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### Urban peripheries: The political dynamics of planning projects

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# POLITICAL DILEMMAS IN PERIPHERAL DEVELOPMENT

INVESTMENT, REGULATION, AND INTERVENTIONS  
IN METROPOLITAN AMSTERDAM.

### ABSTRACT

*Today's metropolis is polycentric. Core city borders are undergoing major transformations and the urban periphery is becoming an attractive area for investment as well as an experimental ground for planning innovation. Yet, its development entails deep political tension. This paper starts from the assumption that the role of political dynamics and political agendas of elected groups is under-investigated in today's spatial planning research, even though they become crucial to enable innovation in times of economic change. It contributes to this field of research in two ways: first, it conceptualizes the political challenges for planning into three major dilemmas over approaches to spatial investment, regulation, and spatial interventions in the periphery. The paper then empirically demonstrates that to address these tensions in spatial planning there is a need to consider more fundamental political issues over future city-regional agendas. Examining recent transformation efforts in Amsterdam's northwestern areas, where industrial, housing, and environmental change all conflict, the paper shows that these dilemmas are attached to broader political questions over growth strategies, the meaning of regulation, and the role of governments in land management.*



*View on NDSM Warf, Amsterdam North, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2010.*

## INTRODUCTION

The spatial organization of today's metropolis has been defined as polycentric, kaleidoscopic, asymmetric, and edgeless, with different variations in urban morphologies (Knox, 2008; Sieverts, 2003). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century's European city-regions, the urban periphery is becoming an area for urban restructuring, brownfield reclamation, and urban densification. These are urban locations at the border of core municipalities, located at the heart of growing agglomerations that are often presenting fragmented spaces with a mix of production, residence, and vacant land. The increased dynamism of this inner urban belt poses important challenges in spatial planning, which needs to develop new concepts and institutional frameworks to address the changed socio-spatial configuration of cities. While peripheral locations are recognized as key spaces for city-regional development and for planning innovation, they are at risk of being subordinate to developmental ambitions of core cities, targets of top-down strategies of economic development, or even neglected spaces in regional policies. The raising of new peri-urban spaces is confronted with the existing geo-political conditions of cities, which poses political and economic barriers to city-regional coordination in planning and hinders the emergence of substantial metropolitan politics (Orfield, 2002).

Phelps, Wood, and Valler (2010) suggest that peripheral transformation entails a political strain between the capital accumulation strategies of municipalities, the social implications of peripheral development, and the different positions of governments on political coordination across jurisdictional borders. Adhering to the idea that these tensions are inherently political, this paper proposes a conceptual and empirical contribution to reveal the relevant political issues for planners today. The direct links between planning practice and the power consolidation strategies of politicians have been historically recognized, and 'it is striking that while this relationship occupies a pivotal position within the planning activity it remains little discussed in the academic literature and it is

generally shrouded in mystique and secrecy' (Campbell, 2001: 83). In particular, 'the role of political coalitions in driving the development of [post-suburban settlements and peripheral locations] remains underexamined' (Phelps et al. 2010). Planners are often portrayed as mediators or brokers in a broader political process (Albrechts 2003), or as managers of political dynamics in project management (Gordon 1997). Planning is generally understood as a political process of power (re)configuration and consensus building between conflicting interests, but historically 'the question is not whether planning will reflect politics but whose politics will it reflect' (Long 1959:168). Although this is a historical question, the existing literature tends to keep electoral politics in the background of today's debates.

This paper contributes to the empirical discovery of the political dimension of contemporary spatial planning in two ways. First, it argues that planners are facing three major dilemmas in the development of the periphery: regulation, spatial investment, and spatial intervention dilemmas. Secondly, the paper empirically demonstrates through one case that these dilemmas have an inherently political (and not technocratic) nature, thus requiring consideration of the broader political context. This paper selectively looks at emerging urban transformations in the urban periphery to detect these dilemmas and show how they structure the spaces of political confrontation in the plan making process.

The paper explores the case of the redevelopment of Amsterdam's northwest periphery. This particular case has been chosen as its complexity and location makes political debates clearer. The area is a space of national interest, with different governmental agendas at stake. Moreover, the project encompasses multiple planning issues: changing housing markets and urban restructuring, environmental protection, and issues of industrial-residential zoning. Furthermore, most research on the Amsterdam metropolitan area has generally neglected the Northwest, privileging business developments and residential areas on the city's southern side. Lastly, a focus on the periphery in the Netherlands also facilitates a preview

of some consequences of Dutch planning reforms. Planning in Holland is currently questioning some of its fundamentals, such as the role of the Randstad concepts, the hierarchy of different governments, and the future of environmental and housing policies (Roodbol-Mekkes et al, 2012). The data are collected through a series of 30 semi-structured interviews at the city, provincial, and national levels between 2011 and 2012 with both politicians and planners involved in the project. The interviews were specifically designed to unearth the different points of view and stances at each level, with particular attention to pressures on elected politicians regarding specific planning issues (i.e. the future of the harbor, the typology of housing, and environment). These data have been cross-analyzed by extensive desk research on the specific interventions taking place within the area.

