The challenge of planned urbanisation. Urbanisation and national urbanisation policy in the Netherlands in a northwest-European perspective

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CHAPTER FOUR
POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, DAILY MOBILITY AND PHYSICAL PLANNING POLICY

"We want two extremes. We want the intensive meeting place, the urban environment, the place where everybody is together, and we want the secluded open space where we are alone in the country with nature. We need and want both. (...) This is the contradictory desire in our utopia. (...) We want to live in a small community with which we can identify and yet we want all the facilities of the city of millions of people. We want to have very intense urban experiences and yet we want the open space right next to us."


The above citation expresses one of the central dilemmas that have faced physical planning in Northwest-Europe during most of the twentieth century. Almost every plan on the national, regional and local level struggles with the question, which spatial form of urbanisation should be chosen to be able to provide a high level of services for all inhabitants and access to open space for recreation within reasonable distance. Physical planning as we know it today for a large part derived from a long tradition of utopian design of 'the ideal city'. These utopias could not be realised, but many plans have tried to at least approach these ideal living environments.

This chapter discusses the historical development of comprehensive planning at the national level in Europe. The physical planning policies that stand central in this chapter, and in this study as a whole, are policies aimed at influencing the spatial pattern of urbanisation and daily mobility patterns, or in other words the functional integration of urban regions. The chapter focuses mostly on the Netherlands, but frequently comparisons with other European countries are sought. The chapter starts from the viewpoint that physical planning should be considered as an integrated part of the policy programme of the welfare state (section 4.1). After that, the development of objectives of urbanisation and spatial mobility policy throughout the 20th century are shortly introduced (section 4.2). One of the main instruments that planners use to reach these objectives is the spatial concept. The way spatial concepts are used is discussed in section 4.3. Two concepts have formed a key element in the urbanisation and spatial mobility policies of many European countries in the period since World War II: 'concentrated deconcentration' and the 'compact city'. These concepts will be introduced in section 4.4. This is followed by a discussion on the most recent development in Dutch urbanisation and spatial mobility policy: in the Fifth Report, the compact city strategy is traded for a strategy in which the 'urban network' is the new central concept. The final section of the chapter (section 4.6) deals with the political context in which plans have to be implemented and the prerequisites for a plan to reach its objectives 'on the ground'.
4.1 Reasons for physical planning: 
Physical planning as an element of the welfare state

Welfare states have a long history, but the West-European welfare states, as we know them now, have developed mainly after World War II. Welfare states take several forms, but the essential characteristic of all welfare states is that the government aims to guarantee the collective social welfare of its citizens (Veen, 1990). Most European welfare states reached their most extensive and generous form in the early 1970s. The deep economic crisis starting in the late 1970s caused a discussion about whether welfare state arrangements had become too generous. All over Western Europe the government expenditures on welfare states were drastically reduced during the 1980s and 1990s. Many governments decided to withdraw partially or completely from various sections of society. Several state-owned companies were privatised and the intervention of governments in fields like social security and housing was considerably reduced.

Generally, analyses of welfare states focus on government interventions in the distribution of labour, income and welfare. The policies and measures mostly associated with these interventions are the social security system, labour market policy, and health care policy. Another, less frequently included field of policy is housing (Kemeny, 2001). Physical planning is almost never included in welfare state studies. Nevertheless, there is sufficient reason to consider physical planning as an integral part of welfare state policy.

Physical planning clearly relates to the general aims of government intervention in the collective welfare of its citizens. Among the four main aims of welfare state policy defined by Veen (1990), two could also be seen as aims of physical planning:

- providing services that enable individuals to function in society. The role of physical planning in this could be to promote such a distribution of these services that they come within reach of all inhabitants of the given society.
- promoting individual well-being. The role of physical planning in this respect is an ambiguous one. Physical planning aims at collective rather than individual interests. In the interest of a society as a whole, physical planning measures will often mean that certain individual preferences cannot be met. Eventually, however, most individuals in the society for which the plan is made might be better off when collective interests are given higher priority than individual interests. Physical planning could then function to prevent what has become known as 'the tragedy of the commons': a situation in which a group of individuals all strive to maximise their own profits and damage public resources in the process, so that in the end, each of these individuals is worse off than before (Hardin, 1968).

According to Zonneveld (1991), the roots of physical planning lie in the basic assumption that certain situations lead to problems and that the government is the most suited institution to solve these problems. Concrete examples of these problematic situations are activities that lead to nuisance for their environment and situations that are perceived as unfair. A classic example of the latter is a continuous concentration of economic growth and wealth in core areas at the expense of peripheral areas. The ambition of physical planning to contribute to the collective well being of a society is expressed very clearly in various recent definitions of physical planning in government documents. Examples are given in Figure 4.1.
In the Netherlands, the 1970s were considered as the 'golden age of physical planning' (Cammen & De Klerk 1996, Kreukels 1992). The high ambition level of the national planners in this decade must be seen in the context of an overall belief in the possibility to re-create the society. Many scientists and politicians were convinced that helped by the newest developments of communication, technology, energy sources and scientific knowledge, the future development of a society could be planned (Glasbergen & Simonis, 1979). From the 1980s on, this belief was more and more challenged. Looking back on the 1970s, Faludi and Wusten (1992, p. 29) conclude: "(...) views propounded by the agencies concerned with physical planning may well permeate far outside the bounds of physical planning. This seems to have happened at the apogee of physical planning in the 1970s."

Figure 4.1. Main goals of physical planning policy as stated in official government documents

"To regulate the development and use of land in the public interest" (UK, Planning Policy Guidance no. 1; cited in Cullingworth & Nadin 1997 p.2)

"(...) searching for and bringing about the best conceivable mutual adaptation of space and society, in the service of that society" (WRR 1998, p.14; translation by author)

"The legitimacy of physical planning lies in the notion that the government pre-eminently is the institution, and can offer the approach, to prevent or solve conflicts in land use. (...) Physical planning is meant to provide added value to spatial development through an integral vision and deliberate consideration of all interests" (Werkgroep Vijfde Nota, 2000, p. 266; translation by author).

