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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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## EPILOGUE

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Power has a troublesome image among public administrators and public policy managers (Pfeffer 1992 in Hardy 1994). Parallel to its capacity to enable change, increase progress and mobilize actors, power is also associated with exclusion, compulsion and exploitation. Just as power may be used to promote responsible and concerted development, it can also be misused to serve narrow interests and mobilize bias in a manner that puts barriers in front of actors rather than empower them. Nevertheless, both power and power differences are intrinsic to social interaction. The findings of this research advocate a shift in the debate from distributive issues regarding limiting the effect of power, or how it can be neutralized, towards issues regarding the *constructive* collective use of it. Harnessing power to reduce its effect is neither possible nor pragmatic when promoting regional collaboration. Dismantling power concentration and its redistribution seems to be difficult to perform and even when conducted, appears to carry unsatisfying results. Alternatively, existing centers of power can be constructively channeled towards desired collective outcome. Collaborating within the given concentrations of distributed power may prove much more fruitful and pragmatic than any a-priori debate over optimal manner upon which power should be distributed.

However, utilizing power for fruitful collective action necessitates great responsibility from the powerful. Cautious, coherent and circumspective use of power is essential for increasing regional strategic capacity. The responsibility for achieving high strategic capacity within the region lies therefore by the powerful. It is the duty of the central government to radiate a coherent message towards the regional stakeholders when advocating decentralization policies and negotiating with the regions. It is the task of the regional leadership (regional governments, provinces, central cities) to recruit potential stakeholders and grant them a sense of ownership over the collective regional goals and the expected collaborative outcomes. It is also the responsibility of the collaborating stakeholders to achieve success and reproach the external and internal powerful actors when failing to act responsibly and coherently with *their* power.