#### **NEW POLITICAL DIVISIONS AND AGENDAS IN PERIPHERAL DEVELOPMENT**

Increased development opportunities and social challenges in the urban periphery have stimulated great interest in the political economy of peripheral restructuring. Building upon the evidence of changing suburbs, scholars have engaged in a conceptual debate aimed at defining how economic and political forces are combined in emerging patterns of suburban change (Lang and Knox, 2009). This is seen in the USA where processes of peripheral retrofitting have become more evident in light of sharper spatial and social distinctions between core, downtowns, peripheral areas, and suburbs. These changes have driven scholars to attempt a re-elaboration of traditional political economic models to grasp how suburban and peripheral development might express a power change within city-regional politics (Phelps and Wood, 2011). The empirical application of consolidated theories of urban regimes and growth machines (Stone, 1989, Logan and Molotch, 1984) has traditionally focused on inner city urban redevelopment and on the (exclusionary) effect

that urban projects have had on urban socio-economic patterns (Fainstein, 2008). Suburbanization has been explained as one of the several expressions of a 'spatial fix' of capital, as a process creating land and real estate investment opportunities and reactivating inner city restructuring (Harvey, 2001). According to these views, the joint transformation of inner-city cores and suburbs is one of the major planning strategies of entrepreneurial city governments and the spatial expression of a raising private authoritarianism (Ekers, et al 2012). However, while these approaches have been successful in normatively analyzing growth driven strategies of urban enlargement, planners in both Europe and North America are concerned with addressing the social, economic, and spatial policy challenges advanced by the progressive crystallization of metropolitan areas into new polycentric or dispersed conformations (Bontje et al. 2005; Bogart, 2006). Despite major political and spatial differences in Europe and the USA, we see a reconfiguration of spatial functions in both contexts with a rearrangement of the territorial equilibrium of city-regions by emerging new poles.

Planners ultimately operate within broader political contexts that they must understand in order to influence from within. The political logic of urban development thus regards the way planners and plans entail particular visions over society, biased by forms of ideology, electoral agendas, and discourses used by political groups to sustain power. Planning takes place within a layer of polity that matches macro-objectives of growth with the power ambitions of political coalitions in city-regions (Savini, 2012). These assertions have been recognized for generations, but there is still room to better understand the exact political issues at stake in the planning of city-regional development and in the governing of changing urbanities. In political science, policy change has been generally understood by looking at the emergence of new political fractures that policy makers need to address. These fractures rotate around concepts of urban citizenship, economic wealth, and social justice (Keil, 2000; Allen & Cochrane, 2007), and thus extend to broader issues related to these notions, like state control and individual freedom

in land use. These cleavages entail conflicts and controversies that tend to polarize politics into groups of preferences, and, if fragmented, lead to in-governability.

The changing of fringe areas and outer poles of city-regions in different spatial configurations (in-between cities, post-suburbs, techno-burb etc.) is subject to debate in planning over possible ways to understand and address the social, economic, and environmental challenges posed. They thus entail new political divisions over possible ways to readapt established administrative and regulative planning frameworks, often rooted in clear-cut definitions of 'urban versus rural' and pinned over mono-centric conceptions of urban systems (Phelps, 2012, Young and Keil, 2010). The notions of core and periphery seem to assume a new sense in globalized scenarios. New forms of political participation emerge within the new relationship between city, regional movements and politics, and global urbanization trends. All these factors make the periphery a salient space where established conceptualizations of regional economic growth, urbanization, and environment can be questioned.

For planners, this means the development of new concepts for issues of sustainability, spatial quality, nature, and compactness (Grant, 2009), as well as addressing issues of inter-municipal cooperation (Salet et al, 2003). To respond to these spatial trends, new concepts need to redefine the balance between *environment, urbanization, and economic growth in spatial policies*. This means to combine issues of preservation and transformation of green spaces, historical heritage, and peri-urban landscapes together with economic development needs. The concept of urbanization is also challenged, with emerging forms of urbanities based on new types of housing, urban amenities, social mixes, and infrastructures. Lastly, changing environmental and urban patterns need to be recombined with new perspective on city regional economic growth or recession, which significantly affect the capacity of cities to sustain peripheral change or maintain more expensive policies of compactness and sustainability (Janssen-Jansen et al, 2012). Although it is generally recognized that planning needs to develop

new concepts to address the combination of economic growth, environment, and urbanization, the current planning debate rarely considers the need to address political values and power configurations to achieve this innovation.

### **PLANNING DILEMMAS DRIVING PERIPHERAL DEVELOPMENT**

In peripheral development, the management of the conflict between economic growth, urbanization strategies, and environmental protection/management raises issues on the different approaches, goals, and tools of land use planning (i.e. ideal types). I use the concept of dilemmas to suggest that decision making processes in spatial planning structurally entail a series of compromises over different trade-offs, based on politically and arbitrarily constructed visions of the specific problem at stake (Rittel and Webber, 1973). These dilemmas characterize planning independently of the specific organizational approaches used, ultimately constituting the fundamental pillars of certain policy paradigms such as teleocratic or nomocratic approaches (Alexander et al, 2004). I here make an analytical distinction of the theoretical components of these dilemmas, although the practice is more nuanced. I use this classification to understand how planning develops as a continuous practice of compromise, conflict, and agreement along these conceptual lines. (Healey 2009, Mäntysalo 2002). These dilemmas can have different solutions depending on the scale of analysis and on the specific selection of the agents. Nonetheless, this classification allows an analytical reading of complex, non-linear policy processes. The dilemmas presented are considered crucial based on the assumption that there are three major components of public (spatial) policies: first, the mobilization of particular resources for politically driven goals (investments); second, the regulative framework that conditions and binds implementation of policies (regulations); and third, the locational and spatial component of policies which target specific areas in specific times, especially for spatial planning

(interventions). Although the organization of planning processes might vary across context (including the division of roles between public and private agents), spatial policies are ultimately anchored to these three elements.