"The planning of land and water areas, as well as of buildings, shall, with due regard to the freedom of the individual, be carried out to encourage the development of an equitable society as well as good living conditions for people today and for future generations" (Swedish Planning and Building Act, cited in Nyström, 1996, p.61).

"The main principle (...) is a durable spatial development that brings social and economic space demands in harmony with ecological functions and contributes to a lasting, spaciously balanced order". (German Federal Law on Physical Planning, Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Wohnungswesen, 1998; translation by author)

"With their physical planning measures, the federal, cantonal and municipal government should support especially the following pursuits:
   a. Protection of the natural sources like soil, air, water, forest and landscape;
   b. Providing and maintaining living environments and meeting the spatial requirements for the economy;
   c. Promoting social, economic and cultural life in all parts of the country;
   d. Safeguarding a sufficient national food supply;
   e. Guaranteeing the military defense of the country."
(Swiss Federal Law on Physical Planning, cited in Groenewoud & Hermans, 1980, p.17; translation by author)
A comparable tendency could also be noticed in other European countries. In the UK, for example, physical planning moved from comprehensive 'grand plans' towards a much more pragmatic approach in which the reconciliation of conflicting interests in land use was given most stress (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997). Apart from this tendency that already started in the 1960s, the Thatcher government diminished government activities in physical planning during the 1980s as an element of the more general dismantling of the British welfare state. In a less extreme way, national government involvement in physical planning was reduced in almost all West-European countries during the 1980s and 1990s. Physical planning responsibilities were in some cases decentralised to the lower government levels. In other cases, governments have sought ways to reduce investments in physical planning in the form of public-private partnerships (European Commission, 1997).

4.2 Objectives of urban, regional and national physical planning

The roots of systematic or comprehensive physical planning, as we now know it, are often placed in the late 19th and early 20th century. This was a period in which all over Europe cities went through a process of explosive growth. The main engine for this growth was industrialisation, generating many new jobs that attracted a huge labour force from the countryside. In the cities, a massive production of houses was required in a very short period. This housing production was almost entirely provided by private developers. Their main aim was to maximise their profit. This aim was reached by building as many houses as possible on the land they had acquired. The speculative housing development for the working class, often leading to housing areas of extremely high densities with unsanitary living conditions, led to a debate about the possibilities of local and national governments to promote minimum requirements to housing. The Housing Laws that were introduced in several European countries around the turn of the century can be seen as the first attempt of national governments to intervene in the quality of cities as living environments. These Housing Laws often contained initiatives to promote what could be called 'systematic town extension' (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994; Ravetz, 1986; Hall, 1992; Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997; Alexander, 1992).

Initially, planning in most European countries remained limited to the local level. However, during the first decades of the 20th century, the continuous spatial extension of urban areas became of growing concern to regional and national governments as well as to academics. The UK and the Netherlands were European forerunners in the development of strategic plans on the level of urban regions. In the UK as well as in the Netherlands, the dominant opinion became that urban sprawl was an unwanted development and that further extension of the cities should preferably take place in an orderly and spatially limited way. Parallel to this and as a logical consequence, it was realised that attempts to influence urbanisation required a regional rather than a local approach. In the Netherlands, in the early 1920s, Rotterdam launched the first strategic plan for its urban region, followed by the Amsterdam Extension Plan in the 1930s (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994). In the UK, the Greater London Plan in 1944 was a landmark in the development of strategic planning on the regional level (Hall, 1992). The main sources of inspiration for regional planning in this period were Howard, whose concept of the 'Social City' involved a system of settlements (garden cities) connected by public transport, and Geddes, who introduced the 'city-region' as the basic unit for analysis and planning of urbanised areas (Alexander, 1992; Hall, 1992).
In the first year after World War II, the main concern of most European countries was to rebuild society, to solve the huge housing shortage (initially caused by war damage and intensified due to the rapid population growth in the post-war years) and to recover national economies. Also, the increasing consumption of space and the growing interrelatedness of housing, employment, service provision and recreation across growing distances asked for a response on the national and regional government level (Glasbergen & Simonis, 1979). In this context, physical planning gained considerably in societal importance. Physical planning was seen as a tool to reach a better society in many respects. The expectations of physical planning policy were high and national and regional planning programmes became more and more ambitious. This was especially true for the UK. The clearest expression of the high ambition level of British planners in the earliest post-war years was the policy of concentrated deconcentration, with the instruments of New Towns and Green Belts. Green Belts were installed around all major urban agglomerations to serve the traditional goal of preventing urban sprawl (especially in the London region), while New Towns had to generate regional economic development of deprived areas and provide an ideal suburban living environment for family households. They were also a logical outcome of the strong anti-urban sentiments in the UK at that time. Inspiration was once again found in the pioneering work of Howard (Alexander, 1992; Hall, 1992; Ward, 1993). The instrument of new satellite towns would return several times in various European countries in later decades (see section 4.4.1).

In the 1970s, two more concerns were added to physical planning policy. The alarming report of the Club of Rome about ‘limits to growth’ provoked a growing concern with the effects of economic growth on the natural environment. Manufacturing and traffic (especially car traffic), seen predominantly as expressions of progress until then, appeared to have their negative sides too. The most important negative aspects discussed were several forms of environmental pollution and traffic congestion (Dantzig & Saaty, 1973). Physical planning was supposed to take these negative influences of economic growth into consideration. In the late 1980s, the environmental awareness in physical planning received an extra impetus through the introduction of the concept of ‘sustainable development’ (Jenks et al, 1996). Parallel to this, from the 1970s on, a re-valuation of urban living took place. Urban social problems became another growing concern of policy and society. It was feared that if the middle and upper class people kept moving to the suburbs, the cities would be left with concentrations of the poor, the jobless, the lower educated, and ethnic minorities. To prevent this, various initiatives were undertaken to increase the attractiveness of urban neighbourhoods. From the 1980s on, the combination of growing environmental awareness and the re-valuation of the cities led to an upsurge of compact city policies throughout Northwest-Europe (Dieleman et al 1999; Breheny, 1996). At the end of the twentieth century, most national planning strategies in Northwest Europe therefore consisted of a combination of urban regeneration, the protection of natural areas and open land through building restrictions, and several attempts to discourage car use and encourage public transport through physical planning (see section 4.4.2).

