Symbolic markers and institutional innovation in transforming urban spaces

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Citation for published version (APA):
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In search of symbolic markers: transforming the urbanised landscape of the Rotterdam Rijnmond


The change in the form of cities over the last few decades into amorphous patterns classified as Zwischenstadt (in-between city) has encouraged many urban regions to launch planning strategies that address the urbanised landscape in city-regions. Symbolic markers are used to signify spatial transformation and mobilise various public and private stakeholders (including citizens). As the mindset of people is institutionalised in old perceptions of urban life, strategies employing symbolic markers may be thought of as attempts at institutional innovation. I will argue that the imagination of new regional spaces in the urban fringe is often voluntaristic. Instituting imaginative reconstructions of the Zwischenstadt through symbolic markers relies on a very precise notion of institutional meaning in practice. Using the Rotterdam Rijnmond area in the Netherlands and its attempt to develop new images of the regional urban landscape as an example, I will show that the transformative potential of symbolic markers depends on the way existing cultural and institutional practices are recombined.

Introduction

In recent decades we have witnessed the emergence of a new urban form, a process that is still unfolding and leading to an urbanised landscape that is classified as Zwischenstadt (in-between city). The city is merging physically and functionally with the surrounding countryside and vice versa, leading to an urban configuration quite distinct from the traditional urban hierarchy (e.g. Sieverts, 1997; Soja, 2000; Graham and Marvin, 2001). Today’s cities are best conceived of as regional archipelagos that are highly fragmented as a result of spatial and functional specialisation and segregation (Kunzmann, 1997; Sieverts, 1997). The German town planner Thomas Sieverts introduced the term Zwischenstadt (in-between city) to express the diffuse character of the urbanised landscape that is dominating urban areas virtually all over Europe. It refers to the vast areas between the traditional urban core and the open countryside that have accommodated urban growth over the last decades. This emerging urban condition is characterised by a blurring of the distinc-
tion between town and countryside, in which the in-between area no longer fulfils the traditional image of urban space nor the ideal of landscape. This new spatial configuration has challenged the sense of place (Sieverts, 1997). But, while urban form has changed tremendously, the traditional images of town and countryside linger on, not only in the minds of planners and decision makers, but also in public perception. The challenges of the urban fringe are increasingly recognised, but new images for the Zwischenstadt are only now starting to emerge (Gallent et al., 2006; Hauser, 2007; Salet, 2009).

In many countries, new planning strategies tackle the in-between spaces in urban regions. In Germany, this is summarised under the label Qualifizierung der Zwischenstadt [definition of the in-between city] (Bölling and Sieverts, 2004). The Emscher Park in the Ruhr Area was an early response to the need to define the citified landscape in urban regions. Under the label of regional parks similar plans have been realised in several urban regions (Gailing, 2007). The Mission Bassin Minier in the mining region Nord–Pas-de-Calais and the Estuaire Nantes–Saint-Nazaire festival are French examples of envisaging the emerging regional cityscape. In the UK, green infrastructures emerged as a new development concept for the urban fringe (Thomas and Littlewood, 2010). These approaches share a broader perspective on landscape, which is not restricted to green space but deals with the interface of built-up (red) and open (green) space. Planners try to establish new spatial imaginations for the in-between areas at the urban edge through selective but visible spatial interventions, which I refer to as ‘symbolic markers’. These convey a new understanding of the transforming landscape in the urban fringe. In the Netherlands too, with its traditionally strong separation of ‘red’ and ‘green’, this planning challenge is increasingly recognised and new concepts and ideas are emerging (van den Brink et al., 2006).

The Rotterdam Rijnmond area with its 1.4 million inhabitants is probably the most fascinating citified landscape in the Netherlands and can be considered as a Zwischenstadt par excellence (Atelier Zuidvleugel, 2007). Its most remarkable and distinctive element is Rotterdam seaport, one of the world’s largest. Once located in the centre of Rotterdam, the port now stretches 40 kilometres westwards up to and even into the North Sea. The ‘portscape’ itself is characterised by its enormous scale, which contrasts with the surrounding landscape. Within the harbour area one finds the islands typical of a contemporary Zwischenstadt. Small workers’ villages are situated in the middle of it, and the first extension into the North Sea has become an established recreational destination. On its outskirts the harbour clashes with the coun-
tryside. Green space has been developed to ‘protect’ some villages from ‘ho-
ron pollution’ by cranes, tanks and other port-related activities. The spatial
expansion of the harbour has led to a mosaic landscape, the disappearance of
much green space, and environmental problems such as smells, noise and air
pollution. The general urbanisation of the city periphery, which occurred in
the Rotterdam area, as in any other metropolitan region in the Western world,
has increased this effect. The region has an image problem and is mainly as-
sociated with its port-related industries. Hence, there is a pressing need for
intervention.

There are many visions for the Rijnmond area and many individual projects
are in progress, carried out by all sorts of actors. Recently, the City-Region
and the Province of South-Holland have adopted new spatial plans. In the ab-
sence of a major strategy that specifically addresses transformation processes
in the urban fringe, I analyse an initiative called Project Mainport Develop-
ment Rotterdam (PMR). Within the framework of the port extension into the
North Sea, the Maasvlakte 2, the urbanised landscape of the Rotterdam region
will be transformed considerably. What looks like a traditional infrastructure
project is, in fact, one of the largest initiatives to improve the quality of life in
the Rijnmond. It pursues a double objective of investing in the port econo-
my and in the liveability of the region. PMR links several projects in a single
framework, which involves some €300 million of funding specifically for the
improvement of quality of life. The project has reached the implementation
phase, which allows for some conclusions to be drawn.

