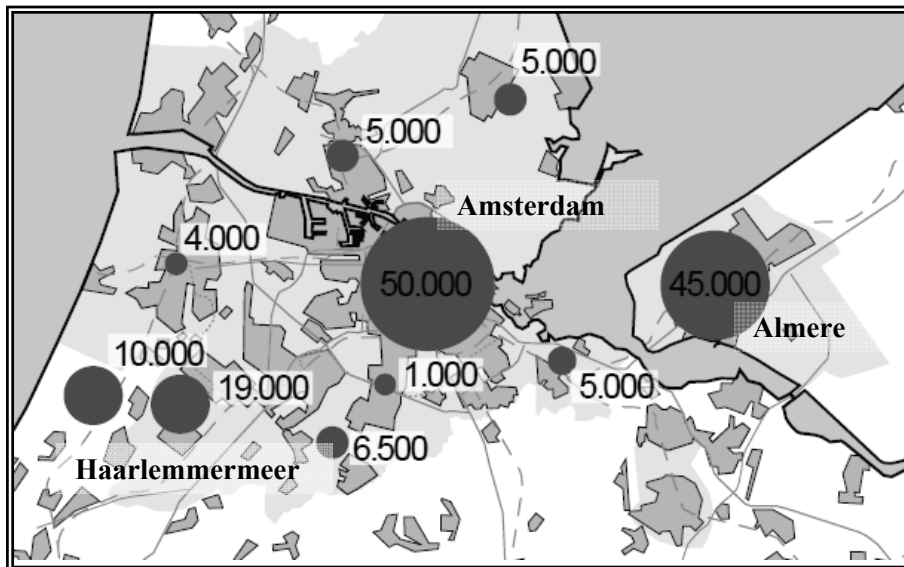


Figure 5.2b: Distribution of new dwellings in the North Wing at 2010-2030 (Noordvleugel 2005a p.14)





In order to limit congestion along the strategic axis, the regional partners agreed to lobby the central government to introduce a pricing mechanism for car usage (regulating mobility) and to develop several infrastructural projects which included (Noordvleugel 2005 p.64-65):

- *Realization of the North-South metro line* connecting Amsterdam North to the growing business district in the south of the city (Zuidas);
- *Expanding the Coen Tunnel* that passes under the North Sea canal and connects the northern municipalities of the region with Schiphol airport and Amsterdam via the ring highway of the capital;
- *Realization of the Zuidtangent*, a rapid public bus system to connect Haarlem, Amstelveen and Diemen with Schiphol;
- *Extension of the southern road N201 and the Holland bridge* to connect the mainland (Amsterdam) with Almere.

#### *4<sup>th</sup> Conference – Regional economy and regional competitiveness*

The fourth conference, in February 2005, debated the regional economy and regional competitiveness. This conference, titled “Spatial Economic Development”, designated certain spatial conditions as supportive for increasing economic performances. The objective was to scan and select spatial developments that would facilitate economic activities in the region and increase its competitiveness (Noordvleugel 2005a p.5). As part of this effort, the aldermen and provincial executives of economic affairs joined their colleagues of spatial planning and transport to develop a collective spatial economic strategy for the region. The conference produced a policy document specifying the shared position of the participants concerning the relation between the regional economic cores and Schiphol airport, the creation of a balanced regional market for offices and industrial terrains and the definition of a ‘creative’ and a ‘logistic’ spatial axis where, respectively, the creative industries and the distribution/logistic industries could be concentrated.

The prevailing significance of the airport to the regional economy brought the regional partners to define the “*metropolitan strategy*” in which the airport, as a hub for international movement, would be better combined with regional economic and cultural activities. By gearing the airport and the regional cultural/economic assets for destined passengers, the RCA aimed to create and exploit synergies between the airport as a central hub and the region that surrounded it (ibid. p.31). A special platform was set up to coordinate the airport’s development and promote the shift of cargo flights from Schiphol to the peripheral airport of Lelystad. This shift would allow an increase of passenger flights to the heart of the region and divert distribution, industrial and logistic activities towards Almere and Lelystad. That way, not only would more passengers use Schiphol and have access to the regional market, but also more jobs would be created in the eastern edge of the development axis of Haarlemmermeer-Amsterdam-Almere. Meanwhile, in order to promote cohesion between office locations, the region and the airport, management agreed that Schiphol would remain a

top location for high-ranked aviation-oriented companies. Less dependent on the airport as a hub, major companies with poor relations to aviation would now be located at the Zuidas (South Axis), a business location with good access to all parts of Amsterdam and surrounding areas.

In this conference, the RCA launched another project aiming to balanced the regional office market and industrial terrains (*Platform Bedrijven Kantoren – PLABEKA*). The boom years of the late '90s and their economic prosperity had given rise to uncoordinated, large-scale office construction in the region. The more sedate years that followed brought less demand for offices and left a big portion of the regional office supply vacant (Noordvleugel 2005a p.39). Thus the PLABEKA team was set up to coordinate the reduction of regional office supply in a manner that fitted market demand. Rounding off a busy agenda, the cooperating members defined in this conference several supporting actions that would help promote regional economic growth. Teams were set up to coordinate the supporting actions aiming to increase the number of companies wishing to settle in the region. One team was responsible to improve the knowledge, innovation and creative industries and to adjust the regional labor market and the offered educational programs accordingly. Other teams encountered the affinity of Almere to the region with the improvement of internal and external accessibility and the creation of differentiated regional housing supply that will match the variety of preferences of the labor market (ibid. p.43)

*5<sup>th</sup> conference – Reinforcing policy lines and further improving competitive position*

The fifth conference took place in November 2005 and focused again on regional competitiveness, reaffirming shared understandings from previous conferences. However, this conference contrasted with the inter-ministerial national program the central government was composing for the region as part of the implementation of the national planning memorandum (see 5.1.1). An opportunity to cooperate with the central government and influence its investments brought the partners to reaffirm their shared understandings on regional issues regarding housing, transport and economy (Noordvleugel 2005b p.2). Agreements concerning the housing distribution and the required measures to ensure good accessibility along the strategic axis of Haarlemmermeer-Amsterdam-Almere were reconfirmed (ibid. p.39).

The RCA members also reiterated economic agreements and a special theme group, chaired by the Chamber of Commerce, was set for promote the innovative and creative industries in the region (ibid. p.21). The axis from Haarlem via Amsterdam and further towards Almere/Hilversum was designated as the spatial axis along which the regional innovation industry would be concentrated (ibid. p.23). The parties also reaffirmed their position favoring the selective growth of Schiphol airport to accommodate more destination flights (p.15) and they pleaded for a second sea lock in the North Sea canal to secure the continuous functioning and the development of the port (p.35).