This study focuses on planning measures on the national level trying to influence trends in population distribution and daily mobility. The comprehensive set of planning measures that is dealing with population distribution and daily mobility dynamics is generally called ‘national urbanisation policy’. Because of this focus, the remaining sections of this chapter will concentrate on the most important strategies used in Northwest-Europe to intervene in population distribution and daily mobility behaviour. However, before
turning to these strategies, some attention should be paid to the way physical planners try to communicate the desired government interventions. A key instrument to get the planner’s message across is the spatial planning concept, which will be dealt with in the following section.

4.3 The use of spatial concepts in physical planning

In several policy fields, ‘acting concepts’ are used to express a certain gap between an actual situation and a desired situation. These acting concepts also present suggestions on how to overcome this gap. A specific type of these acting concepts is the spatial planning concept. According to Zonneveld (1991, p.21), a spatial planning concept "(...) expresses in a concise way, using words as well as images, the way a planning actor sees the desired development of spatial design, as well as the nature of the interventions that are considered necessary" (translated by author).

Spatial planning concepts can have various functions as an instrument of physical planning policy. Zonneveld (1991) mentions five possible functions:

- Cognitive function: the spatial planning concept expresses empirical assumptions;
- Intentional function: the spatial planning concept indicates the necessity or desirability of interventions in spatial development and spatial structure;
- Institutional function: clarifying the division of decision-making powers between individuals, government institutions and other organisations involved;
- Communicative function: using language and images to reach consensus on the definition of the situation and the interventions needed to change this situation in the preferred direction. This is often done in the form of a metaphor;
- Action function: the spatial planning concept bridges the gap between planning goals and intentions and the actions necessary to realise those goals and intentions.

Probably the most important function of the above is the communicative function. Almost as a general rule, opinions on the future spatial development of a location or area are divided among the parties involved. A spatial planning concept might function to combine aspects of these different views on the desired spatial development. As a simplified image of reality, it could provoke associative thoughts, convince parties of an alternative view and generate a discussion leading to consensus on the preferred policy and the measures needed to reach the goals of that policy (Duinen, 1999).

Spatial planning concepts could be divided into two main types: strategic planning concepts and instrumental planning concepts. Strategic planning concepts are mainly meant to create a broad political and societal basis for planning actions. These concepts work to reach a consensus on the definition of the situation to be planned. They form the ‘hard core’ of a planning programme and the framework in which practical planning measures should take place. Strategic planning concepts lay most stress on the cognitive, intentional and institutional aspects of physical planning. Instrumental planning concepts are more focused on the eventual planning actions needed to bring the intentions of the government into practice. The two types of concepts are combined in most policies. The instrumental planning concepts then function to translate the general goals of planning policy (expressed in the strategic planning concepts) into concrete planning measures. Together with regulations, financial instruments and the like, the strategic and instrumental planning concepts from a ‘conceptual complex’ (Zonneveld, 1991).
Alternatively, spatial planning concepts could be considered as a part of a body of thought that Faludi & Van der Valk (1994) call 'planning doctrine'. Planning doctrine involves an interrelated whole of discussion and actions to reach a desired spatial arrangement of an area. Within this planning doctrine, spatial planning concepts express principles of spatial organisation. Complementary to these principles, a set of notions about the planning method is established, known as planning principles. Faludi & Van der Valk (1994) consider planning doctrine an important instrument to reach consensus in a society about the goals and intentions of Dutch physical planning.

The type of concepts focused on in this study are strategic planning concepts, more specifically, strategic planning concepts used in national physical planning policies on population distribution and daily mobility. Two concepts that dominated the post-war development of Dutch physical planning in general, and the policies on population distribution and daily mobility in particular, will be studied in more detail. These concepts are concentrated deconcentration and the compact city. As will appear from the next section, these concepts have been used in various forms not only in the Netherlands, but also in several other Northwest-European countries since World War II.

4.4 Dominant strategic planning concepts in Northwest-Europe

This study mainly focuses on the recent development of population distribution and daily mobility and the attempts to influence these developments through physical planning in the Netherlands. However, this will be done in the context of a wider geographic area that could be called Northwest-Europe. This area, roughly including the Benelux countries, the UK, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark, and parts of France and Sweden, shares a lot of economic, socio-cultural and demographic characteristics. Its settlement structure is dominated by many relatively small urban centres rather than primary cities (with the exceptions of London and Paris). Moreover, in recent decades, all countries in Northwest-Europe underwent an almost continuous process of deconcentration of people and economic activities (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 5).

Apparently, these similarities in economic, societal and population distribution trends have led to quite comparable responses in physical planning policies throughout Northwest-Europe. Looking at the national planning policy documents of the countries in Northwest-Europe in the post-war period, two strategic planning concepts have dominated the scene in various appearances: concentrated deconcentration and the compact city.

4.4.1 Concentrated deconcentration

In the early 1960s, the Dutch National Statistics Agency published an alarming forecast about the expected population growth until the year 2000. According to this forecast, the Netherlands would have more than 20 million inhabitants by the year 2000. This meant a growth with more than 7 million inhabitants in 40 years. One of the crucial dilemmas of the national planners in the 1960s became therefore where and how to provide all these people with adequate housing. The possibility of a further concentration of population in and close to the largest cities was not considered as an option. In the Netherlands, the 1960s were a time in which the largest cities had a very negative image and their further expansion towards metropolitan proportions was feared to produce an anonymous, dangerous and immoral environment. At the same time, the foresight of a completely urbanised West of the Netherlands as a result of unlimited urban sprawl functioned as a
second ‘doom scenario’ . The Dutch government was convinced that a more equal spread of population and economic activities across the country would lead to a more balanced division of wealth and a better quality of life. To avoid overcrowding of the western provinces and depopulation of the peripheral regions, the policy of ‘concentrated deconcentration’ was introduced (Wusten & Faludi, 1992; Cammen & De Klerk, 1996; Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994).