The central aim of this article is to shed light on planning strategies that try
to set up symbolic markers for regional strategies in the dynamic context of
the Zwischenstadt. Such planning strategies face a difficult challenge because
they try to achieve institutional innovation, that is, to change established pat-
tterns of social norms. The implementation of regional symbolic markers sig-
nifying change is a difficult matter since local and regional parties have to be
brought together. I argue that the imagination of new regional spaces in the
urban fringe is often voluntaristic. Instituting new imaginative visions for the
Zwischenstadt through symbolic markers relies on a very precise notion of
institutional meaning in practice. The transformative potential of symbolic
markers depends less on the communicative quality of symbolic expressions,
more on the way existing cultural and institutional practices are recombined.
Using the Rotterdam Rijnmond’s attempt to develop new images of the re-
gional urban landscape, I examine the mechanisms that prove successful in
the mobilisation of stakeholders to support new imaginings. How, then, is the
Zwischenstadt symbolised in the Rotterdam Rijnmond and how is it organised? My research findings are based on 15 interviews conducted in 2008 and 2009 with stakeholders from various backgrounds. In addition, the research builds upon a large file of primary resources ranging from official policy documents to articles in local newspapers and informal newsletters.

Construction and reconstruction of symbolic markers

The changing institutional landscape of planning (multi-actor, multi-scalar) has led to an increased emphasis on communicative means to mobilise stakeholders (Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000). The Zwischenstadt comes close to what Hajer (2003) refers to as ‘institutional void’. This term draws attention to the emerging policy spaces that lack clear, predefined rules or procedures for dealing with a policy problem. The Zwischenstadt is a case in point because it transcends the traditional political arenas and raises new spatial policy issues. As a result, generally accepted institutional norms are only just beginning to emerge. The positioning of Zwischenstadt within the ‘institutional void’ by no means implies that no institutional norms are apparent. Rather, it suggests that no dominant social norms can yet be validated. In turbulent times, in which institutional meaning is not always evident, new meaning needs to become normalised before it is considered everyday knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). This is a gradual process during which various institutional norms coexist. Changing the predominant perceptions and providing new meaning to the Zwischenstadt requires institutional innovation in order to change established patterns of social norms.

Symbolic markers are the visible elements of institutional change and therefore play an important role. Planners use them in strategies as visible means of signifying change. Symbolic markers in planning can take a variety of forms including linguistic tropes, planning imagery, iconic architecture, landmarks or cultural manifestations. In this article symbolic markers are defined as symbolic projects that are part of a wider strategy and signify a new understanding of the in-between space of the Rijnmond. Planners, as it were, place a transformational process under the magnifying glass so that it becomes recognised. Symbolic markers in planning are always addressed to an audience (Throgmorton, 1993: 335), namely, the stakeholders of planning including the private sector, civic groups, residents and other public sector organisations. The task of symbolic markers is to persuade the audience and shape public discourse, so that the projected meaning becomes reality. Symbolic markers have in common that they are used by planners to give a new
interpretation to the Zwischenstadt and, in so doing, to accelerate an ongoing transformation and imprint it in the minds of people.

In these dynamic social conditions, the search for new symbolic markers for the urbanised landscape is not easy. There are plenty of designs, flagships, metaphors and other kinds of communicative temptation that remain powerless when they attempt to symbolise a new future. In planning practice and research the emphasis is often only on the intrinsic seductive qualities of the symbolic markers and the communicative action of planners (Zonneveld, 2005; Healey, 2006; Hajer et al., 2010). The construction and reconstruction of symbol markers by planners takes place in an environment of institutionalised social and cultural norms. Symbolic markers always carry non-inherent meaning, an encoded message (Nas, 1998). For instance, flagship projects often have a catalytic purpose, but this is never just physical, it also carries symbolic meaning (Hubbard, 1996). They are a powerful means of defining space. Space is constituted and represented through material symbols and the social relationships that are related to it (Löw, 2008). Symbolic markers are thus embedded in an existing web of social relations and institutional norms. Less attention is paid to the incorporated socio-cultural norms and the intrinsic motives that make people believe in the authenticity of a symbolic marker and may mobilise them for collective action. Therefore, the search for symbolic markers to create new images of the Zwischenstadt is more than a design challenge.

We need to pay more attention to the intrinsic meaning projected by symbolic markers, and institutional analysis may help us in this endeavour. Institutions in this article refer to the informal and formal norms, rules and practices commonly accepted in the new institutionalism (Healey, 2007). Not all institutional approaches are equally capable of explaining institutional innovation through symbolic markers (Dembski and Salet, 2010). Institutions are often regarded as a set of given formal rules, which are perceived as constraints to action. The following two basic assumptions about institutions are fundamental for the analytical framework. Firstly, the research addresses the symbolic layer of planning, therefore the appeal of a symbolic marker is more likely to be grounded in unconscious and non-rational processes of decision making (Friedland and Alford, 1991). Symbolic markers need to make sense to those involved. Therefore, institutions are understood as internalised in the human mindset rather than as a set of external rules. The inscribed rules of what is considered appropriate behaviour determine action in a situation (March and Olsen, 2006). Secondly, to understand processes of institutional
innovation, it is necessary to remember that institutions are never fixed, but continuously evolving (Salet, 2002). Institutional meaning needs to be reaffirmed in every new practical situation in order to be validated. This notion of institutional validation in practice enables a more dynamic understanding of institutions wherein institutional transformation is possible from a theoretical viewpoint.

Institutional analysis attempts to understand how cultural and institutional ‘conditions’ (Giddens, 1984), ‘settings’ (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1995) or ‘rules’ (Ostrom, 1986) are reproduced and simultaneously injected with new meaning in actual social and spatial experiences. Bourdieu offers the concepts of field and habitus to analyse structures and their impact on social agency. A ‘field’ simply denotes the social space and its ordering nature or the objective structures that are produced and reproduced by its constituents. For the sake of simplicity, I will restrict myself to the indication of social positions and the intrinsic interests of actors in order to depict the objective structures. Whereas objective structures form the conditions that apply at a particular moment, habitus is concerned with their embodiment and how they lead to practices that are more likely to occur than others. Habitus is the ‘durably installed generative principle’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 78) that provides individuals with a scheme for perception, conception and action. It is the inscribed everyday routines of an actor for all kinds of practical situations. People have beliefs about their environment, which they think are normal, and act accordingly. Even our interests are institutionally shaped (Friedland and Alford, 1991: 245). This may explain why actors opt for one strategy and why the audience is receptive to some symbolic markers and the meaning referred to but not to others. In the optimal case, the individual perceptions of symbolisation processes are in harmony with the objective structures that are symbolised (Bourdieu, 1977: 164). Through intentional planning and the use of visible markers the institutionalisation of new meaning becomes an active process of instituting (Bourdieu, 1991: 117–126). Then, even change will be perceived as a natural thing.