*Spatial investment dilemma –the dilemma between supply- and demand-driven spatial investment.* This dilemma entails conflicting approaches to investment strategy in enabling socio-economic change in peripheral areas. Today's fringes have gained economic relevance in urban, regional, and national contexts as spaces where new economies can be created, related not only to distribution or logistics but increasingly to knowledge and creativity (Phelps, 2010). The allocation of investment follows a bargaining over long-term trajectories of regional economic development, especially in times of austerity. These strategies are built upon a politically constructed interpretation of the causal relationship between growth and urban change (Counsell and Haughton, 2003), and on a political definition of the 'value' of the environment (i.e. environmental capital). Political coalitions are structured over the particular strategies of allocation for investments to sustain long-term economic development. Some specifically focus on demand-side labor policies in order to create an attractive business climate, while others target investments and planning to increase the supply of space for businesses (Robinson, 1989). Some cities adopt the protective and stabilizing strategies of existing peripheral economies, while others undertake risky innovation by arranging brand new financial engineering for emerging demands. In particular, I refer to the position of public investments to trigger urban change. Today's governments are puzzled with the redefinition of their role as investors in highly risky projects. They need to quantify their capacity to hold risk, especially in these peripheral areas, and to design new forms of financing to maximize the yields of smaller public investments (Sagalyn, 1997). The investment dilemma emerges from the fuzziness of growth expectations and unresponsive real estate markets combined with the need of cities to draw new resources from

planned land development. It ultimately requires a reflection on new strategies of demand-led investments, emancipated from needs of ambitiously planned economic returns.

*Regulation dilemma – the dilemma between protection and adaptation in land-use management.* It entails conflicts between the practices managing existent land usages and the need for flexible adaptation to emerging land usages. The dilemma emerges when incoming expected usages clash with, and thus question, existing frames that control and steer urban change (e.g. green-blue preservation, quality standards, height limits, norms regarding pollution and density), procedural norms (e.g. hierarchical conformity of land use plans and master-plans), and established normative concepts (e.g. compact city development). These norms are usually institutionalized in local symbolic beliefs and thus hard to reform (Dembski and Salet, 2010). In contrast with neoliberal views on regulation, there is evidence that land use restrictions have been increasing instead of decreasing in recent years (McLaughlin, 2012). These restrictions contrast with strategies of adaptation, resilience, and change of peripheral spaces. The regulatory dilemma stems from the discrepancy between established legal institutions of suburban change and the spatial dynamism of today peripheries. Land use regulations ‘inherently prevent the natural evolution and adjustment of urban form with respect to consumer preferences between land consumption and accessibility’ (McLaughlin, 2012:52). Consequently, both zoning and growth prevention regulations (i.e. impact fees, growth boundaries) are often used instrumentally by parochial governments for the consolidation of political power (Feiock 2004). Governments have two conflicting choices: on the one hand, to enable organic adaptation of environment, production, and urban spaces within peripheries; on the other, to protect their existing specificities, historically rooted spatial and social structures, as well as local sub-cultures (Shaw, 2005). Resolution of this dilemma might require new structural forms of legal contextualization or nomocratic approaches (van Rijswick and Salet 2012).

*Spatial Intervention dilemma – the dilemma between control/determination of planning action and outcomes, and the enablement of bottom-up dynamics whose outcomes are uncertain.* It is the conflict between the rationalistic need to govern change by establishing priorities and targeting areas, and the increased uncertainty of the social, spatial, and economic trajectories of the urban fringe. Today's urban developments do not follow linear patterns of decide-and-execute but are driven by spontaneous forms of land use, bottom-up demands of built spaces, and grass-roots initiatives. In planning, the relationship between knowledge and action is non-linear (e.g. non-Euclidean, Friedmann, 2000), and this has been widely recognized in notions of *adaptive management* (Innes and Booher, 2004), *communicative planning* (Fischer and Forester, 1993), *relational planning* (Healey, 2007), and *actor-relational planning* (Boelens, 2010). All these approaches demonstrate that planning solutions are interactive, contextual, and consensus based, but they become problematic when civic dynamism is low, markets are inelastic, and the uncertainty of long-term change stifles planners. In this case, planners must address issues of priority and the targeting of interventions in order to address both localized demand and the long-term objectives of city-regional development, which are often de-contextualized and discussed within other political arenas. Experimentation might clash with broader objectives based on knowledge and predictions produced at other levels (Mazza 2002). In practice, these issues are raised whenever there is a need to accommodate formality and informality in urban uses, both long- and short-term visions, and the consideration of both preservation and change. Interim spatial usages, temporary activities, or creative forms of land management are likely to happen in peripheral locations where space is available and urban structures are versatile. However, this needs to be integrated with objectives defined, often consensually, by governments at different scales.

### **POLITICAL SHIFTS IN THE AMSTERDAM METROPOLITAN AREA**

In the Amsterdam metropolitan area, the development of the inner periphery takes place in the context of enduring governmental efforts to match increasing housing demand in both the North and South sectors of the Randstad, to coordinate infrastructural investments, and to protect the scarce green space of the Green Heart. Today, the inter-dependency of Amsterdam's jurisdiction and its periphery is structural, as the problem of housing scarcity can be matched only at a city-regional level due to housing market inelasticity and high urban densities (Korthals Altes, 2006). Production and office space have been relocating outside the inner city since the early 1990s and 57% of current development takes place in the fringe (Hamers and Piek, 2012). Spatial interdependency is also anchored to the Dutch fiscal system, with local expenditures dependent on central government redistributive policies that allocate funds across cities into specific areas of policy priority<sup>1</sup> (Allers, 2011).

