Urgentie, leiderschap en kennisontwikkeling: verklaringen voor drie besluitvormingsronden over Schiphol tussen 1989 en 1991
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The subject of this thesis is decision making, in particular the quality standards that decision making on large-scale infrastructure projects has to meet. The 1991 expansion of Schiphol Airport provides the research material and Teisman’s pluricentral approach the perspective from which it is tackled. It is also a story of government in The Hague, in that it discusses way in which the main actors at central government level (the Directorate-General for Environmental Protection, the National Spatial Planning Agency and the National Aviation Service), in collaboration with NV Luchthaven Schiphol and the province of North Holland, shaped the decision-making process on the expansion of Schiphol Airport in the period between 1989 and 1991.

The thesis started out from two general questions: “Did the decision-making process on the expansion of Schiphol work?” “Should we continue along the current path?” These questions were largely prompted by the realisation that although much of the debate focused on the environmental impact of the airport, in many people’s eyes the environment was actually the ultimate loser. I was involved as project leader in the integration of environmental and economic issues around Schiphol in the period from 1989 to 1991. This thesis reflects on those experiences. In addition to trying to reconstruct in detail the events of that period – particularly at official level – I also ask what lessons they can provide for future decision making on large-scale infrastructure projects.

The research question is “What was the course of decision making on Schiphol in the period between 1989 and 1991?”, and the subsidiary questions “Who were the main actors in this decision-making process?”, “How did they behave?”, “What kind of interaction did this lead to?” and “How can we evaluate the decision making, the interaction and the behaviour?”. In my analysis and evaluation I make use of Teisman’s theory of decision making. I adopt his method of reconstructing decision making and analyse the process with the aid of his pluricentral perspective. In order to reach a verdict, I examine the degree to which interaction helps develop a common interest. However, a number of issues are not susceptible to evaluation by this method. I therefore present a number of supplementary theoretical notions, notably those of Sabatier and Termeer. I subsequently examine the role played by the five variables that in my view are crucial: (1) common beliefs (2) sense of urgency (3) leadership from central government (4) development of knowledge and (5) the prevention of stalemate and how to resolve it if it occurs.

I describe three rounds of decision making each of which ended in a product in terms of policy. The basis is a single policy arena occupied by seven actors: the Ministries of Housing, Spatial Planning & the Environment (VROM), of Transport & Public Works and of Economic Affairs, NV Luchthaven Schiphol, the province of North Holland, and the municipalities of Amsterdam and Haarlemmermeer. These seven actors are almost always together in various configurations: steering group, project group, inner cir-
cle, scenario group, the Lauswolt working group. Within the seven a further five core players can be discerned: the Directorate-General for Environmental Protection and the National Spatial Planning Agency (VROM), the National Aviation Service, NV Luchthaven Schiphol and the province of North Holland. Their position is examined in further detail in view of their significance in the decision-making process.

Central to the first round of decision making (February-September 1989) that resulted in the Start Covenant was the formation of a new coalition (the Ministries of Housing, Spatial Planning & the Environment, of Transport & Public Works and of Economic Affairs, NV Luchthaven Schiphol, the province of North Holland, and Amsterdam and Haarlemmermeer) and efforts to break down the Ministry of Transport and Public Works’ resistance to the Plan of Approach to Schiphol and its Environs. The signing of the Start Covenant marked the successful conclusion of this first round. The second round (September 1989-December 1990) was long-drawn-out and resulted in the Plan of Approach to Schiphol and its Environs. It can be divided into two periods: the first consisting of knowledge development (September 1989-December 1990) and the second of negotiation (October-December 1990). In the ‘learning’ period the emphasis was on the parties’ willingness to take the time to familiarise themselves with each other’s standpoints, to note the considerable gaps in the knowledge base, to commission research together and on the basis of the results and further developed policy positions to formulate an initial concept for the expansion of Schiphol. This period was thus an important stage in the decision-making process. The parties recognised the lack of shared knowledge, indeed of well thought-out policy positions, both essential to a considered and uniform vision of the future of the airport. From October 1990 onwards the parties negotiated directly on a number of issues, most importantly the problem of night flights. The third round of decision making (December 1990-April 1991) concluded the process. The result was the Policy Covenant signed on 16 April 1991. The emphasis in this period lay on consultations between the various authorities on the road to the Policy Covenant, and in particular on the efforts made by the parties to convince the province of North Holland, which had reached an impasse in the night flight problem, to remain a signatory to the Covenant.