The strategic spatial concept ‘concentrated deconcentration’ was applied at both the national level as at the level of the urban region. At the national level, the economic development of the peripheral regions would be given an impetus. The government set ‘the good example’ and deconcentrated some of its services to regional centers. It was hoped that the private sector would follow this example. On the level of the urban regions in the western provinces, concentrated deconcentration was supposed to stop urban sprawl. Suburbanisation was not disencouraged, but channeled into a selection of location called ‘growth centres’. Apart from providing housing for migrants from the large cities, the growth centers were also planned to become new centers of employment. It was foreseen that growth centers would become the centres of their own daily urban systems. This strategy was introduced in the Second Report on Physical Planning (Ministerie VRO, 1966). However, it was not until 1976, in the Urbanisation Report (Ministerie VRO, 1976), that the concrete instruments to reach the goals of concentrated deconcentration on the level of urban region were provided. By that time, the other goal of concentrated deconcentration, namely the more equal spread of population and economic activities across the country, was already given up.

The growth centers were mainly located outside of the ‘Randstad’, the area containing the four largest cities and their agglomerations. In-between the horseshoe-shaped urbanised zone of the Randstad, a relatively open area of agricultural land could be found: the ‘Green Heart’. This Green Heart was supposed to be kept as open as possible, so that the earlier mentioned ‘doom scenario’ of a totally urbanised West of the Netherlands could be prevented. At the same time, however, a further growth of the largest cities was not considered an attractive foresight either. The logical consequence was that the growth centers could only be located north, east and south of the Randstad-Green Heart complex (Wusten & Faludi, 1992). A more detailed discussion on the policy of concentrated deconcentration and its results will follow in Chapter 6.

The Dutch policy of concentrated deconcentration found inspiration in earlier policy initiatives in the UK. In the immediate post-war years, 14 ‘New Towns’ were developed. Eight of them were located on the outskirts of the London metropolitan area. The New Towns in the London area were all meant to provide housing and working locations for the overspill of London. In other locations, New Towns were used as a tool to generate regional economic growth. This first generation of New Towns were entirely new settlements of a modest size, with around 50,000 inhabitants. The main inspiration source for these towns and their modest size was the garden city of Howard (Ward, 1993; Hall, 1992).

In the 1960s, a second generation of New Towns was planned. Most of these New Towns were not new settlements, but expansions around existing towns or villages: Expanded Towns. Just like in the Netherlands, in the early 1960s alarming projections were issued concerning the population growth of the UK. In 1960, the UK was thought to have 64 million people in the year 2000, while in 1965 this figure was even raised to 75 million
based on the high birth rate of the early 1960s (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997). A new generation of New (and Expanded) Towns, with a much larger size than the earlier generation, was introduced to meet the expected huge demand of new housing. Most of these second generation New Towns did not reach their ambitious goals regarding population size in the end. After the steep decline in natural growth in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the population projections were revised downwards drastically. This caused the eventual New Town projects to become considerably more modest in size than initially planned (Cullingworth & Nadin, 1997). The further construction of New and Expanded Towns ended in the mid-1970s (Hall, 1992).

Like in the Netherlands, the location of New Towns was partly determined by the aim to prevent urban sprawl. The UK solution was the 'Green Belt'. Around all major metropolitan areas, a zone with severe building restrictions was installed. The aims of these Green Belts were to provide 'green' and 'open' land within reasonable reach for the metropolitan inhabitants, and to prevent metropolitan areas to grow together into a larger urbanised whole. Most of the New Towns were situated at the outer borders of these Green Belts.

While in the UK and the Netherlands, the strategic planning concept of concentrated deconcentration gradually became discredited in the 1970s (see section 4.4.2), the concept kept its appeal in other countries. France, for example, has pursued a policy of concentrated deconcentration on both the national and the regional level since the 1960s. On the national level, ‘métropoles d’équilibre’ were appointed to promote a more even distribution of economic development across the country. These regional centres were supposed to form counterweights to the capital region of Paris. This strategy is quite comparable to the initial aim of the Dutch government of ‘concentrated deconcentration’ on the national level. Within the Paris region itself, eight new cities were proposed in the regional plan of 1965. Just like the ‘métropoles d’équilibre’ on the national level, these new cities should decrease the immense concentration of economic power as well as social and cultural activities in one centre within the metropolitan region. These new cities were expected to provide housing, work and services for about 5 million people (based on an estimate of population growth in the Paris region from 9 to 14 million between 1965 and 2000). In the 1970s, these growth estimates were cut back drastically and so was the development of the new cities. Only five instead of eight new cities were eventually realised and in a considerably more modest extent than initially planned (Hall, 1992).

In Switzerland, the concept of concentrated deconcentration has been at the core of federal physical planning policy since the 1960s. However, it was not used to channel urban sprawl into a few selected locations, as happened in the UK and the Netherlands. Here, concentrated deconcentration meant the promotion of growth in regional centres with the aim to develop peripheral areas. Therefore, in Switzerland, concentrated deconcentration was much more a tool of regional economic policy than of population distribution policy. The promotion of regional centres was a direct result of the specific Swiss political context of a confederation. One of the main aims of the Swiss federal government has always been to spread economic development and wealth across the country as equal as possible (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion).

The most recent example comes from the German ‘Länder’ Berlin and Brandenburg, that set up a joint strategic planning perspective with 'dezentrale Konzentration' ('decentral
concentration") as its central concept. In this case, the concept expresses two main aims: first, to give an impetus to the development of the remoter parts of Brandenburg, and second, to prevent the loss of open land to urban sprawl in the direct surroundings of the built-up area of Berlin. In the period between 1945 and 1990, Berlin and its surrounding regions could not develop into a functionally coherent metropolitan area due to the unique political situation of the city. West-Berlin was an enclave of the Western world in the socialist German Democratic Republic. After the reunification of Germany and Berlin, it was feared that urban sprawl would take place with a speed unprecedented in any other location. Indeed during the 1990s, the immediate surroundings of Berlin developed rapidly as a location for low-density suburban housing areas and large-scale shopping centres. In this inner ring around Berlin, the concept of deconcentrated concentration aims to prevent further urban sprawl, with attempts to concentrate all new developments in and around existing cities. In the outer ring, a series of regional centres has been selected in which population and economic growth are promoted. These regional centres, like in the Swiss case, are supposed to function as ‘growth poles’ and contribute to improved economic perspectives for their surrounding regions as well. This strategy should then contribute to decrease the extreme centre-periphery differences between the Berlin agglomeration and Brandenburg (Ministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Raumordnung, 1998).