In the early 1970s the positioning of the core city within the region became highly politicized (van der Cammen and De Klerk, 2012) with the emergence of more urban labor parties in the national political spectrum. A series of policies were undertaken to equalize unbalanced socio-economic development between Amsterdam and its surrounding municipalities. Until the 1990s these efforts were facilitated by the involvement of national governments, mitigating conflict between Amsterdam and its border municipalities who were often ideologically reluctant to cooperate with the core city. These policies were justified to counteract Amsterdam's diminished financial capacity due to the outflow of middle-class families to suburban regions. This trend was generated by a national policy of de-concentration towards outer urban centers (2<sup>nd</sup> Nota on spatial planning produced in 1966) that triggered a downgrading of central neighborhoods. The national growth of welfare and the increasing use of space had generated a population spillover from the core city, resulting in Amsterdam's population diminishing by 150.000 inhabitants during the 1970s and 1980s. A national growth coalition

(Terhorst and van der Ven, 1995) stimulated national urban, economic, and fiscal programs to regenerate cities based on a national policy of supply-oriented planning for core-city economies (4<sup>th</sup> Nota, Ministerie van VROM, 1990). Major policy outcomes included a program of urban regeneration in large cities (Big City Policy, Premius 1997) and a national investment program for large-scale inner-city development projects (Schuiling, 1996). In the 1990s, the VINEX program (Ministerie van VROM, 1991) became a tool to steer suburban expansion in order to return high quality privately owned housing to cities, requiring a coordinated management of housing extensions between municipalities. In the Amsterdam metropolitan area, the ROA (Regional Overleg Amsterdam), an inter-municipal body established in 1986 and then institutionalized in the Stadregio Amsterdam (SRA), was given the additional task of governing the allocation of state subsidies and managing the political controversies emerging from investment allocation in housing expansion.

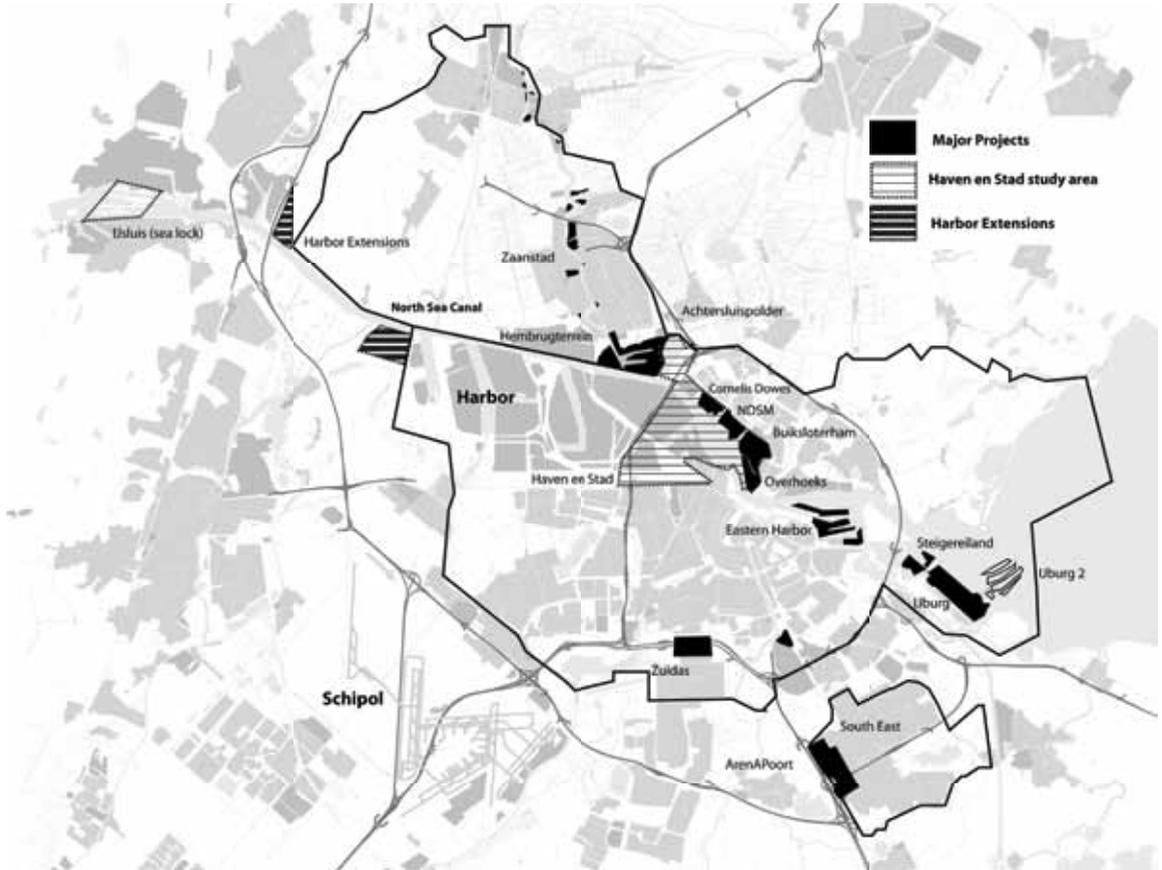
Urban development in the periphery has since been governed through a more experimental approach to metropolitan governance, aimed at organizing political coalitions around broad objectives, regional/urban and economic investment strategies, and specific policy issues (Janssen-Jansen, 2011). After a failed attempt at agglomeration in 1995, a more informal political-technical network was initiated in 2000 under the label of Noordvleugelconferenties (North Wing conferences). Renamed *Metropoolregio Amsterdam* (MRA) in 2007, it functions as a think-tank for Amsterdam, 36 surrounding municipalities, 3 provinces, and the regional body (StadRegio Amsterdam) on issues of urbanization, infrastructure-mobility, regional economy, landscape, and recently sustainability. The success of these platforms illustrates a new political convergence of municipalities in the region towards growth oriented development policies in response to political shifts at the national level (Nota Ruimte in 2004). With the national government's decreased capacity for investment and spatial control, Amsterdam realized that urban-suburban political polarization was the major factor hindering economic growth. In light of this, common

management of regional housing growth had to be found autonomously, through self-made bilateral agreements between municipalities and interventions coordinated across jurisdictional borders.

