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Urban peripheries: The political dynamics of planning projects

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1.

THE GOVERNABILITY OF NATIONAL SPATIAL PLANNING

LIGHT INSTRUMENTS AND LOGICS OF GOVERNMENTAL ACTION IN STRATEGIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

Neoliberalism and decentralization are eroding the capacity of central governments to implement their national spatial objectives. National government, with steadily less financial and political resources at its disposal, has little power to intervene in strategic urban development, because cities have sufficient autonomy to define their own land use plans. This paper challenges this understanding of the contemporary condition of national spatial planning. It demonstrates that although national governments have a weaker grip on local spatial dynamics, they play an active role in governing complex spatial development. Two urban development projects in the Dutch Randstad will be discussed in order to empirically demonstrate four different logics of involvement: endorsement, monetary impulse, propulsion and effectuation. I conclude that there is great potential for national planning in a 'lighter' profile, with instruments used to strengthen the interconnectivity of networks – a condition for generating strategic capacity and ensuring governability of spatial policies.



Almere Poort, The Netherlands, 2011.

INTRODUCTION

The relationships between the State and its urban areas have traditionally taken place in a context of high levels of expertise at the national level, national budgets and strong ties between national executives and local administrators. However, the capacity of national governments to influence implementation of urban and national policies has been progressively changing due to the ongoing processes of institutional decentralization, devolution and Europeanization. Also the neoliberalization of spatial policy has impacted the position of upper levels of governments (e.g. State or National governments, regional or city-regional authorities), often seen as a weaker institutional layers in a glocalised geo-political scenario (Brenner, 2004). Yet, the question of whether national governments can still mediate between changing local urban patterns and collective national interests is still relevant with the progressive regionalization and internationalization of spatial and socio-economic dynamics. In many (EU) countries, the State government is still significant for strategic development (Nadin et al, 1997; Alterman, 2001) as is evident from the numerous examples of national involvement in specific spatial interventions: in France, the *Operations of National Interest and the Territorial Development Contract* following the Grand Paris; in the UK, the *Eco Towns* and the *London Docklands* regeneration; in Germany, the recent federal *Pilot Projects of Spatial Planning*; the Ørestad project in Copenhagen; and the Dutch national Key Projects. Although many of these countries have decentralized planning systems, in spatial planning as in other policy sectors, the State seems to have enhanced its role in 'directly and/or indirectly organizing the self-organization of partnerships and networks' (Jessop, 1997: 305).

In the last decade, spatial planning interventions have become a key focus to detect inter-governmental governance and design innovative planning practice. However, there is still a discrepancy between existing planning regulations and the type of innovative governance needed for complex urban development (Albrechts at

al. 2001). This dialectic between outdated institutional settings and the need to adapt planning processes to new spatial dynamics raises issues of governability. According to a past definition of Mayntz, “*the state, because of the inherent shortcomings of its traditional instruments, is not able (anymore) to solve the economic and social problems it has identified. [...] in order to prevent unwanted developments it is either necessary to look for alternative instruments or to lower the aspirations of central-state control*” (1993,p.10). With the emerging topography of State power, decentralization of planning responsibilities, and uncertainty about the territorial scale at which socio-spatial dynamics are taking place, national spatial planning needs to be rethought (Allen and Cochrane, 2010). However, empirical research on the role of national planning agencies in projects has been largely overlooked..

This paper addresses the governability of national spatial planning by looking at the role of national government in developing areas of ‘national importance’ under conditions of decentralization. It answers one main question: how can national governments influence local urban development projects and what type of role can they play? The shifting context of national planning seems to suggest that national government will have less and less power in influencing local choices of development and that with less money the State loses political influence in decision-making processes. In this study I challenge this argument and demonstrate that national spatial planning is adapting to new institutional conditions and that the *governability* of complex spatial dynamics is still an issue that can be addressed by national governments. The paper conceptualizes a particular profile of the State in spatial planning through a typology of four types of *stimulation tools*. This analytical framework is used to interpret evidence from two cases with the aim to detect the specific character of national governmental action in conditions of weaker financial and authoritative power.

The Netherlands is an ideal context to examine the role of the national and sub-national governments. Although it is a decentralized unitary state, Dutch spatial planning has historically

developed as a process of persuasion and negotiation across layers of government to integrate plans at different scales. This is due to an institutional structure that combines fully autonomous local governments with significant funding from central sources, allocated according to nationally defined framework documents. Since the 1990s, the Dutch government has frequently taken a direct role in strategic planning projects and has aimed to 'get serious' about area development (Faludi and van der Walk, 1994, pag. 219). The selection of projects of national importance has become an established practice through which the Dutch government can translate policy directives into action (Priemus, 2004). However, the role of national planning has been rapidly changing in recent years raising questions on the design of instruments to achieve national priorities in a context of lower responsibilities and weaker economic capacity (Needham, 2011). The National Spatial Strategy (Nota Ruimte, Ministerie van VROM, 2006) formalized a trend already started in the 80s, towards a more proactive role of national planning agencies, linking spatial planning directly with spatial investments (Spaans, 2006). The New Spatial Planning Act (Wro) further decentralized planning competences towards provinces and regions, but it also intensified State powers within areas of national importance (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu, 2010; Needham, 2005). The newly elected government that in mid-2011 reviewed the National Vision on Infrastructure and Spatial Planning (*Structuurvisie Infrastructuur en Ruimte*, SVIR) and abolished the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Environment and Housing Affairs¹.