4.4.2 The compact city

The most important impetus towards the development of compact city policies was probably the emergence of environmental awareness, inspired by the report about ‘limits to growth’ of the Club of Rome in 1972 and given an extra impetus through the 1973 oil crisis (Cammen & De Klerk, 1996). Under the circumstances of constant economic growth and accumulation of wealth in the 1950s and 1960s, many people managed to realise their ideal of a detached house on a spacious plot outside the city. This continuous trend of deconcentration of people and activities was hardly questioned. A dramatic increase of car possession and car use was a logical consequence, since the private car was the most suited means of transport to reach dispersed activity locations within a reasonable time. Only in the 1970s, the negative environmental consequences of population deconcentration were fully realised. Planners in Europe and North America started to consider possible alternative ways to locate people and activities that would have less negative effects on the environment. This was combined with a growing concern for the threat of deteriorating urban neighbourhoods as a result of selective migration of the middle and higher income groups.

An example of this line of thought is the book ‘Compact City’ (Dantzig & Saaty 1973). After shortly summarising what the authors consider the problems of urban sprawl in American metropolitan areas (mainly focusing on long commuter times and over-dependence on the car for transport), Dantzig and Saaty outline an idealistic picture of a new type of city. A ‘four-dimensional city’ (the dimensions being length, width, height and time) is proposed, built on a platform with 8 levels. Each of these levels would contain land for housing and facilities. In this way, the city of Danzig and Saaty could be built on a relatively small surface and still provide spacious plots for each inhabitant. Almost three decades later, their concrete plans for the shape and design of this compact city still look rather futuristic and far-fetched. However, most of the basic design principles of this new ‘compact city’ found their way to many official government
documents on urbanisation policy from the early 1980s on. Among the requirements that Dantzig and Saaty (1973) mention for urban areas are:

- Major activity centres close to each other, so that work, shopping and other services are available to all inhabitants within walking distance from home;
- Easy access to natural recreation areas, but also to top cultural and shopping facilities;
- A transport system without delays or congestion;
- Arrangement of housing and facilities in such a way that contacts between the inhabitants are encouraged.
- Availability of all basic services 7 days a week and 24 hours a day.

From the late 1970s on, the compact city gradually grew towards the dominant concept in urbanisation policy in several European countries. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 provided an extra impetus for compact city development. It contributed considerably to the integration of the concept of 'sustainable development' into the mainstream of the political and societal debate. In many government documents and scientific contributions since then, the compact city has been presented as one of the major planning principles for sustainable development. The main reference for compact city strategies was the densely populated core of historic European cities. This was not only because of the before-mentioned reasons, but also because these city centres "(...) are seen, often by those from outside, as ideal places to live and experience the vitality and variety of urban life. The danger is that it is a romantic vision, one which assumes a golden age that can be recaptured through urban form, leading to a sustainable and benign civility" (Jenks et al, 1996). In addition to the environmental and mobility arguments, the increasing international competitiveness was also used as a reason for compact city policy. It was argued that cities, especially the largest cities, were the main engines of national economic growth and therefore, investments in urban revitalisation were beneficiary to the country as a whole (Ostendorf & Musterd, 1996).

In the Netherlands, the roots of compact city policy can be traced back to the urban renewal initiatives of the 1970s. Already in the Urbanisation Report (Ministerie VRO, 1976), one of the central aims was to stabilise and if possible even increase the population of the large cities. However, this was written down while the policy of concentrated deconcentration was finally realised on the ground with large-scale new housing areas in the growth centres. Therefore, although the dangers of depopulation of the large cities (degeneration of urban neighbourhoods, declining service provision on the neighbourhood level) were realised all too well, the policy of concentrated deconcentration was still pursued. The main reason for this was that the national and local governments had already made huge investments on the growth centre locations. The costs for land acquisition, building preparation and new infrastructure had to be earned back through the realisation of the planned housing areas (Cammann & De Klerk, 1996). As happens more often in physical planning, it took quite some time to translate the concept of concentrated deconcentration into concrete measures 'on the ground'. By the time the instruments to realise concentrated deconcentration were available, there were already serious doubts about the strategy to provide new large-scale housing areas in the growth centres. Already in the 1970s, the growth centres located furthest from the large cities were considered at a too large distance, even though in some of these locations, the first houses were still to be built. Although the dominant concept remained concentrated deconcentration, the emphasis had shifted from 'deconcentration' to 'concentration' (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994). Not much later, also the growth centres closer to the large cities were considered
an undesirable development, since the dominant planning concept had become the compact city instead of concentrated deconcentration. Under these circumstances, the policy of concentrated deconcentration has eventually been put into practice only partially (Zonneveld, 1991).

In the UK, after the New Towns disappeared from national and regional planning policy, the policy on urbanisation more or less became a compact city policy too. From the post-war urbanisation strategy, the Green Belt was the only spatial concept to survive. Recent government documents indicate that the Green Belts will remain untouched for some more years to come (DOE, 1995). In addition, the most recent national government papers clearly express a preference for urban regeneration and compact urban development. The report ‘Towards an Urban Renaissance’ (Urban Task Force, 1999, p.11) mentions as two of the main aims of urban policy:

“(...) developing a higher quality urban product by creating compact urban developments, based upon a commitment to excellence in urban design and the creation of integrated urban transport systems that prioritise the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport passengers”, and

“(...) developing on brownfield land and recycling existing buildings must become more attractive than building on greenfield land.”