*6<sup>th</sup> conference – coordinating regional office supply*

The sixth conference took place on February 2007. It was dedicated to the issue of the regional surplus of office supply and the activities of PLABEKA, the coordinating theme group on that matter. The cooperating parties agreed to abolish 3.5 million square meters of planned office development in the region. Amsterdam committed to abolish 1.5 million square meters of planned offices, Haarlemmermeer 1 million and Almere 0.5 million (Stadsregio Amsterdam 2007 p.16-17). The rest (half a million square meters) was still to be dealt with within the continuous effort to reduce the amount of planned offices. The regional partners also agreed to set up a regional acquisition bureau that would attract companies and guide their settling in process in the region. With regard to anticipated shortage of industrial zones in the future no new locations were designated for that purpose (ibid. p.25).

*7<sup>th</sup> Conference – regional landscapes and long-term vision for 2040*

The final conference in which Amsterdam Metropolitan Area still operated under the name “North Wing” took place in December 2007. In this conference, the theme of regional landscape and its role within the metropolitan strategy was tackled. The shared vision in the conference included the agreement for sustainable use of regional landscapes and the creation of regional buffers between the urban growing cores. These buffers would accommodate nature and recreation to increase attractiveness for residents and highly qualified professionals (Noordvleugel 2007).

Next to the relation between the urban cores and natural landscapes, the cooperating members sketched a long-term regional vision for future strategic developments. After a few preparation rounds of open discussions with different regional stakeholders (including scientists, representatives of the private sector and NGOs), a shared vision defined four “*impulses*” that would guide development up until the year 2040 (Metropoolregio Amsterdam 2008):

- *Urban transformation and the creation of mixed working-living areas*: the region would accommodate future development within the contours determined in the third conference for the 150,000 new houses required for the years 2010-2030. That led to the strategic decision for a “compact metropolis” in which further development would be realized through intensive and mixed land use;
- *Improving metropolitan accessibility through investment in regional public transport*: Building new road and public transport connections and the creation of a uniform regional public transport network;
- *Metropolitan landscape*: Exploiting the regional landscape as a recreation area for urban residents;
- *Sustainability and attention to climate change*: Acknowledging the risks of climate change (rising sea and river waters) and the need to spread urban development and define safety measures.

Finally, and importantly, RCA members in this conference agreed to adopt the name “Amsterdam Metropolitan Area” for future regional collaboration. This change came to symbolize and emphasize the fact the challenges and virtues of the city of Amsterdam extended beyond the municipal borders and that in order to increase regional competitiveness internationally, the name of the Dutch capital should be more explicitly mentioned (Metropoolregio Amsterdam 2008, p.11).

## **5.2 THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF AMSTERDAM METROPOLITAN AREA**

The first hypothesis formulated in the research postulated that the voluntary character of the regional collaboration would prevent the cooperating parties from demonstrating selectivity, making strategic choices and bringing internal fit between stakeholders’ actions. The second hypothesis assumed a negative relation between the number of stakeholders involved in the RCA and the collective capacity to consolidate decisive strategic output. In order to evaluate the two hypotheses, this section will use the RCA’s features and its strategic output in order to evaluate the collective capacity to integrate the strategic components of reception, consolidation and realization.

### **5.2.1 Reception**

A crucial component of competitive strategic approach to planning is the availability of information and the creation of knowledge in a competitive environment. This knowledge is necessary to design adequate strategies and to discover and exploit potential synergies when bringing stakeholders together. Creation and detection of potential synergies increases with the availability and the willingness of a wide range of stakeholders to participate and contribute their knowledge, insights and resources. This section presents an overview of the degree to which various stakeholders participated in the RCA.

#### *1. Local and regional governments*

As an inclusive RCA, the North Wing strategically involved all municipalities situated in its territory. Even though not all (aldermen of) municipalities participated in all the sessions conducted by the RCA’s theme groups, they were all informed and encouraged to take part in the general conferences conducted roughly every year. While all member municipalities in the region participated in the general strategic formation process, only the larger ones took part in the detailed elaboration and preparations of the general conferences or in the recurring consultations within the different theme groups.

## *II. Neighboring regional governments*

Interaction and involvement of stakeholders from other (neighboring) regions was limited compared to the involvement of stakeholders within the region. Occasionally, representatives of neighboring regions (like the province of South Holland) took part in the North Wing conferences as observers. In turn, representatives of the North Wing took part as observers in comparable consultations conducted in the southern part of the Randstad – the South Wing. The influential Amsterdam municipality, the city region Amsterdam and the North-Holland province also took part in an RCA of the whole Randstad (*'Regio Randstad'*) before its abolishment at the end of 2007. Both the occasional observance during the North Wing conferences and the cooperation attempts at the Randstad level were incidental and limited.

## *III. Higher tiers of government*

The ministries of Transport, Economic Affairs and Spatial Planning were intensively involved in the strategic formation process of the North Wing. Even though these ministries were not official members of the RCA, representatives of the ministries frequently participated in the consultation rounds conducted by the relevant theme groups. Additionally, the different ministries had an observer role in the periodic conferences conducted by the North Wing's partners. This presence secured the involvement of central government, both in the strategic level (general conferences) and the concrete projects discussed within the regional theme groups. As the central government formulated its own national strategic program for the region, it often initiated consultation rounds with different regional representatives of the North Wing (municipalities and provinces). This involvement was an attempt to exchange ideas about regional preferences concerning future central governmental investments in the region. Contrary to the substantial involvement of the national government, any involvement or reference to a super-national institution (like the EU) during the composition of the regional strategy was absent.

## *IV. Private sector and societal organizations*

Compared to the public sector, the participation of private and civic stakeholders in the regional strategic formation process was limited. The only organization that permanently represented the private sector on regional strategic levels was the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber was not only a permanent member in the conferences but also an active actor in some of the theme groups concerning the regional economy. It chaired the theme group responsible for the encouragement of innovative industries in the region (Noordvleugel 2005a p.47). As a mediating organization between government and private companies in the region, the Chamber of Commerce composed its own spatial economic vision as a basis for potential private sector involvement in regional development (Kamer van Koophandel 2006). Still, the direct involvement of individual private companies in strategic matters concerning the regional scale was very limited and did not exceed incidental occasions. Private

companies did not participate in the general conferences, with the exception of several preparation rounds that took place prior to the formation of the long-term vision for the year 2040 in the 7<sup>th</sup> conference. RCA respondents interviewed for this research revealed that involvement of private companies were often limited to few real estate corporations and seldom transcended the project level.