In this paper, the planning legacy of two projects is explored to empirically investigate the interplay between central and local governments in area development: *Schaalsprong* Almere (Upscaling Almere), a project to revitalize a new town adjacent to Amsterdam, and *Midden-Delfland*, an important green area in the heart of the heavily populated Randstad region. Both areas are important sectors of the Randstad since the population growth over the next 20 years, with Almere being still considered an area of urban expansion and Midden-Delfland green area being pressed by ongoing

urbanization. This article builds on the results of a study conducted in 2010 (Savini et al. 2010) that investigated VROM's use of stimulation tools in seven strategic projects in the Netherlands². The research consisted of 45 interviews with professionals involved in each project at both national and local level and of an analysis of policy briefs, newspaper articles and official reports. First, I will explore the key elements that currently constitute the governability of national planning objectives. A taxonomy of tools is provided in the second part to analyze the two cases. The fifth section specifically looks at the usage of each tool type.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF NATIONAL PLANNING AGENCIES IN GOVERNING SPATIAL POLICIES?

There is agreement that national and regional plans must guide local agents in addressing complex planning problems (Mastop and Needham, 1997). However, even when a framework for planning is formulated at national level in a vertically integrated system, this is not guaranteed to steer local authorities in the desired direction. Lange, Mastop and Spit (1997) have already demonstrated that in some policy sectors (traffic and landscape) the performance of national frameworks is weak and national perspectives are rarely integrated in local plans. Governability problems occur whenever there is a discrepancy between the planning objectives of municipalities and those of upper levels of governments. They often derive from the discrepancy between the political and economic responsibilities of national governments to govern national, and international spatial changes as well as the ability of cities to autonomously pursue land use planning within their jurisdictions. Foucault has provided a major contribution to the conceptualization of the issue of authority between collective institutions and autonomous agents. With the concept of *governmentality*, he has investigated the State through the ensemble of institutions, procedures, reflections, calculations and tactics that allows governments to exercise power

(Foucault, 1991). Governmentality thus conceptualizes authority from an instrumental point of view, making a direct theoretical link between *instruments* and *strategies* of state power, looking at how specific techniques of government influence social networks in time. Following this line, in a context of weaker and less authoritative state power, a government will employ different tools to exercise its authority and influence urban development.

Until the 1990s, the problem of national policy implementation in decentralized systems was addressed administratively. In the American literature, a particular focus was given to the role of federal and State governments in the steering and control of policy-making through clear policy formulation, regulatory frameworks and particular ad hoc agencies (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1981; O'Toole, 1986). Since the mid-1990s, another strand of theories has conceptualized (spatial) policy implementation as a dynamic, asymmetric, interactive networking process, and argued that *enablement* instead of *control* is the key logic to understand inter-governmental relations. *The management of complex networks* is the logic of policy governability, which ultimately depends on the extent to which fragmented bargaining dynamics are managed across levels of government (Van Bueren, Klijn et al. 2003; Agranoff and McGuire, 2004). In Europe, a significant contribution to these theoretical insights has come from research on multi-level governance and European integration that focused on the different articulations of state intervention within trans-national functional systems and on its role as meta-governor in the constitution of the conditions *within* which self-organization of networks takes place (Jessop, 2002). Urban development is not the mere product of a vertical influence between layers of government whereby high-level objectives are percolated into area planning but it is an outcome of a networking process in which spatial dynamics are framed and rescaled to fit different policy levels. Specific political or technical agents becomes thus crucial to enhance the conditions of this inter-governmental negotiation over spatial strategies (Sehested, 2009) and national agents can actively align plans at different scales, coupling

concepts with financial-investments, connecting policy sectors, providing knowledge to orient planning and create platforms for inter-organizational coordination (Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000).