The policy shifts outlined above have been the expression of a conflicting dialectic between different political views on the role of the core city and its relationship with the region. The spatial organization of the Amsterdam region has been an area of confrontation between progressive groups, 'culturalist' intellectuals, and planners. These groups represent different political views on city growth objectives, arguing over different strategies of core-periphery symmetry, urban restructuring, and connectivity between nodes (Rooijendijk, 2008). The metropolitan governance of 2000 was also driven by a shift in regional geo-politics, especially in the Northwest. In the mid-1990s the former 'red' governments of the urban belt started to adopt developmental strategies that favored creative economies, knowledge intensive industries, and R&D, with less nostalgia of former industrial production. The Northwest has a long tradition of labor governments, both from working class parties (Socialist Party, SP) and from social democratic parties (PvdA). For many years they represented the industrial harbor tradition and have driven Amsterdam's socially oriented urban policies of social housing and tenure mix, but have also historically created ideological barriers to post-industrial redevelopment in the area. Since the 1990s, new electoral factions related to green and environmental movements (Green-Left, which gained the municipal executive in spatial planning and has received stable votes since the 1990s) or moderate right wing liberals (D66) have been gaining power. These new groups represent new social profiles like international and multicultural young professionals, highly qualified workers, and highly educated families employed in third sectors and R&D. These groups advance new developmental concepts and generate new policy issues in spatial planning related to emerging notions of internationalization, multiculturalism, livability, and sustainability that might clash with existent ones. They demand easier access in

the private housing market, central locations, and non-suburban living environments (see for example, Uitermark 2009), and they also stimulate a retargeting of interventions towards specific types of urban environments. The rise of these groups has progressively stimulated regeneration and gentrification policies towards up-and-coming locations in the city's north and inner east, and more recently they have attracted attention to new developmental possibilities in the Northwest<sup>2</sup>. Between 2006 and 2010, PvdA lost 10% of their votes in the municipality with major losses in the Northern and Western Districts. D66 gained 10% in the last election after their early success in the late 1990s. Most strikingly, the Socialist Party, often connected with the most nostalgic workers, has lost votes at every level (i.e. 6% municipally, 8% provincially). The neighboring Zaanstreek (Zaanstad and Oostzaan) area has progressively converged towards Amsterdam's electoral situation<sup>3</sup> (i.e. SP has lost 5% and PvdA 10%), constituting a 'red progressive' axis in the middle of a province dominated by liberal parties (Louter and Eikeren, 2012). This political alignment has brought Amsterdam and Zaanstad to lobby the national government to put the transformation of Amsterdam's northwest periphery into the investment agenda (see below).

Because of this changing and fragmented political geography, the inter-municipal and intergovernmental political alignment of executives becomes crucial in the governability of urbanization trends, economic growth, and landscape protection. Moreover, a recent series of reforms by the Dutch government has made political alignment between executive directions at different levels even more pressing. The Spatial Planning Act of 2008 (Wet Ruimtelijke Ordening, 2008) equalizes the role, but not the fiscal capacity, of each government tier in strategic planning, with each level of government producing their own spatial policy documents (*structuurvisies*) that do not formally bind the others (Needham, 2005). Furthermore, the current draft Structural Vision on Infrastructure and Environment (Ontwerp SVIR, Ministerie van I&M, 2011) does not propose new national spatial concepts (such as the Randstad) that



*Fig. 4.1. The North Sea Canal Area including major planned interventions.*

helped in building national coalitions for urban development in the past (Faludi, 1994). It instead focuses on different areas of intervention for which different spatial strategies will be elaborated and investments programmed. Lastly, national spatial planning has recently lost its unitary institutional identity (the Ministry of Spatial Planning, and Environment and Housing Affairs). The right-wing Liberal-Christian Democrat cabinet elected in 2010 has restructured the executive, politically dividing spatial planning competences, environmental management, and housing across three different ministries<sup>4</sup>. In addition, divisions were drawn across the three levels of government, placing economy and infrastructures under national, environmental issues under provincial, and housing development under local government. Below I will illustrate how the combination of shifting electoral geographies and recent institutional reforms poses three major challenges for planning.

#### **THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMSTERDAM'S NORTHWEST PERIPHERY: ZAAIJ**

In 2010, new pressure from progressive left groups in Amsterdam and Zaanstad resulted in a study for the strategic redevelopment of the northwestern waterfront<sup>5</sup> (*MIRT-onderzoek ZaanIJ*). Political pressure on the area increased progressively from the mid-2000s, with a series of actions undertaken by local politicians and planners to redevelop underused land on the northern banks. The area was indicated as a strategic project in the regional agenda designed by the Amsterdam metropolitan area (Gebiedsagenda Noordwest Nederland) in 2009, and was recently named a national strategic location in the draft national structural document (Ministerie van I&M, 2012). The project will set the bases for a national strategic vision on the whole North Sea Canal area (*Noordzeekanalgebied*), recognized as one of the national economic motors of the country. Today, the ZaanIJ is a cluster of coordinated projects from the north banks of the IJ to the western outskirts municipality of Zaanstad

(see Fig. 4.1).