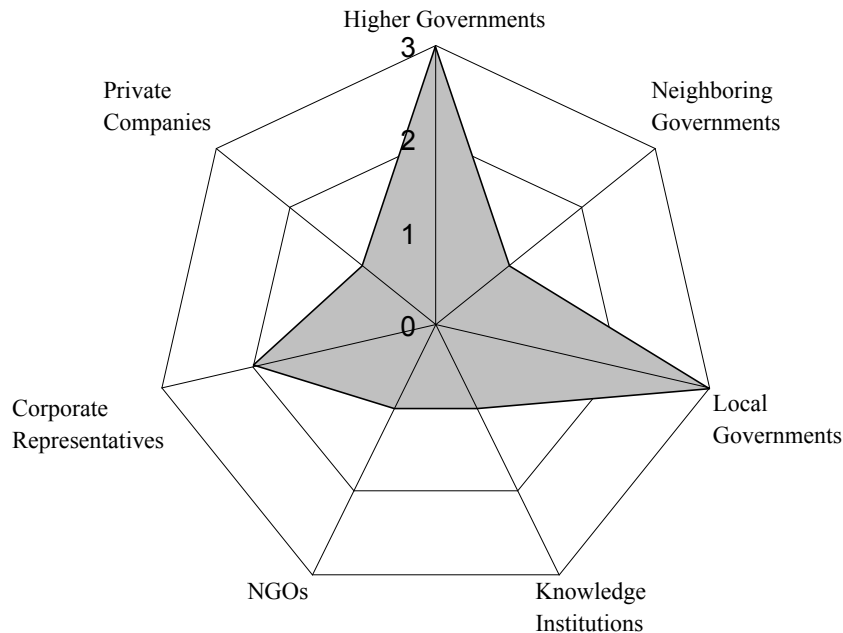
In specific theme groups with economic orientations, some private companies like Capgemini and TCN Property Projects took an incidental part in discussions.

For civic organizations, NGOs, universities and other interest groups the picture was not different. Only occasionally were they involved in the strategic formation process of the North Wing.

#### *V. The strategic compass of the North Wing*

Figure 5.3 presents the strategic compass for the North Wing. The predominance of local governments (municipalities and provinces), higher governments (ministries) and representatives of the corporate sector (Chamber of Commerce) in the strategic forming of the North Wing was striking. All were strongly involved in strategic issues of regional scale. Other parties like private companies, education centers and NGOs were merely incidentally involved.

Figure 5.3: Strategic compass North Wing ( 0= No Participation, 1= Incidental participation, 2= Enduring participation, 3= Permanent participation)



## *VI. Multiplicity of collaborative policy fields*

The North Wing functioned as a regional association for strategic collaboration in a variety of policy fields. Those included housing, urban development, policies on open space, transport and the regional economy. The richness of policy fields encountered in the North Wing created potentials for synergetic interactions between related policy sectors. The next section (5.2.2) appraises the consolidation capacity of the RCA and reveals whether the collaborating members of the North Wing indeed managed to exploit these synergetic potentials.

### **5.2.2 Consolidation**

Involving multiple actors in order to enrich knowledge and create potential for cooperation is only one component of regional strategic capacity. Another component is the regional capacity to define content-based strategies, choose between available alternatives of action and promote synergetic combinations of coherent activities.

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

Within the first years of the North Wing's collaborative practice, it defined strategic choices that became the backbone of key decisions, priority settings and the generation of projects. The definition of the spatial axis Haarlemmermeer-Amsterdam-Almere as the area where 80% of the future housing construction would be concentrated (first conference) became the conceptual base adopted in complementary policy fields and functioned as a measurement for prioritizing between different competing projects. Not only housing but also the future intensification of economic activities was to be concentrated along this axis (4<sup>th</sup> conference). Logically, the improvement of accessibility along the strategic axis got the highest priority among the collaborating parties (3<sup>rd</sup> conference) and brought them to lobby for central governmental investments to ease congestion and enable the envisioned housing and economic development to take place.

The issue of integrated regional accessibility was most challenging for the RCA members. The region conditioned the distribution of the 150,000 houses and further growth of Almere (along the strategic axis towards Amsterdam) on the improvement of accessibility and the reduction of congestion along the corridor. Even though there was a broad regional consensus about the urgency of improving accessibility between the growing city of Almere and the Amsterdam/Schiphol area, RCA partners could not easily decide the best way to solve the congestion problem. Members of the RCA struggled to agree on one of the three proposed alternatives for solving the congestion problem (Ministerie V&W 2006 p.47-52):

*The Minimal Alternative* – introducing fees for using the highways and upgrading public transport facilities at the same time. The smaller municipalities along the existing highways of the strategic axis favored this alternative;

*The Middle Alternative* – introducing fees for car use and expanding existing highways (A6, A1 and A9) along the strategic axis in order to increase their capacity. The province of North-Holland favored this alternative;

*The Maximal Alternative* – introducing infrastructure to cater to car use by connecting Almere via an extended A6 highway that would connect it directly to the highway in the south of Amsterdam towards Schiphol and, it was hoped, ease congestion on the way to Amsterdam. This alternative was originally favored by both the municipalities of Almere and Amsterdam.

Internal differences regarding the favorable alternative prevented the RCA from reaching an agreement and led to stalemate that lasted a few years. However, the logjam was broken during the composition of the national inter-ministerial program for the region, when members managed to reach an agreement supporting the ‘middle’ alternative for easing congestion. The municipal elections of 2006 had brought a new local coalition to the municipality of Amsterdam which changed the municipality’s initial support for the extension of a new highway in favor of the ‘middle’ alternative. Now, Almere remained the only municipality insisting on the ‘maximal’ alternative. As respondents revealed, Almere’s desire to achieve a quick solution to the urgent congestion problem brought it to withdraw from its original support for the road extension and join the other parties favoring the expansion of existing roads (middle alternative). Almere’s withdrawal from its original preference meant that the RCA now could display regional unity as the larger cities and the provinces all favored the expansion of existing roads as the measure to tackle the congestion. This was eventually the alternative they lobbied for to the Ministry of Transport during the composition of the national inter-ministerial program for the region.

The strategic definition of the development axis formed a conceptual base that helped to prioritize between projects and potential investments. Regional practitioners argued that the demonstration of selectivity and capacity to bundle regional demands behind a limited number of issues was crucial during the negotiation with the ministries participating in the inter-ministerial program for the region: “*One of the strategic advantages of the North Wing was its ability to limit the number of its demands. We did not come up with an endless list adding up all we ever wanted,*” confided a respondent from one of the municipalities. The collective capacity to choose and prioritize between alternatives was evident not only in issues suited to collective lobbying (for example, the congestion problem along the development axis and the preference for expansion of existing roads) but was also evident in internal regional matters.

The collective capacity to select and prioritize was evident too during the effort to balance the regional office supply. Schiphol Airport and the South Axis in Amsterdam were designated as the only two locations in which head offices of multinational companies would be concentrated (Stadsregio Amsterdam 2007 p.13). The region defined further differentiation between the top locations: the airport was designated for aviation-related companies while the South Axis would handle other types of businesses. The RCA incorporated all other eligible office locations into the regional



program PLABEKA that coordinated the abolishment of locally-planned office development in order to match the lower anticipated market demand (ibid. p.20).

The strategic output of the North Wing showed also the capacity to integrate related policy fields and yield substantial internal fit between them. During the six years in which the seven conferences took place, the collaborating parties developed a regional awareness to the interrelation between housing construction, transport and accessibility conditions, regional economy, and open spaces. That led to the gradual creation of an integrated regional strategy. The central government considered the internal coherency between projects as crucial evaluating criteria for the acknowledgement of projects in its inter-ministerial programs for the regions. The North Wing scored highly in that report and its collective output was considered coherent by the representatives of the central government evaluating regional recommendations. (Rijksprogramma Noordvleugel 2006a).