Dieleman et al (1999) consider the Dutch experience with concentrated deconcentration and compact city policy one continuous policy aimed at compact urban development. Comparable viewpoints have recently been expressed by Faludi & Van der Valk (1994) and by the national planners themselves (Vriesman, 1999). This suggests a long-term continuity in Dutch physical planning policy that was absent in reality. It is true that Dutch-style concentrated deconcentration also contained the element of compactness. Instead of suburban extension of large cities and their surrounding villages, suburban neighbourhoods were located in a selective group of new towns and built in a compact form. However, the concepts of concentrated deconcentration and the compact city show more contradictions than similarities. They form the expressions of policies that are opposed to each other in many ways. To channel suburbanisation towards a number of growth centres is a strategy very different in its aims and possible effects than to concentrate new housing and employment locations in and directly outside already existing cities. In the policy of concentrated deconcentration, suburbanisation was allowed and even encouraged. The compact city policy, instead, was very clearly an anti-suburbanisation policy.

The only elements of Dutch physical planning policy that survived all policy changes are the Randstad and the Green Heart. The suggestion of continuity in Dutch national urbanisation policy discussed above is mainly based on the continuous key role of these two concepts. Attempts to prevent urban sprawl around the Randstad and to preserve the relatively open agricultural landscape of the Green Heart have remained a central element of Dutch urbanisation policies throughout the second half of the twentieth century. However, these attempts were made through quite different, and even contradictory, approaches since the 1960s. At first, the preservation of the Green Heart was promoted through the policy of concentrated deconcentration, by locating the growth centres outside of the Randstad / Green Heart complex. In the compact city policy, the Green Heart was still preserved, but now in the framework of a policy to prevent the loss of open space in agricultural and nature areas in general. While within the western part of the Netherlands, in the concentrated deconcentration policy, the Randstad area was actually
(unintentionally) extended outwards, the compact city policy aimed at further concentration of population growth on the Randstad ring of large and medium-sized cities.

4.5 Towards a new central concept: the network city or the urban network?

The Dutch compact city policy seems to have undergone the same fate as the policy of concentrated deconcentration. Towards the end of the 1990s, while the concrete instruments of the compact city policy were finally set in motion, the policy met with growing dissatisfaction. The goals of compact city policy were said to be impossible to reach, and the gap between policy goals and reality seemed to become wider and wider. When the compact city was launched as central concept, the national planners already realised that problems of urbanisation and daily mobility had become regional rather than local, but the compact city as a central concept was thought to counterbalance the trend to further deconcentration. However, this proved to be harder to realise than previously expected. Therefore, in the Fifth Report, a new change of strategic concepts took place: after ‘concentrated deconcentration’ (Second and Third Report) and ‘compact city’ (Fourth Report), the ‘urban network’ (Fifth Report) was supposed to become the new core concept. Figure 4.2 gives a simplified graphical impression of the differences between the three concepts in terms of the intended functional relationships and the location of new extension areas. In this respect, the policy announced in the Fifth Report introduces another new spatial concept (more operational than strategic in nature): the concept of ‘contours’. Every municipality is asked to draw a boundary within which building is allowed, and outside of which building is prohibited (Ministerie VROM, 2001).

Academic geographers and planners have intensively debated the desirability of compact urbanisation as a planning goal. Advocates of the compact city argue that a more compact urban form contributes to a reduction of pollution, most notably through car use (Newman & Kenworthy, 1989; Ewing, 1997), helps to prevent the loss of open countryside (CPRE, 1999), and promotes urban regeneration (Bourne, 1996). The counter-argument holds that urban form is hardly related to car use and that the relationships found in empirical studies are due to spurious correlations (Dieleman et al., 1999). Several academics claim that a compact city policy denies the living preferences of the majority of the population. They question the use of spatial planning policy in general, stating that the housing and land market would lead to much better solutions if they would not be interfered by government interventions (for example Gordon & Richardson, 1997). Since the benefits of compact building have not been proved convincingly, but the evidence against compact building is at least as unconvincing, Breheny (1996) takes a compromise position between the ‘centrists’ and the ‘decentrists’. Although he sympathises with the compact city idea, he judges it as not realistic enough. Typically, he proposes a ‘controlled direction’ of deconcentration and with this, he returns to the tradition of concentrated deconcentration as the central strategic planning concept. Ewing (1997) seems to arrive at more or less the same conclusion. He favours compact urban expansion, but uses the term ‘compact’ in a quite broad sense, which might include a high-density monocentric city expansion, as well as a low-density settlement pattern with several concentrations of housing, employment and services.

Apparently, the arguments of the ‘decentrists’ found more approval among the Dutch planners than the arguments of the ‘centrists’. During the preparations for the Fifth Report, the Dutch planners sought a new concept that would better match current and
expected tendencies of population distribution and daily mobility. Initially, the regional urbanisation concept 'network city' was launched. This network city came quite close to the traditional daily urban system as defined in studies of daily mobility in the 1980s and early 1990s (Cortie et al., 1992; Dingemanse, 1993). The national planners realised that the functional urban regions they defined in the compact city policy (significantly smaller than the urban regions found in the studies mentioned above) did not reflect the actual patterns of daily mobility. Therefore, they proposed new entities composed of a few formerly independent but now intertwined urban regions (Ministerie VROM, 1999a).

Figure 4.2 The core strategic spatial concepts of Dutch national urbanisation policy since the 1960s.
Late during the process towards the Fifth Report, the term 'network city' was traded for 'urban networks'. This seems only a matter of words but involves much more than that. The change from 'network city' to 'urban network' was accompanied by an upward shift in geographic scale and increased stress on inter-regional instead of intra-regional linkages. For example, the three initially proposed network cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam-The Hague were replaced by one 'urban network': the Delta Metropolis (Burg, 2000). This was probably the result of an intensive lobby campaign of the four largest cities and a number of medium-sized cities in the Randstad region, in close cooperation with several non-governmental organisations and academic researchers (Deltametropool, 1998). The change of terms might also have been a response to critical reactions or misunderstandings about the term network city. Although the national planners never meant to say they wanted to create new large-scale settlements with multiple centres, this might be the way that it was interpreted by a part of the (provincial and municipal) planning community. The term 'urban network' suggests a less integrated whole with centres that are more independent from each other than in a 'network city'. Confusingly, the scale of the 'urban network' more or less coincides with the academic notion of the 'network city' as proposed by Lambooij (1991) and Batten (1995) (see Chapter 3).