What does the foregoing imply for symbol construction and how can regional symbolic markers be implemented locally? Those that are addressed by symbol constructions are equipped with certain tastes incorporated in the habitus. Therefore, existing institutional norms play an important role in the construction and reconstruction of symbolic markers. Here, the difference between construction and reconstruction is important. Symbol construction refers to the introduction of new markers that symbolise patterns of disconnected transformation, whereas reconstruction indicates processes
of symbolisation that build on the historicity of a place to create a new future: the past, that is to say, is transformed into a new future. The acceptance of the intervention is related to whether the imagination satisfies the sense of place inculcated in the audience. Even the power of imagination has its limits. Symbolic markers that rest purely on construction are likely to be perceived simply as alien or even threatening. The famous example of Baron Münchhausen, who used his own hair to pull himself and his horse out of a swamp and escape drowning, may well serve as an illustration of the idea of using endogenous potential to change directions. It also links to the social origin of symbolisation, the senders of symbolic meaning, and their authority. External actors are often perceived as intruders in local affairs who ignore local socio-cultural patterns. Counter-frames may evolve in reaction to symbolisations of the Zwischenstadt (Benford and Snow, 2000). The challenge, then, is to recombine existing institutional meaning with something new.

I hypothesise, therefore, that symbolic markers for the imagination of new regional spaces in the urban fringe would work if buttressed by existing institutional norms. The symbolic markers need to be incorporated in the mental maps—the habitus—of the stakeholders who were addressed by the symbolisation. At the same time, institutional innovation is required in order to realise change. Table 3.1 outlines the operational research steps we have to take in order to analyse experiments with new symbolisations of current urban transformation. First, the symbolic marker and its encoded message, that is, the social patterns that it symbolises, have to be identified and we have to determine whether we are dealing with symbol construction or

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Table 3.1 Operational steps for research on symbolic markers

Symbol identification

1 Symbolic marker: what are the symbolic markers?
2 Message: what are the encoded social patterns?
3 Symbolisation: is it symbol construction or reconstruction?

Whose symbolisation

1 Coalition: who forms the symbolising coalition?
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Stakeholders’ reaction

1 Stakeholders: for whom is the symbolisation sought?
2 Habitus: what are the dominant social norms and their practical consequences?
3 Counter-frames: are conflicting symbolic markers proposed?
reconstruction. The second step regards the question of who is seeking the new imagination of reality. What are the structural conditions and the habitus of the symbolising coalition? Finally, we have to ask for whom it is meant and what the reaction of the stakeholders is. I am also interested in whether counter-frames evolve, something that might be analysed in accordance with the same procedure.

**Rotterdam Mainport Development Project as overarching policy framework**

Before entering into a detailed analysis, I will briefly introduce the policy context in which the spatial and institutional transformation in the Rijnmond is occurring. Project Mainport Development Rotterdam (PMR) groups together a series of spatial projects at various scales ranging from minor interventions at neighbourhood level, through the functional transformation of large open spaces, to the construction of the Maasvlakte 2, as shown in Figure 3.1. The origins of the PMR date back more than two decades. It started in the late 1980s with the recognition of an imminent lack of space in the Rotterdam seaport if growth continued. When the then municipal Port Authority knocked at the door of the National Government in order to get funding for this mega-project, the National Government required a...
more encompassing plan than just another round of port extension (Glasbergen, 2002). Because quality of life in Rotterdam was under pressure, a broader process of improving quality of life as well as the economic structure in the Rijnmond area was requested. The Rijnmond was therefore designated as one of the areas with either pressing environmental problems or high environmental quality, in which a new experimental policy of the national government was to be applied to bring about a better integration of spatial planning (Ruimtelijke Ordening) and environmental policies (Milieu)—what became known as the ROM Area Policy. This resulted in the adoption of a policy document in 1993, the ROM Rijnmond Covenant, in which the public stakeholders from all levels agreed on a number of projects that would later also be included in the PMR framework. Although the discussion was more about procedural than substantive issues, it was the first spatial vision for the Rijnmond (Glasbergen and Driessen, 1993).