## *II. Showing unity and efficient lobbying*

Many respondents emphasized the importance of showing regional unity around strategic choices when negotiating with external parties: *“If the region was not united over the projects submitted to the central government it is questionable whether these projects would have been the ones honored for investments”* (Official from the inter-ministerial program for the North Wing). Respondents from the local and regional governments, universities and the Chamber of Commerce agreed that unity and consistency behind declared policies were crucial for long-term engagement with both the private sector and the central government. The RCA mostly managed to radiate a united position. However, tackling the congestion problems between Almere and Amsterdam illustrated the difficulties in creating and displaying unity when communicating with the central government. The lengthy time spent deciding on alternatives to solve the congestion problem between Almere and Amsterdam delayed the central government’s decision regarding its investments in the region. The central government avoided any decision without first having broad regional support for its chosen solution. Respondents from both Almere and neighboring municipalities revealed that the urge to end the stalemate and the postponement of a decision concerning the urgent congestion problem brought the perception that a suboptimal decision was better than waiting for an ideal decision by the central government that might never have come. This perception brought Almere to revise its original position and withdraw from its campaign to extend of the highway between the A6 and the A9 and join the other RCA partners by pleading for the widening of existing highways. Respondents from Almere municipality contended that this revision was a clear use of regional unity to accelerate the decision-making process by the central government – even at the cost of getting a sub-optimal (but feasible) solution.

### *III. Conflicts, their impacts and resolution mechanism*

Conflicts and clashes of interest between collaborating parties often signal the limits of regional strategic capacity to select and prioritize. At the same time, solving or learning from conflicts can further increase strategic capacity. The North Wing did not suffer many conflicts at regional strategic level. When they did occur, conflicts seldom gave the impression of a crisis that threatened to stop the whole process. In conflict situations, the collaborating members had the tendency to contain the rows and avoid acceleration by bypassing them or smoothing them over in different ways. Securing the continuation of the collaborative practice and the avoidance of conflicts from becoming crises was crucial for the RCA members. Respondents from the municipalities revealed that in order to avoid crises, differences were not always solved at the time they actually occurred. Instead, parties ‘agreed to disagree’ on certain points and postponed decisions on issues that remained controversial. One local politician, recalling the initial disability to agree on an alternative for the congestion problem between Amsterdam and Almere, commented: *“You don’t always have to agree. You can sometimes accept that you do not agree on certain issues. You agree to disagree. You don’t emphasize this fact but it calms the atmosphere and it enables the continuation of the collaboration on other or related issues”*.

Another illustration for the bypassing of occurring conflicts for the sake of continuous collaborative practice occurred during the PLABEKA platform for balancing the regional office market. In order to balance the regional office market, the ratio between the planned and the projected demand for offices in the year 2030 was centrally assessed. But Almere did not agree with the regional assessment of the projected demand for offices (613,000m<sup>2</sup>) in its territory and came up with its own calculation suggesting a substantially higher future demand (1,443,600m<sup>2</sup>), a result of its own projected growth. The other parties in PLABEKA feared a precedent might occur if municipalities could reject the central estimation of future demand. There was a general concern that by accepting the position of Almere, other municipalities would try to promote their own local ambitions through the amendment of estimated demand volumes. After some unsuccessful attempts to agree on the estimated future demand for Almere, a compromise was achieved. This compromise provided for the inclusion of both prognoses in planning future demand. In a special appendix, Almere’s prognosis was added to the regional estimated surplus of planned offices for the municipality (Stadsregio Amsterdam 2007 p.58). The RCA did not determine which of the versions would be taken into consideration when PLABEKA’s program would be implemented.

Comparable differences occurred with regard to the industrial zones in the North Wing. A central calculation revealed a shortage of industrial zones by the year 2020. Particularly in the area of Zaanstad/Waterland and IJmuiden, a worrying shortage seemed to exist. Most regional partners advocated new industrial zones in these areas. However, Waterland and Zaanstad were not keen to realize new industrial zones. Better exploitation of existing zones, they argued, would be better than building

entirely new terrains. The issue remained unsolved as of the end of 2007. In the implementation of PLABEKA's agreements, no specification of an area for new industrial areas was mentioned (Stadsregio Amsterdam 2007 p.39).

Another regional conflict that heated up during the seven years of the North Wing centered on the expansion plans of Almere towards the west. The growing city's plans included building thousands of houses in the waters of the IJ lake (*IJmeer*) between Amsterdam and Almere. Municipalities along the lake (especially Waterland) objected to the scheme, claiming such development would require a dike to lower the lake's water level. Both the idea of the dike and the residential expansion towards the water caused lots of unrest and ended up with the municipalities around the lake rejecting the expansion, fearing for the unique ecologic character of the area. Even though the larger municipalities (Amsterdam and Almere) did not solve the differences with the objecting smaller municipalities at the time of writing (2008), they continued to develop the original schemes of the expansion of Almere into the lake's waters. This, however, was not mentioned in the regional documents produced under the name of the North Wing. Instead, as respondents from the smaller municipalities opposing to the plans revealed themselves, the coordinating team for the North Wing 'melted' the differences and softened the issues of conflict by using an abstract formulation that left all interpretations open. *"When Amsterdam doesn't get what it wants within the North Wing, the disputable issue becomes so blurred and abstract that the opposing parties receive an unclear textual formulation of the text regarding to Almere's expansion. Once you get a dispute in the region that appears unbridgeable, quarreling parties get it to a higher level of abstraction in which you do not understand the content anymore. You get an unclear statement that conceals the problem"* (Civil servant from a Waterland municipality).

### **5.2.3 Realization**

The third strategic component of competitive strategic capacity is the transition of the collective consolidated output towards realization.

The RCA of the North Wing consolidated two types of output:

1. Shared positions concerning projects to be approved/realized by the central government (for lobbying efforts);
2. Collective agreements concerning internal matters that necessitated the commitment and implementation by the regional stakeholders themselves

During consultation rounds with representatives of the inter-ministerial national program for the region, RCA members managed to unite behind strategic preferences. They managed to radiate a strong, unified signal regarding their preferences and by that they achieved a great impact on the central government. The central government adopted in its inter-ministerial program for the region the regional housing distribution plans for the year 2030 including Almere's expansion westwards. The central government acknowledged the urgency of the congestion problems along the development axis and it reserved a generous € 4.5 billion to address the problem (Rijksprogramma Noordvleugel 2006a p.37). However, the central government did not

specify in its program which of the three alternatives it would implement. This was exactly the decision the members of the North Wing could not make at that time. Respondents from the municipalities and the central government revealed that the disability of the region at that time to radiate a favored alternative was the main reason for the central government to hold back a pronouncement on the matter. It was only when Almere abandoned its initial insistence on realizing a completely new road that the central government weighed in on the matter. The Ministry of Transport decided to adopt the regional position and chose by the end of 2007 to spend the reserved budget on expanding the existing highways between Almere, Amsterdam and the airport.