A growing field of literature has sought to identify the tools of government used to facilitate the changing logics of government action in the practice of public policy-making (Eliadis et al. 2005; Hood, 2007). Lascoumes and LeGalès have argued that instruments constitute “*a condensed form of knowledge about social control and ways of exercising it*” (2007, p.3, see also Le Galès & Lascoumes, 2005). They underline the emergence of ‘new public policy instruments’ (idem, p.13) based on agreements (e.g. contracts); incentives; communications and information, all of which are less interventionist and entail different governmental arrangements than authoritative tools. In planning, Van der Broeck (2008) has adopted a socio-political perspective to investigate the link between social, political and cultural changes. He demonstrates that “*planning instruments embody socio-political characteristics, expressed in strategic selectivities favoring or constraining specific strategies of specific actors*” (Van der Broeck 2011, p.73).

Most of these works emphasize the importance of designing different types of instruments, tailored to the State’s weaker financial capacity. Such tools do not embody *command and control* logics but focus instead on incentives, political manipulation and information exchange to improve process management and generate organizational capacities (Salamon and Elliott, 2002). This paper investigates this specific category of tools, defined as , which become more crucial in conditions of decreased economic and fiscal power of central government. Stimulation tools are hence non-regulatory and non-authoritative in nature as they are used on selected pivotal projects, when national governments decide to intervene.

TYPES OF TOOLS: LOGICS OF GOVERNMENTAL ACTION

The report on which this article is based lists 20 different instruments integrated in five different spatial investment programs coordinated by the Ministry of VROM³. A taxonomy of four types of tools has been designed in order to detect the rationale of governmental actions. The model is a structuring device that allows empirical investigation of the different rationales of today's national involvement in strategic urban development and their respective outcomes on planning processes. Howlett has demonstrated that when national governments operate in situations of limited (political and economic) authority they tend to gear procedural tools to "*indirectly affect outcomes through the manipulation of policy processes*" (Howlett, 2000, p.413). Accordingly, it is expected that tools to stimulate and manipulate will be increasingly used in planning by national agencies nowadays. To define specific logics of involvement, this concept is operationalized according to two main working hypotheses.

First, decentralization arguably reduces the influence of national governments on local decisions, and gives greater autonomy to city authorities. It is hence important to measure the specific degree to which state agencies take part in planning processes to determine whether they assume responsibilities for decisions taken. In this paper, the higher the involvement, the more the government takes responsibility, invests political resources and is accountable for decisions taken (although formal responsibilities remain local). Second, reduced economic capacity arguably induces governments to operate selectively to maximize available resources. I hence distinguish between two targets: *content* or *process*. Governments operate on the *content* of plans when they aim at determining land use, or stimulating original thinking or solving problems (e.g. trajectories of infrastructure corridors, landscape design or locations for strategic projects). Conversely, they target *process* when their priority is to stimulate the overall decision making but without pushing for a specific solution (e.g. trouble-shooting, organization,

mediation between different actors). Four possible logics of governmental involvement are hence outlined.

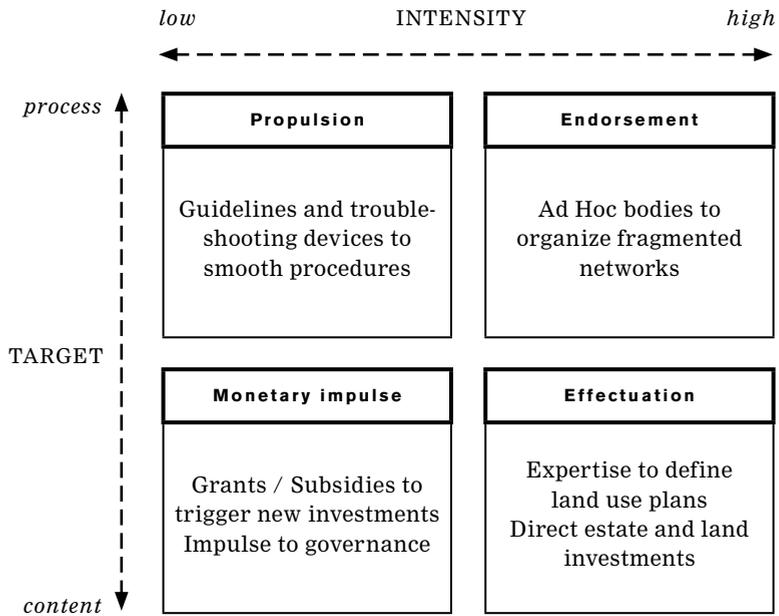


Fig. 1.1: The taxonomy of four types of tools and governmental action.

Monetary impulse: (content-low involvement): government aims at triggering decision-making on specific issues of development, without taking direct responsibilities on their implementation. National government can become involved at an early phase or when there is a need to mobilize other public or private resources. With monetary impulse, grants are very selective, issued to address chosen planning issues, and not given automatically. They are often allocated through competitively between specific projects. Monetary incentives are used to stimulate planning on aspects that are rele-

vant for national agencies (e.g. green development, spatial quality around infrastructure) but they do not involve an active engagement of state authorities in decision making (see effectuation tools).