A broad coalition of public sector, private sector and environmental organisations had already been involved in policymaking when the national government took over planning in 1996 (for a detailed analysis of the policymaking process, see van Gils and Klijn, 2007). In 1997, PMR was established as a joint initiative of the National Government, the Province of South Holland, the City-Region Rotterdam and the municipality of Rotterdam. They also formed the project organisation of PMR under the lead of the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management. In formal and informal sessions coordinated by the project organisation with stakeholders from the public sector, business associations and environmental groups, PMR took concrete form. The relationship between environmental and economic stakeholders was fragile, and environmental stakeholders left the consultations on more than one occasion. The deadlock was resolved when the municipality of Rotterdam and leading environmental organisations negotiated the compensation measures for Maasvlakte 2, summarised in the agreement Visie en Durf (Vision and Courage) (Schrijnen, 2003). One outcome of this exclusive consultation was the setting aside of 750 hectares for a new nature and recreation area, which was adopted into the PMR framework without major debate. Despite being quite interactive, some stakeholders were not involved; in particular, farmers and fishermen were neglected in the process up to that point. And it was those stakeholders who successfully challenged the national planning scheme at the Raad van State (Council of State). The Cabinet opted for the restoration of the original content under a weaker decision-making regime. In 2006, the Tweede Kamer (House of Representatives) finally adopted the plan (PMR, 2006).
The PMR project has a budget of approximately €3 billion. It consists of three pillars, which are interdependent in the sense that the progress of each one depends on the progress of the others. One organisation has been made accountable for the progress of each pillar (Figure 3.2). The central pillar concerns the construction of the port extension Maasvlakte 2, which is the raison d’être of the whole project. About 2,000 hectares of new land are to be claimed from the North Sea, of which 1,000 are for large-scale port-related industries. Because Maasvlakte 2 lies in a Natura 2000 area, it also involves the environmental compensation measures stipulated by environmental law. The programme Existing Rotterdam Area is a mixed bag of intensification projects aimed at solving the shortage of space within the harbour through spatial restructuring and liveability programmes. The latter involve environmental projects that mainly provide technical solutions to environmental problems (in particular noise reduction) and projects that deal with the improvement of spatial quality within the immediate surroundings of the harbour. Two projects, Landtong Rozenburg and Oostvoornse Meer, are analysed in more depth below. The time horizon of the programme stretches until 2021 and it has estimated costs of €156 million. The last pillar, the 750-hectare nature and recreation area programme, involves four projects with a total budget of €175 million for the period 2006–2021. As the name suggests, it is about the de-

![Organisational scheme of Rotterdam Mainport Development Project](image-url)
velopment of 750 hectares of ‘new nature’ in the vicinity of Rotterdam. This implies mainly the transformation of agricultural land in order to improve quality of life. The largest project with 600 hectares is Midden-IJsselmonde, which is analysed in more detail below. The realisation of the remaining 150 hectares is split into two projects in the north of Rotterdam. It also involves a cycle connection (Green Link) crossing a large infrastructure bundle in the south of Rotterdam.

This overview gives a first impression of the spatial transformation through PMR. Besides the two rather fuzzy labels of ‘economic development’ and ‘liveability’ it does not include any thematic umbrella that individual projects have to fit under. It was never the intention of the initiative takers for the port extension to develop new visions for the regional landscape; that was the result of extensive negotiations. The imperative of the port extension clearly overshadowed the need for a broader discussion of the liveability dimension. This type of institutional arrangement was successful in aligning the strong economic interests with the strong concerns of environmental parties about the further deterioration of the environment. The central project organisation of PMR was dismantled after the implementation of all projects was secured through public contracts. However, the absence of a central policy framework does not mean there are no projects that symbolise the new urban reality of the Zwischenstadt. Rather, the construction of symbolic markers remains more implicit.

**New symbolic markers in the Rijnmond**

When analysing such a large project relying on the rather thin symbolic layer denoted by the fuzzy term liveability, it is wise to look at a selection of projects within the framework. Three projects have been analysed in more depth. They comprise the transformation of Midden-IJsselmonde into a metropolitan park—the largest liveability project in terms of area and investment; the Landtong Rozenburg, which pursues a new vision for the port landscape; and the improvement of the Oostvoornse Meer beside the harbour for the benefit of recreationists and nature. Together, these three projects provide a good overview of the PMR framework and its various attempts at qualifying the urbanised landscape in the Rotterdam Rijnmond (see for an overview Table 3.2). They address specific issues of contemporary urban transformation at the interface between built-up and open space. All selected projects can be considered innovative in that they try to imagine spaces in the urban fringe from a regional perspective and, in so doing, adapt to the new reality of an urban region. However, the manner of symbolisation strongly differs.
The agricultural area of Midden-IJsselmonde in the municipality of Albrandswaard is one of the few remaining large open areas in the vicinity of Rotterdam. It is a beautiful polder landscape in the delta with historic dikes and farmhouses that has traditionally attracted the upper middle class with its rich social and cultural life, while retaining its rural character. Already in the early 1990s Midden-IJsselmonde was listed as a potential transformation area in the regional agreement between the municipalities in the Rijnmond concerning the realisation of the double objective of economic growth and liveability. With its inclusion in the PMR framework, it is subject to a large-scale transformation into a nature and recreation area to strengthen the natural features of the delta and at the same time tackle the shortage of recreational space in the Rotterdam region (PMR, 2006). The transformation of Midden-IJsselmonde is framed as a regional park and constitutes the centrepiece of

Table 3.2 Overview of the three case studies within the PMR framework

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<td>Planning ambition</td>
<td>Transformation of an agricultural area into a regional (nature) park</td>
<td>Redevelopment of the Landtong as a ‘green podium in the harbour’</td>
<td>Improvement of ecological and spatial quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment volume (indexed as of 2002)</td>
<td>€117.5 million</td>
<td>€20 million</td>
<td>€6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current state</td>
<td>In planning</td>
<td>Partly completed, partly in planning</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official project partners (project leadership)</td>
<td>National Government, Province of South-Holland (project leader), Rotterdam City-Region, Rotterdam Municipality, Albrandswaard Municipality (affiliated)</td>
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* Officially, the project leadership is with the Port Authority but commissioned the Department of Public Works, municipality of Rotterdam.

Midden-IJsselmonde

The agricultural area of Midden-IJsselmonde in the municipality of Albrandswaard is one of the few remaining large open areas in the vicinity of Rotterdam. It is a beautiful polder landscape in the delta with historic dikes and farmhouses that has traditionally attracted the upper middle class with its rich social and cultural life, while retaining its rural character. Already in the early 1990s Midden-IJsselmonde was listed as a potential transformation area in the regional agreement between the municipalities in the Rijnmond concerning the realisation of the double objective of economic growth and liveability. With its inclusion in the PMR framework, it is subject to a large-scale transformation into a nature and recreation area to strengthen the natural features of the delta and at the same time tackle the shortage of recreational space in the Rotterdam region (PMR, 2006). The transformation of Midden-IJsselmonde is framed as a regional park and constitutes the centrepiece of
the liveability investments. The Province of South Holland has been placed in charge of implementation. Why then, did the laudable idea of increasing the liveability of the region result in controversy?