The northwestern periphery has been historically considered a marginal location for regional urban and economic growth in comparison to the attractive central locations of the Amsterdam Zuidflank (i.e., Schipol, Zuidas, residential estates in the east) and the new town of Almere. However, this area could indeed benefit from major national and international investment because of its interconnectedness with the other major nodes of the Randstad and plentiful land available for housing development. The municipality of Zaanstad, a community of 148.000 inhabitants, initially played a weaker role in the early days of the Amsterdam metropolitan negotiations for both political and geographical reasons. In the early 2000s the city faced fragmented internal politics and post-industrial political change, driven by consolidated labor protective coalitions that were skeptical of emerging new economic sectors and regional growth policies. Moreover, the geographic location of Zaanstad does not allow extensive urban expansion in the green areas. Still, the city's attractiveness has been increasing, with growing industry in food processing, financial services, and pioneering creative clusters spilling from the nearby transformation of the North Amsterdam developments. The peculiar combination of post-industrial landscapes and buildings, lower urban densities, and accessibility to green landscapes have become very attractive to political parties sustaining the rising 'creative-class' in the outskirts of the city. The political alignment between the progressive left of Amsterdam and Zaanstad has provided good conditions for spatial interventions.

The ZaanIJ project could potentially match 6% of the total housing demand in the Randstad's North Wing, but this planned change makes evident a clash between urbanization, economic growth strategies, and environmental management. On the one hand, the North Wing has a housing deficit of 10.000 units per year, since only approximately 5.000 units are built annually. To address this deficit, there is a need for a minimum of 14.000 up to a maximum of 30.000 units per year, with different typologies and costs. However, this housing expansion rate strongly conflicts with local and regional

economic perspectives on harbor growth, industrial expansion, and Schipol airport expansion. Both urbanization and economic perspectives directly affect ambitions for natural and urban landscape protection in the area, as expansion would imply the erosion of surrounding green areas, the change of existing natural structures, and the eventual reconsideration of Amsterdam's compact-city policy.

**SPATIAL INVESTMENT DILEMMA:  
SUPPLY OR DEMAND ORIENTED?**

A spatial investment dilemma arises from the conflicting trends of industrial expansion and urban change in the area that will require radically different uses of public resources in the long run. At stake is the economic sustainability of Amsterdam's manufacturing and logistics industries versus the long-term competitiveness of the Amsterdam metropolitan area based on the accommodation of new sectors of production (e.g. finance, third sectors, and creative industries). Amsterdam's harbor is Europe's 4th largest in tonnes of materials shipped and further growth is planned. However, the forecasted increase from 64 to 125 tonnes per year (Amsterdam Haven, 2009) requires an investment of up to D800 million to renew and enlarge the North Sea Canal harbor lock (the IJsluis), as the current harbor, built in 1929, is not suitable for today's ship sizes. The costs of this investment can only be covered through the plus-value generated by harbor growth within the next twenty years. Conversely, the creation of new housing requires investments in soil remediation, infrastructures, and the relocation of harbor activities. The accommodation of both functions would require further harbor expansion into the green landscape of the region.

Today, political groups are clashing over strategies to address this problem of collective action. The investment dilemma regards the management of the economic win-lose situation generated by different territorial expressions of economic policies, namely the strengthening of existing productions or a risk-taking strategy to

generate new productive landscapes. Strategic gridlock emerges from political uncertainty on the use of national and local resources to promote urban and industrial change. Policies of industrial expansion clash with the need to transform internal areas of the harbor to accommodate incoming social profiles with new urban environments.

The political divisions spread across different levels. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, responsible for housing development, is concerned with housing production to match the shortage in the Randstad. Its position has been largely uncertain in political terms, often bound to liberal views of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment. The latter already agreed to invest €541 million in a new sea lock in 2009 and expects to cover costs with larger harbor outputs. The Ministry of Economic Affairs is also defining new national policies directed towards economic sectors alternative to those managed in Amsterdam harbor, subsidizing high-tech, creative industries, and knowledge intensive jobs<sup>6</sup>. Yet, these documents lack focus to encompass different political views as they prioritize a large proportion of Dutch economic sectors. Local politics is also fragmented on the issue, making the project even more uncertain at the moment. Divisions stem from conflicting views on the typologies of urban environments to be produced. While the city government has already expressed its preference for the transformation of the inner harbor areas (Structuurvisie, 2011), the Liberal alderman strongly supports harbor growth. Amsterdam's Green-Left aldermen strongly support a constituency of the young, highly educated, and urban creative with the production of new types of housing, compact city policies, and decreasing pollution of the harbor. Urban transformation does not find support among other parties; both liberal parties and, to a minor extent, the Socialist Party contend that those housing policies will erode 8% of the harbor land in which 15% of the total harbor gross product is generated.

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**REGULATION DILEMMA:  
PROTECTION OR LOCAL ADAPTATIONS?**

The combination of harbor, housing, and green spaces creates issues with zoning and land use regulations. The regulation dilemma stems from the discrepancy between existent zoning regulations and the need to define new combinations of usages to enable a progressive transformation of the area. Regulatory frameworks in Amsterdam are consolidated into broad national and local restrictions. There are national programs for nature preservation like Natura 2000, the EHS (Ecologische Hoofdstructuur), the National Parks, and the UNESCO 'stelling van Amsterdam'. In addition, the Randstad is a patchwork of environmental zones with restrictions related to noise (65db around infrastructures), fine dusts (Pm10), air pollution, and external safety. Ultimately, the building restrictions related to the growth of Schipol Airport further reduce possibilities for urban development in the western periphery of the Amsterdam metropolitan area.