Propulsion (process-low involvement): national planning agencies aim at stimulating decision-making but remain in the background of the process. The government invests in research and expertise without taking responsibilities on particular choices. The aim is to facilitate procedures through non-mandatory guidelines or by ‘trouble-shooting’ during the definition of a project. Governance is self-organized locally but national agencies provide background support where needed.

Endorsement (process-high involvement): the national government organizes the process to influence the power relationship in networks. It organizes institutional settings, facilitates access of key stakeholders within networks and strengthens interconnectivity between actors. By endorsing, it takes political responsibilities on the results of the process and it engages directly with local authorities. The involvement tends to continue throughout the process.

Effectuation (content-high involvement): governments stimulate implementation of projects through direct investments in real estate and land development and through a direct and active engagement on the planning and design process. National agencies can also advise on technical issues, urban design, land use planning and other solutions. The government does not substitute the role of local authorities but it mobilizes material resources and knowledge in the project. It can also organize expert think-tanks on several issues like spatial quality, architectural design, and the management of green areas. Different from monetary impulse, with these tools national planning agencies take an active part in the planning process, prompting specific land use interventions.

This typology is a relatively blank canvass, which could be enriched with further research on other contexts and the tools here defined are complementary to regulatory instruments still at governments' disposal. This paper is interested in detecting these alternative devices used in complex decision-making processes.

UP-SCALING ALMERE

The development of the Almere, a new town founded in 1976, has historically been a national project. Almere was designed to relieve the urbanization pressure in the core of the Randstad region and to avoid the development of a large urban agglomeration joining the cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague. Initially, the role of the national government was direct, extensive and oriented to both strategic planning and implementation, framed within the national strategy of 'concentrated de-concentration' and 'growth poles' (Second Report on National Spatial Planning 1966). The engagement of national agencies reflected the heyday of the Dutch planning system in the 1970s and 1980s with a complete fabric of planning in which inter-sector coordination was procedurally legalized and supported with powerful interdepartmental bodies at the level of bureaucracy, at the political level of the ministers, and also at the level of supporting advisory councils (Siraa et al. 1993).

The construction of the new town of Almere was a product of this planning machinery, based on a shared 'planning doctrine' with a strong 'culture of government' that allowed efficient coalition-building (Faludi, 1994, Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994). As a growth pole, Almere benefited from special organizational and financial resources from the State that supported municipalities that lacked sufficient administrative capacities to accommodate the planned housing growth. Contributions included covering the costs of infrastructure, special subsidies for administrative and building expenses, grants for multi-functional facilities as well as increased municipal funds (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1990). An interdepart-

mental commission was formed to manage the national policy on planned places of growth while a committee was responsible for distributing housing quotas in the northern cities. *The IJsselmeer Polder Development Authority* was charged to manage the process of land development under direct responsibility of the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management and to chair the municipal government. Land was directly transferred from the national to local authorities. In 1993, with the Fourth Report Extra (VINEX), Almere became a major target in the government's national planning for new housing expansions (i.e. *Almere Buiten*, *Almere Poort* and *Almere Stad*) financed by specific subsidies for land remediation, servicing and development; the State even guaranteed on the investment risk with venture capital and ad hoc regulatory arrangements (de Wolff, 1993). The different roles of each governmental level were fixed in advance by mean of specific contracts (VINEX *convenanten*, actualized into VINAC later). After the VINEX, governmental involvement progressively decreased and eventually seemed to stop in 2003, when the nearly finished *Integraal Ontwikkelings Plan Almere* was not supported by the new political leaders in The Hague.

Today, the city is still strategically important for the Dutch government because it is one of the few areas in the Randstad not protected by development restrictions and where the consistent national demand for housing can be met⁴. The *Schaalsprong* of Almere is a project initiated by the national government in 2005 to achieve: 1) the creation of approximately 60,000 new houses and 100,000 work spaces; 2) the development of a new 'urban milieu' to consolidate the socio-economic identity of the city; 3) the improvement of the infrastructure corridor of Almere-Amsterdam-Schipol. The city is planned to nearly double in population to reach 300,000 inhabitants by 2030. The planning challenge is to match the national government's long-term policy objectives with the development ambitions of Almere into a shared meta-strategic plan for the whole Northern Randstad. The strategic vision for the *Schaalsprong* must define housing and infrastructural development perspectives and