Members of the North Wing made a series of internal agreements regarding housing distribution, regional economy, the coordinated acquisition of companies and the provision of demand-driven office supply and industrial zones. Even though the actual realization of houses was not a task of the individual municipalities, there was a need for a central monitoring system in order to detect deviations from the plans and to promote consistency with regional agreements. In order to monitor the developments and realization of the houses, the Province and the City Region Amsterdam developed a regional system that annually monitored the capacity of actual plans for accommodating housing development in the region. Through the monitoring, RCA members could ascertain which municipalities needed extra attention to reach the targets. Despite the fact the agreed construction volumes were aimed at the year 2030, the first steps to their realization revealed substantial obstacles when official schemes were produced. The first plans of Almere's expansion towards the IJ-lake stoked protest in neighboring municipalities (Waterland and Muiden) whose cooperation was needed (5.2.2). Respondents disclosed that the expansion of Almere and the promotion of new housing construction in Amsterdam met different obstacles, suggesting some gaps existed between the RCA's ability to consolidate regional agreements and its ability to translate those into concrete feasible projects.

As agreed during the 6<sup>th</sup> regional conference (Stadsregio Amsterdam 2007 p.43), the RCA set up a regional acquisition bureau at the beginning of 2008 in order to attract and guide the settlement of (foreign) companies in the region, based on each company's profile and regional office supply in general. PLABEKA's program for the coordination and modification of a more balanced regional office supply represented the first steps towards the abolishment of existing office plans. Municipalities agreed to abolish existing plans for office developments but those agreements, have not yet led (as of 2008) to any official change of municipal zoning schemes in areas where planned offices were slated to be cancelled.

Although at the beginning of 2008 many of the agreed-upon projects remained in their planning phase (so concrete failures in implementation had not actually been experienced), many of the respondents expressed their doubts concerning the *full* realization of the regional strategic output. Respondents mentioned different reasons for their pessimistic expectations:

1. Lack of experience and knowledge within the North Wing concerning the realization of complex regional plans. According to some respondents,

- financial considerations regarding land exploitation and local interests did not get enough attention at the strategic regional level;
2. Lack of any enforcement mechanism that would prevent the withdrawal of regional stakeholders from earlier agreements;
  3. The perceived gap between practitioners and political figures involved in the strategic level of regional policy-making and their professional and political grassroots.

#### **5.2.4 The strategic capacity of an inclusive-voluntary RCA**

The collective output of the North Wing showed significant strategic capacity. As a voluntary RCA, the North Wing included dozens of municipalities and two provinces, yet it still managed to define a long-term strategy with clear strategic choices and internal differentiations. Members linked between related policy fields on a regional scale, reaching a substantial level of internal fit between transport and accessibility, spatial development and regional economy. Although much of the collective consolidated output is still in its initial realization phase, and uncertainties concerning eventual realization still exist, some encouraging signs were already present at the time of writing. The central government has adopted the strategic choices of the North Wing in its national program for the region. Internal issues like regulating housing production and office abolishment, all have been executed by the RCA members themselves, or already have been monitored and coordinated.

Respondents from within and outside the RCA appreciate its achievements. Officials from the central government involved in the composition of the inter-ministerial program for the region expressed their impression concerning the capacity of the RCA's members to communicate clearly over their preferences regarding potential central governmental investments in the region: *"Representatives of the region chased us during the decision-making process of the national program for the region. They played the game very well. They knew when the central government was going to decide about which issue. They made sure we were well informed, they submitted reports and made phone call to the ministries. To a large extent, the regional cooperation in the North Wing made the decision-making for the central government easier"* (Official from the Ministry of Transport).

When asked to reflect on the voluntary character of the RCA and its potential influence on the quality of the regional collaboration, several respondents disclosed that the voluntary character of the RCA had made the cooperation rather awkward and energy consuming. Respondents from the Chamber of Commerce suggested that fragmentation of the RCA and the lack of hierarchy prevented collaborating local governments from presenting a united message towards potential stakeholders from the private sector. They also suggested that a more hierarchical governing mechanism would have increased regional decisiveness on issues upon which the municipalities were divided. Some respondents from local politics recognized the relation between the voluntary character of the RCA and the reduction of regional decision capacity over

sensitive issues. They claimed that the voluntary character limited the regional strategic output to the borders of consensus.

However, most respondents (including the critics) did not support the introduction of a compulsory alternative to the present voluntary practice. The main reluctance came from the appreciation of the respondents for the achievement of the RCA. Respondents appreciated the practice of the North Wing and the successes gained through the voluntarily practice. One official from the municipality of Amsterdam referred to the idea of compulsory collaboration or hierarchical decision-making as premature: *“I say no, don’t do it. Maybe later, but now it is too early. The formulas we used in the North Wing have delivered a lot. They are good and valuable. If you go for more hierarchy or to elections it can jeopardize the process because then the factor of ‘power’ comes to the field. We constantly try to avoid any form of power concentration. Power or competence, that certain people or organizations get within the North Wing are based on agreements, content and trust, not on arbitrary decisions of an elected apparatus”* (planner from the municipality of Amsterdam).

The demonstrated strategic capacities of the North Wing and the reflections expressed by the respondents are clearly at odds with the first hypothesis of the research. Contrary to the postulated hypothesis, the North Wing as a voluntary RCA did achieve high strategic capacity and managed to integrate its three components. The observed strategic capacity of the North Wing contradicts the second hypothesis as well. The case of the North Wing shows only little support to the alleged tradeoff between the level of inclusion (reception) and the collective ability to consolidate and realize strategic output. Even though the North Wing included dozens of municipalities, it demonstrated a high capacity to produce content-based strategies with clear priorities and internal coherency.

When confronted with the suggested tradeoff between the level of inclusion and the collective strategic capacity, respondents were quite divided. Respondents from the private sector and some governmental officials considered the inclusion of many municipalities a barrier for achieving quick agreements. Other respondents, however, especially from municipalities and the province, considered the wide inclusion of stakeholders as important and advantageous. Advocates of wide inclusion mentioned three reasons for maintaining the open collaboration:

1. Expanding the knowledge available while defining profound SWOT analyses and generating ideas for adequate actions;
2. Creating a critical mass with a strong impact on external parties, particularly the central government;
3. Increasing the probability of realization by early involvement of potential partners/antagonists.

### **5.3 POWER AND THE STRATEGIC CAPACITY OF AMSTERDAM METROPOLITAN AREA**

The relatively high strategic capacity of the North Wing leads to the next series of hypotheses aiming to detect those conditions that stimulated, supported and enabled the demonstrated regional performance. At the basis of the hypotheses on power lies the proposition that power external to the RCA, concentrated within the RCA and resulting from the collaboration itself create a stimulating mechanism that is crucial for the achievement of high collective strategic capacity in the region.

#### **5.3.1 External power and its impact on the regional collaboration**

*“The most important mechanism for achieving regional agreements is the collective position against a third party. In this region, the third party is the central government”* (Official from a local municipality in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area).

External opportunities and threats that trigger and stimulate regional cooperation may emerge from global market forces and from specific actors external to the region (2.1.2). The events that shaped the collaboration of the North Wing (5.1), and the interviews conducted with the respondents, revealed the crucial role the central government had in shaping the capacity of the North Wing to cooperate strategically. Many of the respondents considered the specific task granted to the region by the central government to realize 150,000 houses as *the* trigger for collaborative practice. The task brought the regional partners to hold the first conference in a series that became common practice in the North Wing. The regional partners were challenged by the central government, which allowed them to determine themselves how to distribute the required housing volumes. The regional partners, as respondents revealed, were keen to prove to the central government that they could meet that challenge.