Chapter 6 contains an analysis of the strategic behaviour of the core players. It analyses the policy arena and the begin and end situation, asks the following questions: “Which actors were actively involved?”, “How did the actors behave towards each other?”, “What efforts did they make to exercise influence from their relative positions?”, and assesses the interaction between the actors in terms of interwoven objectives, link-ups and agreements. The actors’ strategic behaviour can be characterised as follows:

1. NV Luchthaven Schiphol had a clear need to find new coalition partners with a view to the expansion of the airport. One such partner was the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning & the Environment. This was in line with NV Luchthaven Schiphol’s ‘chameleon’ strategy of taking on the ‘colour’ of central government (including the Ministry).
2. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning & the Environment had no hesitation in starting on the decision-making process with a limited group of ‘pioneers’. Apparently none of the actors had any difficulty with this. Nor did the Ministry have any difficulty in handing over the reins after two years in the concluding stage of the process by participating to only a limited extent in the follow-up activities.

3. A need for continuing interaction rather than concrete results at an early stage was evident where many of the actors were concerned, but most particularly the National Spatial Planning Agency and the province of North Holland. One can conclude in respect of these actors that their strategy was long term.

4. Within the government and in important fora such as RPC/RMC the cooperation between the Ministries of Housing, Spatial Planning & the Environment and of Transport & Public Works was held up as an example. Due to the immense care with which the decision-making process was designed and put in place, it proved possible to bring together in a result-oriented working environment two actors that had been in conflict with each other for decades, and to have them develop a common interest.

The degree to which actors develop a common interest through the interweaving of objectives determines the outcome: the ‘satisfactory results’ of the decision-making process. Starting from Teisman’s ‘pluricentral perspective’, three criteria are defined to evaluate the quality of the interaction between actors: (1) the degree to which objectives are interwoven as a yardstick for the quality of the content of the interaction, (2) link-ups between actors as a yardstick for the quality of the process and (3) the degree to which actors make agreements concerning their interaction as a yardstick for the organisational quality of decision making.

Decision making on Schiphol led to three policy products, each concluding a round of decision making: the Start Covenant (1989), the Plan of Approach to Schiphol and its Environs (1990) and the Policy Covenant (1991). Each reflects the common interest that the actors developed with each other. Showing great creativity, they resolved two important dilemmas: by spreading the expansion over two planning periods (up to 2003 and between 2003 and 2015) and by dividing the decision making on the night flight problem into two, coming up with a national norm (1993) and a night regime for Schiphol (as part of the Plan of Approach to Schiphol and its Environs). The resolution of these dilemmas also reflects the actors’ aim of interweaving their objectives. Furthermore, they established a large number of linkages, rules on interaction and institutional arrangements.

A number of issues remain unsusceptible to Teisman’s theory of decision making. These relate to five variables: (1) cultural issues that bind the actors but generally remain unspoken, (2) the presence of a sense of urgency that galvanises the actors, (3) the leading role played by central government, (4) the significance of the development of knowledge for policy change, and (5) breaking through stalemate during the decision-making process. The five variables are discussed in turn and further examined. The theories of Sabatier and Termeer are discussed as a possible aid to analysing and evaluating the variables. The conclusion is that three further variables
should be added to those stated in Teisman's decision-making model: a sense of urgency, a leading role for central government and knowledge development. On this basis a number of quality standards are formulated with which decision making on large-scale infrastructure projects must comply. A perspective on Schiphol is also formulated.