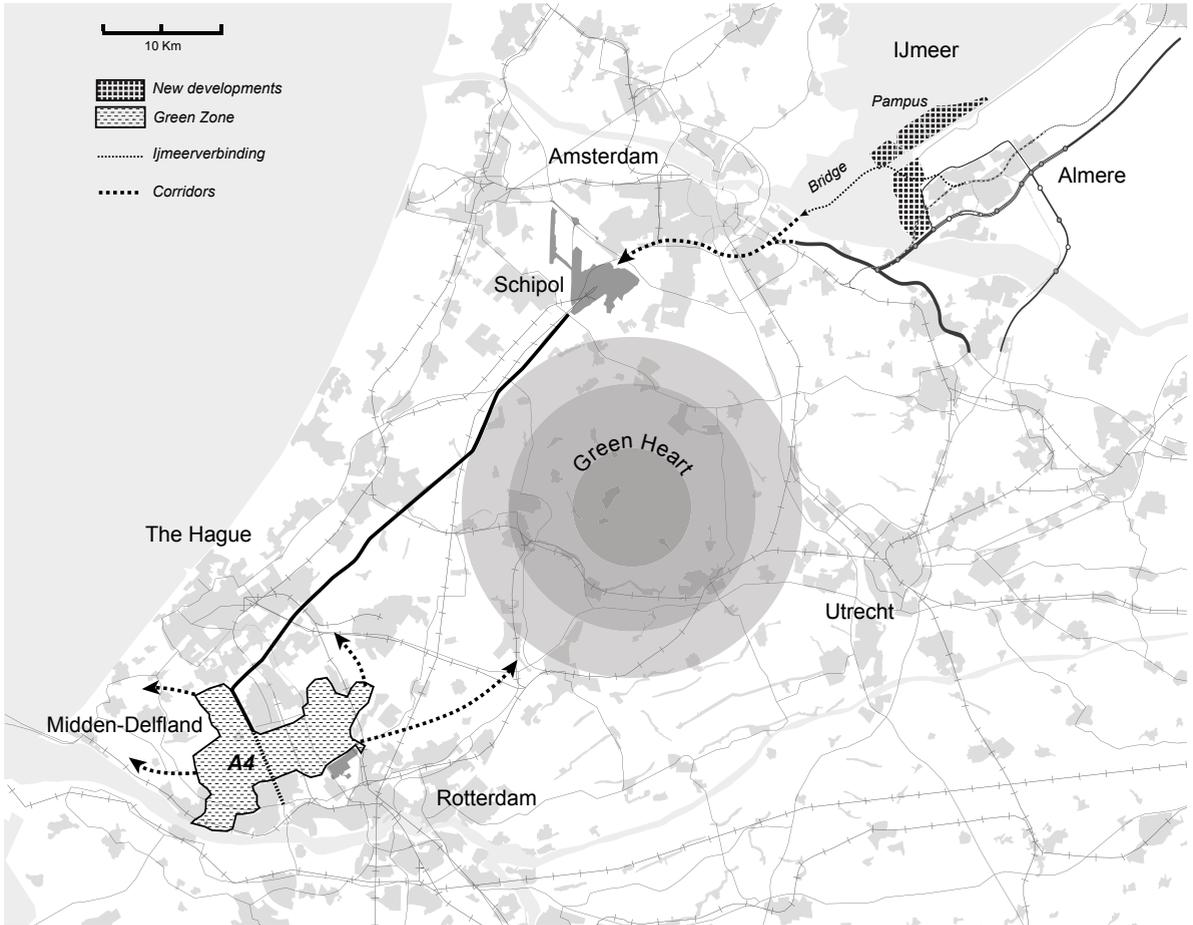


Fig. 1.2: Strategic interventions in the Schaalsprong Almere and in Midden-Delfland green zone within the Randstad Region

target spatial investments in a time of scarce resources, when spatial planning may be less of a priority than other policy fields.

Regarding the future of the city, conflicting scenarios have been produced. Some prioritize investments in the Amsterdam-Almere connections in order to strengthen the role of the new town as an urban extension of the Dutch capital, with major investments in infrastructure such as a €6bn light rail bridge linking Almere with Amsterdam (*IJmeerverbinding*). By contrast, other scenarios imply a more autonomous development of Almere and prompt for other investments on education, community-building and social services. A key element for governing this process is the capacity to frame the future of Almere as a multi-scaled spatial issue related to the urban position of the city within the Randstad region and, most importantly, within Amsterdam metropolitan area. Strategic planning in Almere is exacerbated by a discrepancy between land property assets and formal planning competences. The government is large land owner in development sites but Almere has the choice to acquire land within planned sectors of expansions. Such an inter-governmental assets is further stressed by the fact that according to the Spatial Planning Act approved in 2008 (Wro), there is a formal possibility for both provincial and national governments to overrule the local autonomy in drawing up land use plans (by issuing *inpassingsplannen*) or through specific legal instruments (i.e. *verordening* or *proactieve/reactieve aanwijzing*).