When the central government composed its own inter-ministerial program for the North Wing, the regional partners were keen to achieve and demonstrate regional unity around strategic issues. Participants acknowledged that regional unity would increase the influence of the region while lobbying for investments by central government. As one of the aldermen in the region said: *The central government observes very closely whether the region is able to draw a vision.... Once it appears the region is divided around certain issues you take the risk of being ignored by the central government or that it postpones a decision. ...The regional unity was very important in our interaction with the central government. We showed the central government that we have a clear idea about what is needed in the region and where investments should go. Whether it was a good idea is another issue, but it was in any case a clear idea”* (Local aldermen for Spatial Planning).

Respondents from the ministries confirmed the regional assumption that the central government appreciated and tended to be more positive towards firm and united regional positions regarding spatial economic investments: *“When the region is not organized then the central government can determine more. If the region does not manage to set priorities and be selective then we get long lists of projects we are expected to finance. We will never realize all the projects the region asks. If the regional parties cannot select urgent projects by themselves then we, the central government, will make the choice for them”* (Official from the national program to the North Wing).

The central government appeared not only to stimulate selectivity by the RCA but also indirectly promoted the regional capacity to deal with internal conflicts. When the RCA members could not agree on strategic issues (see reduction of road congestion, expansion of Almere to the IJ lake) the central government fulfilled a latent role in mitigating those conflicts. Internal coalitions of parties favoring certain policies occasionally (mis)used the central government by presenting *it* as the reason behind bitter decisions the RCA had to make in favor their choice. Amsterdam and Almere used the central governmental decision to approve the construction of 60,000 houses in Almere (Rijksprogramma Noordvleugel 2006a) as an argument to justify their preference to expand Almere westwards to the waters of the IJmeer lake. Using the official decision of the central government to approve Almere’s massive expansion, both Amsterdam and Almere could present the controversial plan as unavoidable while convincing the opposing parties to remove their objection. By using the central government’s official decision, the internal coalition of Amsterdam and Almere tried to shift the frustration of the opposing parties towards the central government rather than towards other RCA members. This tactic of using the external party as the guilty party for the need to take painful decisions was recognized both by respondents from the local municipalities and by those from the central government: *“The municipalities need to make sometimes difficult decisions. There are always municipalities that do not want to build. If the region can argue that the central government demand that something should be built, it is easier to convince the opposing parties in the region to go ahead and cooperate with the project”* (Respondent from the national program to the North Wing).

The years in which the central government was busy with the composition of the inter-ministerial program for the region proved to be the years in which the regional collaboration was intensified and the motivation to radiate clear and unified regional signal was highest. The resources of the central government and its potential investments in regional projects worked as a direct stimulus to form united and coherent regional positions and sharpen understandings between regional parties in order to lobby effectively. The position of the central government, however, was not always conceived as constructive to the RCA’s collaborative practice. When the central government showed inconsistency or clearly biased positions towards the region, the negative effect on the regional collaboration was tangible. Some respondents saw a clear bias by the central governmental program towards projects of transport and infrastructure. These respondents highlighted the fact that the Ministry of Transport



coordinated the inter-ministerial investment program. This 'bias' of the central government led to similar bias within the RCA that took more effort to develop shared positions regarding mobility and transport projects while other issues (like the initiation of industrial terrains) were given lower priority.

Respondents also blamed the central government for what they saw as destructive interventions that damaged the quality of the regional collaboration. One example was the coordinating effort between the collaborating regional stakeholders and Schiphol airport. The envisioned coordinated development between the national airport and the region (as outlined during the 4<sup>th</sup> conference of the North Wing) was expropriated from the RCA by the central government. The shared vision portrayed in the conference could not manifest itself in multilateral consultations between the regional parties and airport. As a national airport, the inter-ministerial program for the North Wing incorporated Schiphol's development and brought it under the direct responsibility of the coordinating Ministry of Transport. That led to high frustration within the North Wing, especially among the municipalities around the airport that felt they lost their chance to influence the future of the airport. The power of the central government and its influence on the regional collaboration was also destructive. The preference and the capacity of the central government to coordinate the airport development by itself (the central government is the largest shareholder in the airport) reduced the potential of the RCA itself to synergize development between the region and its airport along the lines of the regional strategy.

Another discouraging influence of the central government towards the RCA was evident by the end of 2007 when the RCA concluded its last conference under the name "North Wing". In this year it appeared that both the RCA and the central government deserted the North Wing. The RCA did it solely by changing its name (to Amsterdam Metropolitan Area) but the central government abandoned it as it did not more see it as adequate scale for inter-ministerial regional program. In this year, the newly elected central government abolished the program for the North Wing and launched a new national program, this time for the whole of the Randstad. The program for the North Wing had to be reevaluated and incorporated into the new national policies for the whole of the Randstad. The Amsterdam Metropolitan Area lost its leading status for national attention in favor of a higher scale that included the South Wing as well. This shift in central governmental priorities frustrated the members of the North Wing. They saw in the new national program for the Randstad a program that threatened everything that had already been achieved during the formation of the national program for the North Wing. Wishing to reaffirm the essence of the region, it may not be totally coincidental that, in the year the central government shifted its attention from the North Wing to the Randstad, the members of the North Wing decided to change the name of their RCA to the 'Amsterdam Metropolitan Area'.

### **5.3.2 Internal power in a monocentric region**

The interrelation between the collaborating parties and the concentration of power within an RCA influence strategic capacity, according to the 4<sup>th</sup> hypothesis. Analysis of the strategic output for the North Wing and the series of interviews conducted with politicians and practitioners show that concentration of power, together with the central position of Amsterdam, combined to strengthen the collective strategic capacity of the whole region.

#### *I. The Provinces and the City Region Amsterdam*

The two provinces of North-Holland and Flevoland, as the highest governmental tiers in the RCA, already had official competences that allowed them to shape and mold spatial economic policies within their administrative borders which covered a great deal of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. According to the Spatial Planning Act, the provinces can intervene and force municipalities to act according to official provincial policy. Additionally, municipal land use plans require provincial approval. The provinces thus enjoy juridical resources that can influence local policies. North-Holland province holds substantial financial resources as well, as it was an important shareholder of Nuon (a public owned high-revenue energy company) till 2009.

Despite its statutory and financial resources, the province of North-Holland was not considered as an actor that determined the collaborative practice of the North Wing. Its statutory competences in the fields of spatial development were limited to only part of the region (the part outside of the strategic axis Haarlemmermeer-Amsterdam-Almere). The rest of the area fell under the juridical responsibility of other regional statutory organizations – the province Flevoland and the city region Amsterdam.