The symbolic marker of this project is a regional park, planned as a nature and recreation area for the inhabitants of the wider area, which was subsequently named Landscape Park Buytenland. The initial policy proposed a nature area that would enable the returning of the tides. Several design studies illustrated the potential futures for this agricultural area (Boudewijn et al., 2002; van Oosten-Snoek and van Leeuwen, 2002). While it was not made clear exactly how the park would look, the encoded message came across clearly. It implied first the disappearance of the last remnants of rural life through the displacement of the agricultural sector. It presented a different understanding of the cultural landscape, basically stating that agriculture is much less appreciated than ‘planned’ nature. It was argued that an agricultural sector that is set to decline cannot guarantee the openness of the area in the long run, which would lead to *verrommeling*, a Dutch expression for scenic deterioration. Only a strong function, such as nature and recreation, along with maintenance by professional organisations could secure the quality of the landscape (PZH, 2007). Secondly, through the growing importance of landscape managers the region would get more say regarding the scenic quality of the landscape. Lastly, Landscape Park Buytenland was planned as a regional park to serve city people. The transformation from agriculture to nature and recreation for the urban region would integrate Albrandswaard more strongly than ever into the urban system of Rotterdam. Midden-IJsselmonde is an example of symbol construction since little effort has been made to combine local institutions with the regional objective.

The symbolisation was pushed forward by a coalition consisting of the decision makers involved in the port extension and environmental organisations. The structural conditions were clearly dominated by the need for the port extension, repeatedly claimed by the Port Authority and the municipality of Rotterdam. The environmental organisations, often left empty-handed in the past, could jeopardise planning through legal action. Instead, they negotiated with the municipality of Rotterdam and linked extra investment in nature and recreation in the form of a natural tidal area with the Maaslakte development (*Visie en Durf*). The South Holland Landscape foundation, as the designated landscape manager, represented the nature organisations and meticulously protected the natural objectives. Although Midden-IJsselmonde was already part of a regional agreement on green development by
the City-Region, the municipality of Rotterdam decided on issues outside its jurisdiction. In the past Rotterdam has placed strong spatial claims on neighbouring territories. Generally, it holds a strongly urban view of the cultural landscape. The recreation and nature area was presented as an extra effort to improve the liveability of the whole Rijnmond, but the key criterion was the distance to the centre of Rotterdam. It was only after negotiations on the environmental impact and its compensation were concluded that the Province of South Holland became a key player and took the lead in the project. The provinces, in particular in the western part of the country, have little control over large cities and therefore the implementation of ecological corridors has become a main preoccupation (Koomen et al., 2008). There is also a strong tendency towards nature creation in the Netherlands (Doevendans et al., 2007). Thus, the intention of the project fits nicely with the habitus of the Province as well as of the other members of the symbolising coalition.

The park proposal, which was supposed to be beneficial for both local and regional inhabitants, encountered fierce resistance at the local level. Obviously, large property owners (institutional investors) and farmers, who were threatened by expropriation, were against the plan. But local citizens and civic

Figure 3.3 The polder landscape through a picture frame and protest sign (photo courtesy of Wim Gé Warnaar, taken in 2009)
(environmental) groups had strong objections too. In response to the threatening idea of *natte natuur* (tidal nature), the Platform Polders Albrandswaard was formed. More than 3,000 inhabitants of Albrandswaard and the wider region signed a petition against the proposed nature development. Most inhabitants also wanted to keep the area open, but they valued the cultural landscape with its traditional agriculture and therefore embraced the interests of the farmers. A protest sign, as shown in Figure 3.3, stated 'anyone who changes the polder landscape for new nature belies their origins and their own culture'. Ultimately, this affected the position of the local municipality. Initially the mayor of Albrandswaard supported the plans to prevent the open area from becoming urbanised, but the municipal council, which supported the proposal, later also disapproved of the transformation due to the strong resistance. None of these actors perceived the park as a gift. It was perceived instead as another instance of intrusion by Rotterdam, which had made a deal with the environmental organisations at the expense of a third party. They feared that extra-local actors would dictate the image of the landscape. The fact that the Province did not have a vision of its own for the park led to it being perceived at the local level as the *roeptoeter* (mouthpiece) of the national government simply carrying out an order.

The first counter perspective emerged in 2005 as a result of the dissatisfaction with the plans of the Province. In a collaborative effort citizens and members of the municipal council developed a local agenda for the wider rural area: the *Albrandwaardse Variant*. Instead of blocking the transformation, this plan offered an alternative way to interpret the national government's planning scheme and give it a local touch. In this plan, too, the dominant land use would change from agriculture to nature and recreation. However, it tried to keep the *genius loci* with its dikes, the allotment structure and the openness of the landscape. One of the key aspects involved keeping the possibility of conventional commercial agriculture in parts of the area as well as including the farmers in landscape maintenance. It also suggested a different name, *Het Buitenland van Rhoon* (The Plains of Rhoon), to avoid the term 'park', which is by definition something urban (Gemeente Albrandswaard, 2005: 5). In essence, the transformation was less radical and more respectful of the existing cultural landscape. Like the provincial plan, it envisaged the acquisition of all the land. This proposal was an attempt to create broad support at the local level and to demonstrate the unity of citizens and local politicians vis-à-vis the Province. At the same time it tried to fulfil the requirements of the planning framework set by the national government. In the event, landowners and farm-
ers rejected the plan, because in essence it meant the devaluation of land, while the environmental organisations disapproved of the weaker nature regime.