In 2006 the government decided to stimulate the planning of Almere and charged the national land development agency, the RVOB (*Rijksvastgoed- en ontwikkelingsbedrijf*) with the responsibility to manage the up-scaling. The role of the agency was to coordinate negotiations between the Province, other ministries and the City of Almere, to reach agreement over the *Noordvleugelbrief*, the first policy document for the Northern Randstad, whereby medium-term issues of the location of housing and infrastructure were addressed (Ministerie van V&W, 2006). The role of the agency was to liaise between the national general directorates of different ministries and local representatives. A similar objective was also

pursued with the production of a territorial agenda's (*Gebiedsagendas*) within the frame of the MIRT (*Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport*), the multi-year program of infrastructure and spatial investments updated yearly by the national government since 2007. Between 2008 and 2009 the national government stimulated the redaction of a document that could harmonize all the different national policies over the specific area of the North-West of the country (*Gebiedsagenda Noord-West Nederland*). In 2007, VROM politically restated that Almere was a key site for the implementation of the national spatial strategy and allocated approximately €84m of special grant to put underground a motorway crossing the inner city and to build a new school complex. In the same year, the *Schaalsprong* Almere was selected among 33 projects of the *Randstad Urgent* programme – a program defined by the Ministry of Infrastructures and Waterways (V&W) addressing priority projects in the region. A 'government duo' was created by the Minister of VROM and the alderman with the responsibility to formulate an agreement before 2010 on development priorities. An 'ambassador' was appointed to manage the communication process between the two politicians. These operations arose from the need to increase connectivity between political representatives to speed up decision-making on key projects. National and local governments have today reached a declaration of intent on joint priorities, the promotion of the realization of a municipal structure plan towards 2030 and a more precise financial plan. These agreements gave also precise procedural indication for the next steps, binding them to the allocation of other special grants in order to induce Almere to follow them. The recently published *RAAM-Brief* (National decision on Amsterdam-Almere and Markemeer, Ministerie van V&W, 2010) today operationalizes national and local policy objectives in the area and it quantifies a preliminary budget plan towards 2030.

MIDDEN-DELFLAND GREEN ZONE

Midden-Delfland is a zone that has attracted national attention since the 1960s. The area is a semi-rural space of approximately 6,600 ha, squeezed between the two larger agglomerations of Rotterdam and The Hague. Currently it hosts approximately 17,000 inhabitants in an urban system of scattered villages and small-sized cities. Parts of these were grouped in 2005 in the jurisdiction of Midden-Delfland which at present covers around 70% of the whole area. Since 1958, state authorities have taken a prominent role in governing the area, establishing specific directives and financial measures to purchase undeveloped land and manage agriculture and nature between The Hague and Rotterdam. In the 1950s the status of 'buffer zone' restricted new developments besides providing directives on uses of the landscape while allocating a subsidy for purchasing land fragments. From 1977 until 2010, a special regulation (*Reconstructie Wet Midden-Delfland*) was put in place to establish a state-led planning regime to directly control spatial developments (Van Rij, 2008). With this act, a commission composed of local, national and civic stakeholders (*Land Consolidation Committee*) became the responsible body to approve any new development and to define the areas of compulsory purchase to be used as natural heritage. Land management was coordinated by a special agency (*Dienst Landelijk Gebied*) under the Ministry of Nature, Agriculture and Nature (LNV). Van Rij and Korthals Altes (2008) have characterized this period as a 'slow planning approach', which was based on a governmental vision for rural planning, which has been major component of national policies in the past (*Nota Landelijke Gebieden*). The State enforced highly restrictive regulations (Van Schendelen, 1997) and provided the financial and organizational resources to directly manage the distribution of agriculture and nature within Midden-Delfland.

Today, Midden-Delfland's buffer-zone status is to be renegotiated with local authorities and the special regulation is set to expire. The national government is concerned about the urbanization pressure

on the southern Randstad, as approximately 280,000 houses need to be built in the areas of Rotterdam and The Hague. Midden-Delfland, with its major agriculture industry, sits in between two of the major agricultural areas of Holland (Westland-Oostland) and on the trajectory of Rotterdam-The Hague railway and A4 highway. The combined management of these issues is apparently a win-lose situation between urbanization and green-preservation. The governability problem lies in the need to manage negotiations between different national department (i.e. infrastructure, nature and housing) and the major cities to produce a shared strategic framework of urban-rural development.

In 2007, the *Randstad Urgent* program selected Midden-Delfland as a priority project. This allowed the alderman and the Minister of LNV to sign a declaration of intent in 2007⁵ to stimulate inter-municipal cooperation over the whole area. This direct link between local and national levels of government was motivated by the need to manage the complex, regional-wide network involved in the project and to better define which key players would be accountable in negotiations. An ambassador was also appointed to assist the aldermen in communicating with civil society representatives and the ministry. Aware of this national attention, Midden-Delfland took a leadership role to activate a dialogue between cities and province of South Holland on the opportunities of inter-municipal cooperation. The constitution of a governance platform representing 16 municipalities, including Rotterdam, The Hague and the Rotterdam city region has been the first tangible result of this stimulation. The *Hof van Delfland* now works as an informal arena in which local stakeholders can discuss broad strategic ideas on the relationship between urban and rural developments and the specific function of recreational areas together with the larger municipalities⁶. As in the North-West of the country, these interaction were supported by a national coordinate on long term objectives for the South Randstad region, stated in the MIRT territorial agenda in 2009 (*Gebiedsagenda Zuidvleugel/ Zuid-Holland*, 2009).