The many attempts to combine harbor functions and housing in more central locations have frequently faced appeals. The hypothetical relocation of most central harbor activities to open space has generated opposition from smaller municipalities, who use environmental regulation to their advantage. With looser national protection rules (e.g. abolition of state buffer zones, which are protected green areas between cities), landscape becomes the center of a political deadlock where local and regional interests conflict. Amsterdam supports housing growth and industrial reduction, but in this way it indirectly advocates for a relocation of the harbor to accommodate housing. This agenda clashes with the leftist-environmentalist majorities at the provincial level. They defend the value that landscape has gained for Amsterdam's economic attractiveness, and also protect the interests of smaller municipalities that are pushed to take the environmental risks of city-regional growth.

Local planners have been highly pragmatic in addressing this dilemma with a series of ad-hoc procedures and exceptions to enable plot by plot restructuring, temporary reuse, and case-by-case management. These have required particular agreements and new forms of organization, like a joint city-district planning office (Noordwaarts) or specific contracts with local enterprises. The city needed to overcome harsh conflicts between district needs and city-regional strategies, as well as the frequent appeals of local companies against urban transformations in surrounding areas. The 2009 Covenant NDSM-Houthavens and the exemption zoning of the recent Crisis en Herstelwet, 2010 are examples of these policies. Yet, these decisions have progressively hindered today's planning strategies, which often strive to find coherence among these multiple agreements. The problem is *"how to guarantee that, after the exemption period expires, local governments have found a permanent solution to environmental restrictions"*<sup>7</sup>. While exception rules allow a few pilot examples of planning innovation locally (e.g., *Het Zaans Proeflokaal*), they today make coordinated interventions complicated and unpredictable. Political fractures emerge on the fundamental value of these regulatory practices. Some advocate for more flexibility and local autonomy to enable demand led change, while others (especially existing vested interests and property owners) might tend to argue the value of zoning for spatial and environmental qualities. Here the answer is political rather than technical or organizational; it regards the definition of longer term agendas of socio-economic development and industrial policies. A provincial executive, the level in charge of environmental and industrial policies, elaborates: *"The question is: do we want the harbor's growth to reach our metropolitan objectives of economic competitiveness or do we question our environmental zoning?"*<sup>8</sup> Others underline that *"[the Amsterdam metropolitan area] is not exempt from discussing the conformity of national, local, and even European regulatory requirements for urban development"*<sup>9</sup>.

**SPATIAL INTERVENTION DILEMMA:  
CONTROLLED OR SPONTANEOUS CHANGE?**

In the ZaanIJ, the interventions dilemma questions the basic institutions of Amsterdam's planning system: the sustainability of the government's active role in land development. Since the early 1990s, the dynamic cooperation between Amsterdam and its fringe in metropolitan strategic planning had been alimanted by a growing economy, allowing cities to enlarge the margins of bargaining over spatial priorities and to reinvest development surpluses in urban projects (Janssen-Jansen, 2010). Regional planning was based on an expectation of successful projects and returns, which allowed the activation of different projects pleasing different regional alliances within a larger scheme of growth. These were projects of varying nature, including suburban developments, business districts, inner city renewal, and logistic related urban areas (e.g. Almere, Schipol, Zuidas, the renovation of the Bijlmermeer, the central Overhoeks, the eastern harbor area, IJburg, Steigerisland, and Zeeburgerisland). Today, thinner national subsidies and weaker market investments are pushing cities to resize the spatial priorities of regional transformation. One of the first examples of coordinated de-programming is the platform PLABEKA (*Platform Bedrijven Kantoren Metropoolregion Amsterdam*), recently created in cooperation between city departments of spatial planning and economic affairs.

Planners are today challenged by the need to facilitate spontaneous change to enable emerging market pressures while also sustaining established expectations of urban economic growth. In a time of weak markets, this implies a revision of development priorities and the reassessment of projects. There is a need to address the greater intra-urban competition for projects and eventual cannibalization effects. The salience of the ZaanIJ in the metropolitan agenda radically conflicts with ongoing planned interventions of different types. One of the crucial cases is the development of Almere (Schaalsprong Almere) with planned interventions in the West. Together with the redevelopment of the South West Schipol-

Haarlemmermeer area (SMASH), the new town is considered a strategic and urgent project by the national and local governments (Savini, 2012). It involves €2 billion of infrastructural investments and the timely development of IJburg. This project clashes with the ZaanIJ by pursuing different typologies of housing: The ZaanIJ a project of urban restructuring while Almere is still framed as suburban expansion of a twin city. The ZaanIJ is planned to accommodate mid-range private housing units for the highly skilled middle class (€250.000 – 350.000 price range) while Almere is currently developing lower density single family houses. On this issue, Amsterdam's political geography is fragmented and perhaps confused. The city currently pursues a maintenance policy that encompasses both interventions. The local Green-Left pushes for compact city, inner restructuring, and creative urbanites. Social democrats are addressing both issues but also regard Almere as a key project. The national cabinet applies pressure for fast housing production, leaving the question of typology to local agents.