The network metaphor can also be found in other recent national planning documents. In Switzerland, the federal planners proposed to integrate all major national and regional centres of the country into one urban network, called 'Vernetztes Städtesystem Schweiz' (Swiss urban network system). In this strategy, the urban centres are expanded in a compact way, while at the same time their interconnections are intensified (Bundesamt für Raumplanung, 1996). In an advisory document for the future spatial development of Sweden, the urban regions are imagined as islands in a sea of forests and rural areas. This situation was perceived as not beneficiary to the future economic development of the country. The intensification of the interconnections between the urban regions, changing the urban regions from 'islands' into 'pearls on a string', is therefore strongly advocated by the Swedish national planners (Nystöm, 1996). The attempts to integrate the Danish-Swedish Öresund region into one functionally coherent urbanised entity (Ministry of the Environment, 1993) are another Scandinavian example of a network city strategy.

4.6 From ambition to reality: the results of urbanisation policy

National planning documents express the preferred future spatial development of countries in the view of the national planners. These documents generally contain ambitious goals and the firm belief that these goals can actually be reached. This is more or less true for national planning in all European countries, but perhaps most of all for the Netherlands. A crucial question is then of course to what extent these high ambitions are justified. As already pointed out in chapter 2, spatial planning policy is only one of a large number of factors influencing spatial developments. These other factors do not only include economic-technological, socio-cultural and demographic trends that are hard to influence through physical planning, but also other government policies, as well as other government levels and the political and administrative system of the country in question. The political context, in which national physical planning is trying to reach its goals, is discussed in section 4.6.1. Apart from the possible limits of this political environment, the success of physical planning also depends on the planning process and on the plan itself. This includes questions of internal coherence of the plan, a clear definition of goals and
objectives and the way the plan is communicated to the parties involved. These ‘internal’ factors determining the success chances of a plan are addressed in section 4.6.2.

4.6.1 The political context of physical planning policy

The possibilities to influence spatial developments through physical planning are for a large part determined by the political, legal and administrative framework in which planners work. This framework offers both opportunities and constraints to the planners. Most European countries have a law on physical planning, in which the powers given to physical planning and the available instruments are defined. In the law on physical planning, the legal status of plans is expressed and this status has consequences for the way the plans are implemented. In some countries plans have a legally binding status, while in others the plans are merely advisory. When plans are legally binding, they should contain concrete instruments with which the plan is to be realised. The realisation of the planning objectives ‘on the ground’ can be enforced in this case. In the case of an advisory plan, these concrete instruments become much less relevant, since the plan offers no possibilities to enforce the use of these instruments. In that case, national plans usually have the character of guidelines instead of operational plans. Apart from the law on physical planning, other laws and regulations also determine the possibilities of planners, for example laws on land use and possession, housing provision and environmental protection.

An important element of this legal and administrative framework is the division of powers and responsibilities between the national, regional and local level. Within Europe, considerable differences can be found in the degree of centralisation of government and therewith also in the degree of centralisation of the physical planning system. This has far-reaching consequences for the status of national plans within the planning system. Generally, the local development plan eventually is the most important element in the planning systems of European countries. The importance of the plans made at the national and regional level, however, varies considerably between countries (Healey & Williams, 1993). In some countries, there seems to be a clear top-down hierarchy of plans: the development plan has to meet the planning goals set in the regional plan, which in its turn has to fit into the national planning strategy. The Netherlands is an example of such a hierarchy of plans, but this hierarchy is a rather ‘informal’ one: even though both the national and the regional plans are not legally binding, the municipalities are still expected to design their local land use plans in accordance with the planning principles set out on the national and (to a lesser extent) the regional level. In another group of countries, the national plan is advisory only and the focus of the planning system is on both the regional and the local level. This is generally the case in federal states like Germany and Switzerland. An alternative approach is found in the Scandinavian countries: here, planning initiatives are strongly concentrated on the local level. National planning has only an advisory status and regional planning is as good as absent (European Commission, 1997).

Newman and Thornley (1996) have constructed a typology of European planning systems based on these differences in planning powers of the national, regional and government level and the above-mentioned differences in the legal arrangements for physical planning. This typology will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The possible complications of the division of planning powers across government levels for national planners are evident. Politicians and planners on the regional and/or local level, who
might have very different ideas about the preferred future spatial development, might
block national planners in realising their plans and ambitions. In political systems where
the regional or local level is stressed and given much influence, this might frustrate any
attempt to plan nationally, except when national, regional and local planners manage to
agree on a compromise planning strategy.

Besides planners and politicians at the sub-national level, the national planners are also
confronted with possible competitors on the national government level. Apart from
physical planning policy itself, the national government pursues many other policies with
possible consequences for spatial development. Examples are policies in the fields of
housing, transport, economy, agriculture, environmental protection and protection of
cultural heritage. These policies are usually spread out across various departments of the
national government. In some cases, there are even competing divisions within the same
department. Each of these departments would like to realise as much of its goals and
ambitions as possible. The physical planners are then confronted with the task to unite all
these policy goals and ambitions into one national planning strategy. It will often appear
that the goals of the various departments are conflicting and incompatible and that
priorities have to be chosen. Another problem might be that the national planners do not
have sufficient competence to force the other departments to follow the spatial strategy
they prefer. The national physical planning policy might then have to compete with
several other policies with spatial consequences that might limit the possibilities to reach
the objectives of that policy severely. Apart from 'intentional' attempts to reach goals
contrary to those of the national physical planners, conflicts with other policies are
sometimes also simply caused by bad communication between the departments (Wissink,
1982).