Financial and technical support was allocated in 2008 to stimulate reflections on rural-urban interventions. National agencies technically assisted local project leaders in designing landscape quality, locating recreational activities and plan the reuse of historical heritage to increase real estate values. Small grants (totaling €35m from the BIRK- *Besluit Investeren Ruimtelijke Kwaliteit* - and Nota Ruimte Budget programs) supported this framing process: these grants, targeted at smaller municipalities, have gone towards developing green corridors in the west and center of the Randstad on condition that local municipalities contribute a proportional amount. The funds do not cover the whole costs of the operations and are not addressed to the acquisition of specific land assets. Instead they are used to encourage small municipalities to develop green corridors, an ambition which cannot be realized without inter-municipal cooperation.

STIMULATING NEGOTIATIONS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

The governability of the spatial dynamics in Almere and Midden-Delfland depends on the capacity to strategically combine spatial dynamics which surpass city boundaries. This is a task which is unachievable by local authorities alone; yet, neither can it be achieved by the national authority where land use planning is a local responsibility. In the past, the problem of governability was addressed by the direct engagement of national planning agencies which, through extensive financial measures and consistent organizational and technical investments, have steered decision making, selected growth poles and directly managed agricultural land. With less spending capacity and a weakened governmental infrastructure, national planning agencies now play a less extensive, more specialized role in area development, within a less hierarchical arrangement of intergovernmental relationships. In both projects, the State became one stakeholder within a multi-step decision-making process, although it makes use of its position to manipulate, enable

and stimulate local choices in line with its own policy objectives. The national government's role shifted from a position of authority to that of enablement, establishing a new influence in the metagovernance of urban planning processes (Sørensen, 2002). Yet, this role is not uniform, but is performed in different ways according to the specific target and intensity of involvement:

a) Endorsement: in both cases the national government endorsed the project, through specific governmental bodies which joined lower and higher tiers of government (the so called 'governmental duos'). These are loosely defined political partnerships through which national and local authorities identify medium term priorities and distinguish responsibilities. In Almere, this was an attempt to structure political accountability and manipulate inter-organizational connectivity in a project with a strong metropolitan character. In Midden-Delfland, instead, Randstad Urgent helped to raise the profile of the project and overcome impasses in negotiations. As Midden-Delfland's alderman stated, "*the Randstad Urgent program focused on only two of the several governmental layers involved so to make a 'cross section' across the others*". This reportedly allowed the project to 'jump scales' and trigger systematic strategic thinking over the whole sector. Endorsement is in both cases a tactic to raise the sense of urgency of projects, to incite local actors in achieving agreements. However, it is not yet clear whether endorsement has enhanced the quality of the decisions taken.

b) Effectuation: in Almere, the government also made use of *effectuation tools*; by using these devices it directly got involved in formulating land use choices coherent with its policy framework. Effectuation tools targeted a specific area in Almere and aimed at operationalizing strategic choices for housing extensions. The government became a stakeholder in the process but it adopted a lighter approach to advance its claims into local land use planning. To do this, it employed a specific agency, the RVOB, to manage land assets and have a direct position in the process. This provided

a platform to match local and national demands within the Amsterdam metropolitan area. The RVOB manipulated a process full of ambiguity and uncertainty, with a high risk of stalemate, by focusing operational debate on concrete land use issues about developments in the west of the city. In Almere, the RVOB became active already at the strategic phase to mediate between officials over land use planning issues⁸. The use of the MIRT territorial agendas in both cases was driven by a similar intention as these documents has been a middle step into a long strategic planning process to detect possible conflicts between existent national and local investments.

c) Monetary impulse: in the past, national government made extensive use of grants, allocated automatically to selected locations to cover overall extra costs. Today, grants impact the networking driving spatial policy framing. They are based on project proposals developed by local authorities and they are not automatically allocated. In Midden-Delfland, subsidies were issued to raise awareness and promote self-designed solutions for green corridors. In Almere, allowances permitted government agencies to enlarge the network of decision makers and put pivotal issues on the table (e.g. education and quality of space) so as to re-orientate the framing of Almere. Funding is thus used to support broad topics, considered crucial to national spatial perspectives, even though the amount might not cover the full costs. Grants are today used to trigger alternative framing processes during the process.