The dilemma between spontaneous and controlled change cannot be addressed without a deep discussion of the city's planning capacities to activate and govern land development. The transformation of northern areas has been triggered by a series of bottom-up interventions since the late 1990s (after master plans were jeopardized by negative business cases and harbor-related political conservative groups<sup>10</sup>) that have created a unique and attractive environment for incoming users. The site is attractive today because of this spontaneity, but at the same time its land development bears unpredictable costs for both municipal and private developers. Amsterdam planners are aware that *“the development pays itself step by step, and if [they] start [they] need to ensure that banks and developers invest and gain returns at a different pace than before”*. While land lease presses the city to generate development, developers tend to maintain a strategy of attendance, keeping risk on the shoulders of the municipality of Amsterdam as prime owners of the land. According to a planner at the land development agency, the question here is not about governing the municipality's

different interventions, but understanding whether the municipality should actively manage the land market to promote growth: *“It is not about theoretical housing shortage but about what planners should do: provide what people want each time or make a political choice. [...] we need to decide where we want housing, if we should follow the market, or even whether we want to grow at all”*<sup>12</sup>.

The dilemma thus requires a discussion over the institutional bases of Amsterdam land policy, both within the municipality and in coordination with the competing policies of neighboring municipalities (Segeren et al, 2005). In the North, the city has chosen an organic approach based on plot base development. Land values are still lower than other areas in the city, but risks are higher due to issues of soil remediation. After the erosion of more nostalgic socialist and workers political groups in the area, the incoming governments attempted to capture the added value of artists, squatters, and creative industries relocating to the area. However, the success of this process is highly uncertain and hinders the capability of the city of Amsterdam to meet housing demand. Although discussions are not yet disruptive, these issues divide political factions in the council between sustaining Amsterdam’s active, costly land development policy or radically adapting the institutional bases of land markets in the city.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Peripheral areas are becoming dynamic locations, delineating polycentric city-regional spatial patterns. This new socio-spatial conformation poses new important challenges for planning policies. The periphery is becoming a political object that raises questions on established conceptualizations of environment, urbanization, and economic growth in today’s planning policies. It is a laboratory where new concepts of sustainability, climate change, resilience, and alternative spatial qualities can be translated, readapted, and tested in practice. This generates political divisions along different

interpretations of natural and historical landscape change/preservation, city-regional typologies of economic growth, and the typology/quantity/location of urban amenities. Planning needs to recombine and address these different visions under consensual trajectories of peripheral change. This paper provided a particular view on this substantial change and it looked at the political fractures emerging from this social, economic, and urban trend.

In this paper, three major dilemmas are identified in order to analytically explore the fundamental challenges for planners. The concept of dilemmas recognizes the fundamental role of planners and political groups in enabling a shift in established planning practices and it better emphasizes the dialectic and confrontational character of the planning policy process. Although under different forms, spatial planning tends to follow consolidated processes of decision making based on growth expectations, supply-led investments strategies, and enforced zoning regulations. This practice follows the need to secure long term expectations. In this paper I show that planning in peripheral areas urges us to rethink the essential bases of planning processes beyond the pure organizational considerations of the decision making process. First, public spatial investment in land development should be reconfigured towards a more demand-led approach. Secondly, there is a need to address the contradictions generated by contextualized spatial innovation within established regulatory frameworks. Thirdly, the essential role of public planning agents to coordinate multiple interventions within metropolitan areas must be addressed. This paper suggests that the achievement of planning innovation along these lines does not (uniquely) depend on the design of new organizational structures or processes of decision making, but requires more fundamental political confrontation.

The practice of planning is more nuanced than the analytical differentiation presented here. Dutch planning practice has largely showed that different factions are capable of achieving compromises in spatial policies. However, this paper's case shows that in the periphery these compromises are yet to be established in light

of current economic context. They entail a process of confrontation between political groups and parties and this is likely to affect Dutch planning institutions. These compromises are often punctual and are not institutionalized into a different approach to planning, still striving to control and predict long term change to address expectations of growth. This paper suggests that under conditions of polycentric development, economic downturn, and decentralized planning systems, planning theory and practice need to closely address the value of a paradigmatic change for important planning institutions: the contextual meaning of zoning and regulations in addressing local specificities, the cogency of planning tools to control individual use of land, the economic viability of demand-led investments in long term planning, and the organization of land markets within metropolitan areas. This requires a re-politicization of planning practice, the questioning of broader concepts of collective interests, and a more critical view on the concepts of city-regional growth.

## NOTES

- 1) In 2006, the self-raised revenues of cities only amounted to 21% of the total city budget.
- 2) de Voogd, J. (2012), Behoudzucht troef in beroerde buitenwijk. <http://www.socialevraagstukken.nl/site/2012/07/12/behoudzucht-troef-in-beroerde-buitenwijk/>
- 3) Data from Amsterdam Statistical Office yearly overview, 2006 and 2011: <http://www.os.amsterdam.nl/publicaties/amsterdamincijfers/>
- 4) The former Ministry of Spatial Planning, Housing and Environment (VROM) had the role of coordinating among these sectors.
- 5) The first report of this research is published in December 2011 from a think-tank composed of representatives of Amsterdam Harbor, the City of Amsterdam and Zaanstad, the province of North Holland, Stadregio Amsterdam, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
- 6) These were the sectors that benefitted the most in the policy Piek in de Delta (2006-2010) and the major sectors in the current *Topsectorenbeleid*.

- 7) Interview with Project Leader ZaanIJ at Zaanstad Municipality, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
- 8) Interview with Project Leader ZaanIJ, responsible for North Sea Canal structural vision, at the province of North-Holland, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
- 9) Interview with planner at the Stadregio Amsterdam, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
- 10) Interview with official responsible for the 2002 Noordelijke-IJoever Masterplan at the DRO Amsterdam, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
- 11) Interview with ZaanIJ project leader at the Municipality of Amsterdam, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
- 12) Interview with official at Amsterdam City Land Development Company, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

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