Two other counter perspectives emerged, but appeared less promising. In spring 2007 the *Natuurwinst* (Nature Profit) foundation, a consortium representing some of the holders of large properties within the area (institutional investors) proposed to develop Midden-IJsselmonde as an extensive golf course integrated in wetland. In exchange for developing the natural features the consortium requested permits for some villas along the dikes. There was no space in their plans for agricultural activities either. The third counter plan by local farmers, the Farmers’ Variant, suggested new foot and bicycle paths and ecological improvement of the field edges. The main intention was to change as little as possible in order to continue with conventional commercial agriculture. This alternative was taken seriously by those citizens who preferred no change at all, but was not considered as an alternative in the political arena because it negated the national planning scheme. Both plans were regarded as rescue efforts and also as being strongly representative of particular interests.

Summarising, Landscape Park Buytenland is an example of symbol construction. The plan neither took into account the typical values of this cultural landscape nor the active local communities and their habitus. There are very legitimate reasons for nature development but it is not a framework that appeals to everyone. When the policy agreements for PMR were made, planning underwent a scalar shift in which the local level had a say. But the Province, in particular, had little idea of local feelings and underestimated local resistance. It did not succeed in aligning its good intentions with the wishes of other stakeholders, despite the shared ambition to protect Midden-IJsselmonde from further urbanisation. Many actors joined in the criticism of the Province’s autocratic top-down approach. That is why implementation became a cumbersome process and manifested as a power struggle between the Province, the Foundation Landscape of South Holland and the local level. Strangely enough, the Province did not commit itself to the Albrandswaardse Variant, which enjoyed local support and symbolises social relations of the future (i.e. reconstruction).

*Landtong Rozenburg*

Another example of symbolisation is the upgrading of Landtong Rozenburg, an underused, dead-end strip of land, approximately 10 kilometres long and 150 hectares in area, that remained after construction of the Botlek and Europoort harbours in the 1950s. The industrial village of Rozenburg is tucked away behind the dike at the eastern end, but the narrow part of the spit be-
longs to Rotterdam. Since the harbour’s construction, the Landtong has been a deserted strip of land used as a dumping site for fly ash. It was simply too narrow for large-scale economic activities. Instead, over the years, nature developed and it became popular with ship spotters, and for fishing and other unplanned functions (dog obedience school, horse-riding centre), settled without too much planning control. The special location of the Landtong offers spectacular views of the port landscape and passing vessels. In addition, it contains the impressive Maeslantkering (flood barrier) to protect Rotterdam from floods and the Port Education Centre. It took a long time before the special beauty of the Landtong was rediscovered. Parts of the project have been completed, while other elements of the plan face difficulties and are still subject to planning.

The symbolic marker was given form in the master plan ‘Green Podium in the Harbour’, which already underscores the main ambition. This project aims to develop the Landtong as scenic driveway for cars as well as cyclists and inline skaters, to strengthen nature development, and create a leisure area on a former dump. It is an integral plan covering an area stretching from the western edge of the built-up area of Rozenburg to the tip of the headland. A new ferry connection with the Maaslakte and Hoek van Holland supports the recreational potential. The project points to a new future that combines recreation and nature with harbour activities. In a way, the Landtong project emphasises the contrast between port activities and nature/recreation, as illustrated by Figure 3.4. It aims to show that recreation and nature are possible within a prospering seaport, as symbolised by Konik horses (a semi-wild pony originating from Poland) and highland cattle (a traditional Scottish breed) on the 54-hectare nature area. It includes the art project boomweide (tree field), in which a number of dead trees have been painted in colours typical of the harbour as they appear on chemical vessels, containers or the huge tanks for liquids. The symbolisation builds on the unique qualities of the location within the harbour and is therefore considered as an example of reconstruction.

In 2003, nine organisations signed a covenant on the realisation of the master plan, among them were all relevant local and regional administrations, the national infrastructure agency Rijkswaterstaat, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the association of port and logistics companies Deltalings. Plans for the upgrading of the Landtong and a scenic portway existed from before the ROM-Rijnmond policy covenant of 1993. Through PMR, this project gained new momentum. Officially, it is a joint initiative of the municipalities of Rozenburg and Rotterdam, which are the competent territo-
rial administrations. However, Rozenburg is just one stakeholder among many and nearly all the land is owned by Rotterdam. The Landtong project is led by the Port of Rotterdam Authority, for whom it provided an excellent opportunity to make the port landscape accessible and to be presented as a green harbour. The land was not used anyway and nature development had already taken place as a consequence of several decades of neglect. The Port Authority promoted the Landtong on its own initiative in a cycling brochure. For the WWF and the ARK Foundation (a partner organisation that manages the wildlife area), the Landtong Rozenburg is an exemplary project, demonstrating that nature, recreation and economic activities are not mutually exclusive. Despite such broad commitment, the upgrading of the Landtong was confronted with budget problems from the beginning.

The target group for the symbolisation was the inhabitants of the whole region as well as of Rozenburg. Rotterdam is identified with its seaport and this is an excellent spot from which to explore the port. Through the realisation of the scenic portway and the nature area, as well as the new ferry connection,
the potential for tourism will be much better exploited. But while planning has successfully tackled the head of the Landtong, which is in the territory of Rotterdam, the missing link between Rozenburg and the spectacular part is still subject to planning. In the perceptions of the inhabitants of Rozenburg, the Landtong is a dumpsite—terra incognita that is inaccessible and does not really belong to Rozenburg. The plans for the leisure area adjacent to the village included a large festival area for events with up to 30,000 visitors in mind. The festival area, which was mainly included to cover the maintenance costs of the recreation authority, was difficult for the municipality of Rozenburg and its inhabitants to accept. They were afraid of the crowds and the related traffic problems due to inadequate road access (and for this reason, the plan has been altered consequently). Similarly, the replacement of the horse-riding school is still an issue and regarded as unnecessary by Rozenburg. Through these issues and the lack of positive symbolic markers, integration into the mental maps of the inhabitants is progressing only slowly. Because of these undesirable elements in the plan, but also the mediocre municipal budget and small public administration, the development of the Landtong has only medium priority (Gemeente Rozenburg, 2009: 56).