Today, while the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is fragmented both locally (municipalities) and regionally (provinces and city region), all local governments have to deal with the central position and the influence of one central city – Amsterdam. In their interviews, all respondents emphasized the great influence of the politicians and the civil apparatus of Amsterdam within the region and on the national policy makers. One respondent from a smaller municipality said: *“The province is not the face of the North Wing. The minister will always call the mayor of Amsterdam when something urgent takes place. The province has only a subtle mediating role in the regional cooperation”*. Some of the respondents saw the role of the province North-Holland as a mediator that voiced the concerns of peripheral municipalities located outside the strategic axis, preventing the RCA from becoming completely the plaything of Amsterdam and Almere.

## *II. The role of Amsterdam*

Some might be surprised that Amsterdam, as indisputably the largest and most well-known city in the region, has no official competences for guiding regional development. However, the dominance of Amsterdam amongst the regional collaborating parties in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area is nevertheless evident. Respondents from municipalities and the province pointed out the benefits the regions gain from the presence of an internationally-prominent city with its own financial resources (important shareholder in Schiphol airport and energy companies) and channels of communication with the central government. The unique human, financial and political assets in Amsterdam contributed to its dominance within the RCA. Respondents saw in Amsterdam's unique position an important influence on collective regional strategic capacity. It increased the capacity to reach consensus, overcome internal conflicts and realize strategies.

Amsterdam has always played a dominating role in the region. The political leadership of Amsterdam (together with that of the province North-Holland) helped initiate the RCA (see 5.1.1) and the city municipality provided a secretarial bureau that prepared the RCA's conferences and financed and organized its theme groups. The geographical centrality of Amsterdam gave it a strong communications dimension within the RCA. Officials of Amsterdam conducted a series of bilateral consultations with the surrounding municipalities to detect collaborative potentials and further strengthen the strategic output that came out of the conferences. Most striking was the bilateral collaboration between Amsterdam and Almere. This bilateral collaboration yielded the "twin city" concept from which the intensity of collaboration between the two cities grew further. Amsterdam was directly involved in the expansion plans of Almere and Almere itself appreciated the collaboration with Amsterdam. But other municipalities objected to the expansion plans of Almere, most notably Waterland, which felt it had been excluded from the plans (Intergemeentelijke Samenwerking Waterland 2007). Meanwhile, Amsterdam engaged with other cities on its periphery. For example, practitioners from Amsterdam advised Amstelveen over city development and the combination of functions within the urban realm and collaborated with Zaanstad on a joint development of the IJ river for recreation and tourism. All municipalities considered the knowledge and the expertise within the municipality of Amsterdam as a regional asset and were keen to make the most of it. One of the respondents from the municipalities even hoped that Amsterdam would do more for its city: *"Amsterdam could have done projects for us. There is a lot of knowledge in Amsterdam. There are people in Amsterdam that would like to do things for us. Nothing is wrong about that. If they are good at it there is no reason why they should not do that for us as well"* (Official from a medium-sized municipality).

It appeared from the interviews that the municipality of Amsterdam offered its expertise and knowledge to the regional parties it collaborated with in a manner seen as humble and not arrogant. That stood in strong contrast with the image of Amsterdam in previous years before the collaboration of the North Wing began. Respondents from Amsterdam and the other regional parties revealed that before the North Wing

collaboration began, the surrounding municipalities perceived Amsterdam as pushy and arrogant. The paternalistic attitude of Amsterdam towards its neighbors in inter-municipal matters used to be perceived as unwelcome. Now, respondents said that Amsterdam had abandoned its paternalistic attitude towards the region in favor of a more collaborative approach of dialogue and reason: *‘We really try to convince our regional partners with arguments. It is not that we dictate what should happen. That was indeed the case in 1995, when the referendum for City-Province took place. But not anymore’* (Official from Amsterdam municipality). Likewise, respondents from Amsterdam often emphasized that the municipality preferred to work with its direct neighbors based on shared interests and not from any antagonistic use of power. They believed such an attitude stimulated the willingness of other municipalities to cooperate and make concessions for reaching regional agreements. Respondents from other municipalities confirmed that perception: *“If a larger municipality behaves arrogantly towards its smaller neighbors, it creates resistance. Everybody knows that Amsterdam is the most important in the region. But that doesn’t mean it has to come about in an arrogant way”* (Official from a small municipality).

The acknowledged central role of Amsterdam brought the RCA to change officially its name to the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. This act symbolized the departure from the previous era where smaller municipalities were reluctant to give Amsterdam the leading role. Gaining its neighbors’ trust granted Amsterdam dominance and the submission of the smaller municipalities. Nevertheless, respondents maintained that Amsterdam’s dominant position brought with it regional responsibility: *“If Amsterdam doesn’t take its responsibility for the region, and that without the arrogance of the large city, no real progress can be achieved in the North Wing”* (Top official from a medium-sized municipality).

### **5.3.3 Collective power – the reflexive impact of cooperative network**

According to the last hypothesis, the third type of power expected to have a constructive effect on the RCA and its strategic capacity is the power resulting from the cooperation itself. The last hypothesis postulates that the collective power and strategic capacity of an RCA increases within time, as successful results from the cooperation become evident and benefits become tangible. The Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, when still operating as the North Wing, was a growing cooperation that gradually expanded its members and its collaborative activities into additional related policy fields. Since the first conference in 2001, both the issues at stake and the spectrum of parties participating grew significantly. Respondents attributed the growth and the intensification of the regional collaboration to the success experienced in the conferences. Meeting the challenge presented by the central government regarding regional housing stimulated the participants to try and cooperate in the same way with the complementary policy fields of transport, regional economy and open spaces. Furthermore, from one conference to the next, the trust between the RCA members grew and stimulated parties to add topics to the regional agenda that had less affinity with those of the central government. Those were topics with little or no orientation to

either specific tasks granted by the central government (housing) or for lobbying (infrastructure) but rather internal orientations like the regional economy and coordination of the office market.

The growing sense of success among participants and observers attracted the involvement of new stakeholders to the RCA as well. Since the first conference in 2001, new parties joined or expressed an interest in joining the regional collaboration. By the time the last North Wing conference was held in 2007, the number of municipalities taking part of the RCA had jumped from 23 (in 2001) to 36, including Lelystad and other municipalities from the Gooi area at the west. The engagement of new municipalities was not the result of an intentional policy to grow, as an official from Amsterdam contended. *“It is not that we invite others, but others are coming to us. We are happy when we are approached by new partners for cooperation”*. Other respondents hinted that there was a subtle but deliberate behavior within the RCA to encourage external parties to engage: *“You need to create something that sparks the feeling – ‘hey, I want to belong there. Something happens there. I need to be there, I want to take part in it’. And then, plenty of enterprising energy bursts out”*.