d) Propulsion: national government reportedly stimulates decision-making being an 'outsider'. In the projects investigated, the government attempts to facilitate procedures without employing significant political or financial resources. The influence of these tools is variegated and depends on political conditions. Political relationships between national and local can give momentum to strategic planning⁹ in a better way than general guidelines provided by national programs, that are perceived as old-fashioned forms of

standardization of decision-making processes¹⁰. Yet, despite its ‘soft’ character, propulsion keeps political pressure on projects considered important at national level to facilitate planning. In Midden-Delfland, inter-municipal cooperation built upon the political support of national authorities. According to the coordinator of *Hof van Delfland*, “the ministry has a direct influence on our governance network, but it is about recognition rather than institutional control. The group is kept together as it is sure to generate legitimate and implementable decisions”¹¹.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper challenged the general expectation that national spatial planning has less power of influence on local urban development in conditions of decentralized and neo-liberalized planning systems. It argued that the governability of spatial dynamics is still an issue for governments at national, state, country or even regional level. I empirically looked at Dutch government behavior in strategic spatial interventions to demonstrate that even though competences are fully decentralized, central government has not completely withdrawn from spatial planning in the Netherlands. Instead, it concentrates its efforts on specific aspects of the planning process, following a ‘lighter’ pattern of intervention than in the past. In the Netherlands this is an ongoing pattern of institutional change: fiscal austerity curtails the capacity of the State to subsidize and finance spatial interventions. The current draft framework appears of a different nature, with a prominent focus on sectors of national interest and specific projects instead of institutionalizing broad spatial concepts; the recent Draft National Spatial Vision (SVIR) has indeed drastically downsized the relevance of the Randstad concept, at the core of the Dutch planning doctrine for the last 50 years. Lastly, the merger between spatial planning and infrastructure ministries has given an institutional structure to this trend, placing planning in a less unitary and less prominent position within national politics.

It is hence important to investigate practices of government involvement that can be geared to these new institutional conditions. In this paper four types of *stimulation tools* have been conceptualized as being used to enable strategic planning in local networks without imposing regulations. The outcomes of stimulation vary according to the degree to which national planning agencies get involved in the process and on the specific target they choose: *a) endorsement*: government decides to stimulate decision-making by reorganizing governance networks with the intent to clarify responsibilities, increase accountability and generate leadership; *b) effectuation*: governments get more directly involved in the process to foster their particular stakes so to reduce the mismatch between local and national priorities on specific interventions; *c) Monetary impulse*: the state supports spatial interventions through monetary allowances, which bring fruits when they are used to reframe planning problems; *d) propulsion*: government choose to work ‘behind the scenes’ to give momentum to specific projects, although this require political legitimacy of self-organized practices within national political arenas.

This new lighter profile of national spatial planning is emergent rather than completed. It requires a stronger policy focus on processes of urbanization and ruralisation to better maximize scarce resources. It also needs more institutional innovation and more interconnectivity, combining local strategic intervention with international platforms, such as European programmes. National government could facilitate local access to international institutions, to enable knowledge exchange, policy transfer and learning. The relationship with the private sector is also critical: national government involvement still seems focused on public arenas, leaving the design and management of public-private partnerships to local authorities. This can be a weak point for smaller municipalities with less capacity to bargain with large investors. Furthermore, under conditions of weak implementation capacity, national agencies can make best use of their position to favor connectivity among national key projects and to reframe and unlock stalemates in local planning.

NOTES

- 1) In November 2010 VROM, the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Environment and Housing Affairs, was merged with the Ministry of Infrastructures, Public Works and Water Management to form the Ministry of Infrastructures and Environment. At the time of writing debates were afoot about the effective functions of national spatial planning within this new institutional form.
- 2) The cases studied are: Kop van Zuid Rotterdam, Sphinx Ceramique Maastricht, Zuidas Amsterdam, Groot Mijdrecht Noord, Midden-Delfland, Spoor tunnel Delft, Schaalsprong Almere.
- 3) For the complete list see Savini et al. (2010, pag. 25). The first and second generation of key projects, the BIRK budget for spatial quality, the Nota Ruimte Budget grants and the Randstad Urgent program.
- 4) The National Spatial Strategy (Nota Ruimte) estimates total housing demand as approximately 400,000 dwellings to be met between 2010 and 2030. At least 40% of the total demand should be catered for in existing urban areas.
- 5) Ministerie of Verkeer and Waterstaat, Afspraken Randstadurgent 2007, p. 11.
- 6) A first draft document on priorities of interventions for the green zone was published at the end of 2010. Hof van Delfland 2025, Ruimtelijke Visie, Versie 0.5, 28 September 2010.
- 7) Interview with Alderman Midden-Delfland 15 May 2010.
- 8) Interview with Almere project leader at RVOB, 8 June 2010
- 9) Idem
- 10) Idem
- 11) Interview with Hof van Delfland coordinator at the Province of Zuid Holland, 26 March 2010

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