The symbolisation highlights the unique setting in the middle of the harbour and has successfully attracted more visitors to experience the port landscape. It is rather a form of reconstruction (despite the festival area) in an anyway under-institutionalised space. The symbolic marker of a green podium in the harbour obviously fits the habitus of the Port Authority that is trying to attain a greener image. Although the symbolic markers mobilised the coalition, this was insufficient to create the necessary momentum to complete the project on time. The large investments of the master plan and in particular the areas that interest the residents of Rozenburg are not yet ready and are much debated. The planners did not take account of the lack of interest of the municipality of Rozenburg. The village remains disconnected and therefore the project enjoys low priority. Dealing with the former dumpsite in a different way, by bringing in local initiatives to carry out the intended transformation into a green podium, might enjoy a higher level of support by Rozenburg.

**Oostvoornse Meer**

Quality Impulse Oostvoornse Meer is considered one of the most successful projects within the PMR framework and was completed in 2008 (Havenbedrijf Rotterdam, 2009). The Oostvoornse Meer is a lake near the Maasvlakte with an area of about 320 hectares. The largest part is in the municipality of
Westvoorne; only the northern shore belongs to Rotterdam. It came into existence through the construction of the Maasvlakte, the first major harbour extension into the North Sea in the 1960s, when an estuary was closed off by a dam for sand extraction purposes. Soon after, the new lake became popular as a recreation area—albeit a totally unplanned one—for scuba diving (attracted by the numerous shipwrecks), wind and kite surfing, fishing and for general recreationists enjoying the beaches. Additionally, a large nature area, the Green Beach, covers the southern shore of the lake. This unique setting is found in the immediate vicinity of the harbour, while the centre of Rotterdam is approximately 40 kilometres away (Figure 3.5). Over the years, the salinity of the lake has decreased continuously, so that it has come close to turning into fresh water. As a consequence, water quality is threatened by the growth of algae, which in turn would make the lake unattractive for its main users. In addition, its increasing popularity as a recreational area has had implications for the accessibility and spatial quality of the area.

The project Quality Impulse Oostvoornse Meer is symbolised by a little salt-shaker. It sought to recover an artificial lake near the Maasvlakte. This took into account the water quality, natural values as well as the quality of public space. It involved a series of investments of which by far the largest was the completion of a pipeline in order to increase salinity and adapt the water level. Furthermore, it included the improvement of the recreational beaches as well as related facili-

![Figure 3.5](image_url)
ties. Objects have been placed on the lake bed for divers and an artwork erected on the shoreline, which can be used as a playground. Finally, the nature area *Groene Strand* (Green Beach) has been restored by the removal of shrubs and the preparation of breeding areas on the bird island and in the lagoon. This has been accompanied by a campaign to market this area as a recreational hotspot for the population of the Rijnmond. The project builds on its autonomous development as a special place at the interface between port and dune landscape and is, therefore, clearly an example of symbol reconstruction.

The Port of Rotterdam Authority, the municipalities of Rotterdam and Westvoorne, the Regional Recreation Authority, the Foundation Landscape of South Holland and the Water Board Hollandse Delta form the coalition that promoted the spatial and ecological improvement of the Oostvoornse Meer. The municipality of Rotterdam, as the responsible authority for the BRG programme, commissioned the Port of Rotterdam Authority to lead the project. The structural conditions were marked by a quite hostile relationship on the part of the municipality of Westvoorne towards the seaport and Rotterdam. Westvoorne is a holiday resort in the dunes and the seaport is therefore perceived as a continuous threat to the qualities of the area. The habitual state of Westvoorne is epitomised in a virtual demarcation line beyond which no port development is allowed. Development of the Oostvoornse Meer had appeared on the wish list of many actors long before PMR was established, but had been postponed due to lack of money. The adoption of the national planning scheme in 2006 finally secured funding. The Port Authority was very interested by that time in improving its relationship with its neighbours. Through the Maasvlakte plans, it had become quite aware of its vulnerable position with regard to the acceptance of large spatial projects. Since Westvoorne had been one of the fiercest opponents of port development in the past, it was able to demonstrate its cooperative attitude.

The Oostvoornse Meer project addressed a wide range of actors from the local and regional level. In order to preserve and improve the unique quality of this area, there was broad agreement on the increase in salinity. The shared problem of declining water quality allowed several demands to be combined. During the planning process everyone was allowed to bring in their wishes and proposed solutions. Through regular meetings, the so-called *Zoute Borrel* (salt parties), which were organised with representatives of local environmental organisations, civic groups, local entrepreneurs (Werkgroep WIJ Oostvoornse Meer) and associations from sports, fishing, leisure etc., support stretched beyond the project organisation. Through the involvement of local
entrepreneurs they had a strong base, because the latter had an interest in the regional objective of a recreational hot spot for the Rijnmond as well.

This project has strengthened this location for regional recreation and underscored the image of urban place in the wilderness between port activities and dune landscapes and is therefore a good example of symbol reconstruction. It succeeded in combining local desires and particularities with a regional purpose. Furthermore, it has improved the relationship of regional parties and brought good publicity for the Port of Rotterdam Authority as it was achieved under its leadership. Through the inclusion of the users in the process, the Port Authority increased the legitimacy of its operations. This voluntary step on the part of the Port Authority was probably the strongest symbol in the project!

Conclusion

The central aim of this article was to investigate planning practices for institutional innovation through symbolic markers in the dynamic context of the Zwischenstadt. The article therefore looked into a planning strategy to give new meaning to the urbanised landscape of the Rotterdam Rijnmond. PMR was a project with a regional perspective that clearly expressed the aim of increasing liveability in the Rijnmond. In the context of the increasing integration of cities and their surroundings, the PMR was welcomed because it took a regional perspective on the mosaic landscape of the Rijnmond. Strong symbolic markers were not used in any of the projects. It was rather the individual projects taken together that made up the symbolisation. Despite considerable investment and a coordinating project organisation, PMR proved to be a regional strategy without overarching symbolic markers. The port extension dominated over the liveability objective, with the result that extensive deliberation on the elaboration of the liveability framework never took place. Therefore, any symbolisation of the future meaning of the urbanised landscape in the Rijnmond remained implicit. Nonetheless, PMR generated many ideas and created places that might provide a new meaning to the regional landscape.