The sense of successful collaboration stimulated not only the involvement of stakeholders but also the capacity to minimize conflicts and consolidate bold strategic outcomes. Some of the respondents contended that the success and the appreciation of the collaborating parties increased a desire to safeguard the RCA’s reputation. Parties developed shared responsibilities for the maintenance of a workable and collaborative atmosphere within the RCA even when differences occurred. The present and envisioned future benefits coming out of the collaboration prevented walkouts by frustrated parties who felt their local ambitions were not being well served or were receiving too little regional support. None of the regional differences that occurred between the collaborative parties led to expressions of disapproval about the RCA. When Almere and the province Flevoland found themselves isolated in their preference for realizing a new highway to ease regional congestion they chose to withdraw from their original standpoint and join the majority which favored expanding existing highways. Almere did not threaten or reproach the other parties for not supporting its original position but rather preferred to align with the regional majority. A comparable experience was observed around the differences regarding Almere’s expansion to the IJmeer lake. When the municipalities in Waterland found themselves alone in front of wide regional coalition that supported (or at least accepted) Almere’s expansion along the lake, they did not decide to step out of the RCA either.

Similarly, Zaanstad and other municipalities located outside of the consolidated regional strategic development axis (Haarlemmermeer-Amsterdam-Almere) chose to remain within the RCA even though they realized they would probably get less attention than the municipalities located along the axis, while still, promoting their own interests by demanding good accessibility to the strategic axis. Zaanstad, for example, pleaded for the expansion of the existing tunnel (*Coen-tunnel*) that connects north-western municipalities to Amsterdam and Utrecht. A respondent from the municipality of Zaanstad revealed: *“For us, the regional agenda is determined by what we do*

*ourselves... we use the North Wing in order to exchange knowledge, to sharpen our own standpoint, lobby for a second Coentunnel. You cannot do that without regional cooperation and this is why we participate."*

Avoiding conflicts that could endanger the collaboration led to the preference to compromise rather than leave the RCA or dismantle the collaboration. This was evident during the regional coordinated effort to reduce office supply (PLABEKA). The differences between Almere and the rest of the municipalities concerning the amount of planned offices to be abolished, led to a compromise allowing all parties to interpret it whichever way they wished (see 5.2.2.). It seemed that parties managed conflicts creatively to keep the collaboration in tact.

Respondents from the municipality of Amsterdam summed up the binding effect of the RCA and its positive impact on overcoming conflicts: *"Parties continue to collaborate not only because of their acknowledged interdependency but also because of the fear of damaging the good image of the cooperation. To a certain extent, we have become each other's prisoners, and that is not necessarily bad. You make with each other a series of agreements which are so interrelated that you cannot withdraw anymore".* *"Participate or perish!"* exclaimed another respondent. The success and the knowledge available within the RCA was so valuable for the individual parties that they would not exclude themselves deliberately from the RCA even when they were not always satisfied from specific collaborative results. Disappointed parties preferred to remain within a successful and influential RCA rather than find themselves out of it.

## **5.4 CONCLUSIONS**

The North Wing represents a case of an inclusive voluntary RCA that strove to improve the competitiveness of a monocentric region. Strategic output and the interviews conducted shed light on the relation between the inclusiveness and voluntary characters of the RCA and its strategic capacity. The role of power for promoting collective action, as revealed in the case, was crucial.

### **5.4.1 Voluntary and inclusive RCA with high strategic capacity**

The North Wing, an inclusive and voluntary RCA, managed to achieve high strategic capacity and skillfully integrate the three components of reception, consolidation and realization. In less than a decade it managed to include a large number of local and regional governments in a voluntary process that yielded a long-term, content-based spatial economic strategy. The RCA included dozens of local governments with whom it consolidated shared integral strategy. However, the involvement of non governmental agencies was limited. The corporate sector was involved through representatives like the Chamber of Commerce; NGOs were only occasionally involved in the collective process.

The voluntary character appeared not to prevent the RCA from achieving high strategic capacity. Some participants recognized delays in decision-making that may have resulted from the voluntary character of the RCA, but this definitely did not stop the collaborating regional parties from producing clear and coherent strategies. The fact that the vast majority of respondents rejected ideas of introducing a hierarchical alternative that would replace the voluntary character of the RCA strengthens that point. The coordination of related policies promoted a good internal fit between policy fields and stakeholders' activities. The coherent and clear regional choices assisted the region in communicating and cooperating efficiently with external parties, especially with the central government. The findings in Amsterdam Metropolitan Area therefore do not support the postulated hypothesis concerning the incapability of voluntary RCAs to produce high strategic capacity. Nor do the findings support the alleged tradeoff between high inclusion of stakeholders and the capacity to produce clear and coherent regional strategic output. This RCA did not avoid growth and exposure to more stakeholders who wished to join it. The growth in number of RCA members through the years did not accompany with observed reduces strategic capacity.

#### **5.4.2 The constructive impact of power on regional strategic capacity**

All three types of power showed constructive impact on the collective strategic capacity of the North Wing. The central government, as an external and powerful actor rich with juridical and financial resources, had direct influence on the quality of the regional collaboration. It ignited the regional collaboration by giving it the specific task of realizing the housing. During the years when it composed its own inter-ministerial program, the central government approached the regional partners in a coherent way, using an appointed coordinating minister that brought the different ministries into line. The coherent position of the ministries stimulated the RCA members to reach internal understandings and radiate unity around strategic choices in an attempt to influence the inter-ministerial program. After all, any agreement with the coordinating minister secured, in principle, the support of the four other influential ministries. However, the central government had a negative influence as well. It raised angst when it took unilateral initiatives in relation to the region and when it shifted its attention from the North Wing to whole of the Randstad.

The North Wing itself contained different centers of power. North-Holland Province had both legislative competences and financial resources that let it function as co-facilitator of the RCA. Its legislative competence, however, only covered the western part of the North Wing area. The province of Flevoland shared the same legislative competences as with North-Holland but its location at the eastern margins of the North Wing and the fact it had less financial resources than North-Holland made it even less influential in the RCA. The City Region Amsterdam carried both juridical and financial resources in which regional collaboration could be legislatively guided. However, the actor that emerged as the most influential appeared to be the municipality of Amsterdam. The municipality of Amsterdam had less legislative or financial resources in the regional arena but it gained its domination from its image and its skills.

Amsterdam's central position and its unique economic, political and professional hegemony shaped the way other RCA members treated it. The influence of Amsterdam granted it a unique position within the North Wing but it was essential that the city maintained a non-paternalistic attitude towards other members. Amsterdam enjoyed an influence that came from regional acknowledgement and appreciation of its central position by the other members. This granted Amsterdam's preferences and insights additional weight compared with other RCA members. And that weight made strategic decisions, even on disputable issues, possible. As the regional partners perceived Amsterdam as an asset they could all benefit from, the capital had the possibility to bring the stakeholders to support its own preferences. These interactions carried an occasional bilateral character.

Eventually, the stimulating effect of the collective power accumulated within the collaboration was evident as well in the North Wing. The sense of success, the appreciation of the members for the RCA, attracted new stakeholders and spurred the partners to collaborate in additional policy fields. Success and appreciation stoked regional hunger to tackle new challenges, thereby increasing strategic capacity and internal fit. The sense of success promoted a valuable sense of belonging to the RCA. That sense of partnership in the collective regional effort was the glue that held the collaboration together even when differences and conflicts threatened to topple the cooperation. In the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, the three kinds of supportive power mechanisms turned out to be present and constructive for the high strategic capacity achieved.