The three projects showed very different outcomes as set out in Table 3.3. The transformation of Midden-IJsselmonde neglected the historically grown institutional and cultural practices of the polder landscape. It combined the interests of various environmental organisations who wanted a large territory for nature development as compensation for Rotterdam's ambition to extend the port and tackle the lack of recreational space. The Province willingly took over, since this fitted in with their policies. Only at a later stage, when the
tone of the project had already been set, was an effort made to take the local citizenry and farmers on board. The current users were neglected and the future users, at whom the symbolisation was directed, did not lay claim to their stake in the project. Those actors that were mobilised came from outside and were perceived as intruders. In fact all actors, the coalition as well as the audience, continued to reproduce their habitus by reaffirming established practices. The Landtong Rozenburg did not seek large publicity and was successful insofar as it did not involve input from the municipality of Rozenburg. Here the various interests of regional actors were recombined and this produced results: the Landtong is now developing into a special tourist attraction, strengthened by cultural and wildlife symbols. However, the adjacent village remains somewhat disconnected and no attempts have been made to build a symbolic link with local residents and initiatives. The improvement of the Oostvoornse Meer was intended as a gift to the municipality of Westvoorne. The Port Authority had absolutely no interest in disturbing its relationship with this municipality and therefore embraced the needs of the current users. Local entrepreneurs as well as the environmental organisation and the other project partners secured and underscored the particular beauty of the lake near the seaport for recreationists.

What can we learn from these instances of planning in the dynamic context of Zwischenstadt? In order to accelerate change, symbolic markers are considered useful signs that convey the message of transformation. However, symbolic markers need to be carefully selected. Not every symbolic marker works, nor can we randomly make space. Sound institutional knowledge is required. Symbolisation is organised within the context of objective structures, which in turn are internalised in the habitus of actors. Planners and policymakers cannot simply change the habitus of corporate actors or individuals and make space—and it is doubtful whether such a prescriptive attitude is desirable. To change established institutions it is better not to work by decree but by strengthening those norm holders who are open to change, without offending established institutions and actors’ interests. Rather, changing institutions is a long-term and gradual process, which might be accelerated by symbolic markers.

The implementation of symbolic markers for a new interpretation of today’s urbanised landscape in city-regions is a balancing act between the overarching interest of the city-region and the interests of local communities. The latter easily result in parochialism and therefore in symbolic markers that are likely to emphasise the status quo, whereas the former risks establishing
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strongly directed and powerful markers that rest purely upon construction and therefore remain disconnected and powerless. In order to imagine the Zwischenstadt as a ‘coherent mosaic’, one can neither see the region solely from the perspective of the central city nor see in-between places in isolation. Therefore, it is more than usually important that symbolisation combines local and regional institutions. Symbolic markers for the Zwischenstadt need to be grounded in existing institutions. Planners need to recognise the power of landscape and the intrinsic motives of actors to become engaged in processes of symbolisation. This might be achieved by building upon existing initiatives by a broad range of actors such as local entrepreneurs, civic groups or artists (in addition to public sector commitment). The analysis also reveals that place-specific characteristics are an important factor too. Each place has a different set of cultural traits, which lend themselves to a different set of symbolic markers. The seaport is an important pool for symbolic markers, yet these might not resonate in every corner of the Rijnmond. When symbolising the Zwischenstadt, the crux is to combine local symbolic markers with the regional element. The art of symbolisation lies in using symbolic markers that refer to what is known and recognised but at the same time are instilled with new meaning and thus institute new practices. This is real reconstruction: transforming the past into a new future.

Notes

1 The meeting of all relevant stakeholders at the ministerial level was called the Topberaad (Top-Level Deliberation). It was headed by an independent chair and included representatives of the motoring club ANWB, the association of seven environmental organisations (ConSept), the federation of Dutch unions (FNV), the Holland International Distribution Council, the Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment, the Dutch Association of Regional Water Authorities, the nature conservation society Natuurmonumenten, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW), the Province of South-Holland, the City-Region and the Municipality of Rotterdam.

2 In Dutch planning law, national planning policy was formulated as key planning decisions (PKB), which were, in principle, only indicative. This implied that public authorities had to take into account a PKB in the adoption or alteration of plans. Legally binding decisions were formulated as ‘concrete policy decisions’. Decisions of the utmost importance for implementing national policy were formulated as ‘decisions of considerable sig-
nificance’. National Government could only deviate from these decisions through altering a PKB. National Government changed the annulled policies into ‘decisions of considerable significance’. The interventions were secured via intergovernmental contracts, so that the Court decision had practically no effect. The planning law has been amended since, so that these regulations do not apply anymore.

3 Until then, green development policy in the Rijnmond area had achieved little, which created a high level of frustration. In particular, the land market has been making the transformation of agricultural land into nature difficult since most farmers expected land lying adjacent to the urban area to become building land, which provides much higher returns. Hence, large-scale transformations in rural areas often end up at an impasse.

4 This is exemplified by the repeated proposal by the Rotterdam division of the PvdA (Labour Party) to develop Midden-Ijsselmonde as woodland because Rotterdam lacks forests in its surroundings.

5 The municipalities are the only public authority that can lay down statutory land-use plans. The municipality of Albrandswaard is expected to cooperate. As a consequence, the relationship with the Province is tense. Since the commencement of the new planning law, higher governmental levels can interfere even more strongly in local affairs and the Province has repeatedly threatened to do so.

6 This situation has changed. In 2010 Rozenburg became a borough of Rotterdam as a result of a negative assessment of the municipality’s governance capacity.

References