The priority given to physical planning as the main policy field to deal with the future
spatial development of a country, as well as the priority given to the goal to influence
future spatial developments in general, is connected to dominant political ideologies and
the type of government in power. This relates back to the concept of 'planning doctrine'
(section 4.3). Faludi and Van der Valk (1994) consider planning doctrine to be present in
some form and extent in every country. This might be true, but the dominant planning
document of a country might not always be to the benefit of national planners. One could
imagine planning doctrines with a preference to solve problems of spatial development at
the sub-national level, or even planning doctrines that trust on market processes and
promote a 'laissez faire' approach for government. In these cases, planning doctrine might
work against national planning instead of strengthening it.

In addition to the goals and ambitions of planners and politicians on the sub-national
levels and those of the various departments influencing spatial development on the
national level, the national planners are also increasingly confronted with lobby groups. In
recent decades, groups representing the civic society have successfully claimed an
important role in the planning process in many countries. Lobby groups representing
interests of population groups, industrial sectors, regions, cities or the natural environment
are more and more asked for their opinion. The UK has a quite long tradition in this
respect, with particularly strong lobby groups like the Council for the Protection of Rural
England and the House Builders Association. In the Netherlands the influence of lobby
groups has increased more recently. In the process towards the Fifth Report, the increased
importance of lobby groups was expressed through the installation of a regular meeting of
the Minister of Physical Planning and the National Planning Agency with a gathering of lobby groups, in which the progress towards the final report was discussed.

Finally, a further complication for national planners is the increasing importance of the European Union. More and more, national planning policies are limited in their possibilities (or, alternatively, given new opportunities) through policy initiatives of the European Union. The EU policies with most consequences for spatial developments in its member states are agricultural policy, regional economic policy and environmental policy. The strict EU limitations to agricultural production caused many farmers to close down their companies or limit their agricultural activities, combining them with recreational activities. The Regional Development fund of the EU provides a strong financial impetus to the development of many backward regions in Europe. The EU also issued directives on the environmental assessment of building projects, through which national and sub-national governments are obliged to check each building project on their possible environmental consequences (Healey & Williams, 1993). So far the European Union has hardly been influential on the field of physical planning policy. However, there are clear signs that this is changing. In 1999, the member states agreed on a European Spatial Development Perspective. This is considered an important step on the way to an integrated physical planning policy on the European level, not only by many academic planners (Faludi, 1999; Böhme, 1999), but also by some of the national governments involved, probably most of all by the Dutch government (Ministerie VROM, 1999a). However, there is still a long way to go before European physical planning policy will have enough status to be able to compete with, or even replace, national planning policies, if it ever comes this far at all.

4.6.2 Plans and the planning process

The possibilities to implement a plan successfully depend not only on the legal, administrative and societal context described in the preceding section, but also on the plan itself and the process in which it was established. In the various models of the planning process that have been constructed over the years, several planning scientists (for example, Alexander, 1992; Hall, 1992) distinguished the following sequence of steps as the ideal way the planning process should develop:

- Clear problem definition: the planning process starts from dissatisfaction with an existing situation and a vision of a development towards a more desired situation. This problem definition is often made not by the planners themselves, but by their clients (in most cases, but not always, a governmental organisation);
- Clear definition of goals and objectives: the problem definition should be accompanied by goals to be reached through the plan, and these goals should be translated into operational objectives;
- Projections of relevant future developments: since plans are always future-oriented, the solution to a problem should be based on expectations of future conditions, needs and constraints;
- Design of alternatives: based on the projections of expected future developments, the planners develop one or several possible strategies to solve the problem;
- Test of internal consistency and feasibility: the planning strategies thought out in the design stage are checked on their coherence: does the proposed planning strategy respond to the objectives and is it possible within the constraints of the future situation in which the plan will be implemented? Inevitably also, the planning strategies are compared in terms of costs and cost-effectiveness;
• Evaluation of alternatives: the possible planning strategies are compared on their expected impact, the extent to which they actually contribute to reaching the goals and objectives, and the extent to which they meet the demands and interests of the parties affected by the plan. This evaluation also often contains procedures that are obligatory by law like environmental impact assessments;

• Implementation: the most preferred alternative is drawn up in a plan and, after being adopted by government, this plan is executed. The execution of the plan might be accompanied by efforts to monitor the extent to which the objectives of the plan are met during the period of implementation.

However, in planning practice, this sequence of steps is almost never reached in the ideal way described above. Many problems may occur that hinder the eventual quality of the plan and the possibility to implement it. This can already start with the problem definition. The problem definition given to the planners in their assignment might not recognise the real underlying factors causing the problem to be solved. A review of the problem diagnosis is therefore advisable before the planners start outlining the strategy to solve the problem (Alexander, 1992). Directly related to the problem definition is the definition of goals and objectives. Quite often, the goals of a strategic spatial plan tend to be on a rather high level of abstraction. Many plans suffer from problems with translating these goals into operational objectives. The client often prescribes the goals of the plan before the planners start their work. The clients giving these goals do not always realise if the goals they desire can actually be reached through physical planning measures. When planners try to work out these goals into workable objectives, they sometimes find out that the objectives are impossible to combine. Alexander (1992) gives the example of a low-income housing project that had to be realised within a limited budget. The best sites in this respect were found in the neighbourhoods with a concentration of low-income households from ethnic minorities. However, another objective of the plan was to promote socio-economic and ethnic integration of the population. Locating the low-income housing in the poorest neighbourhoods would only contribute to more segregation instead. In direct connection to the problems with defining clear objectives and combining them into a workable strategy, additional problems frequently appear in the phase of implementation. The concrete measures to realise the planning objectives are not always thought out properly, with the result that the plan does not change anything ‘on the ground’, or leads to unintended effects.

A problem directly related to the political context in which planners have to operate (see section 4.6.1) is that feasible alternatives that lead to a spatial development that planners prefer might be rejected by politicians on political or financial grounds. The plan might not fit sufficiently in the ideology of the political party in power, or exceed the budget reserved for physical planning by the governmental institutions involved. In addition, some conflicts of values and preferences between parties involved cannot be solved through a rational decision-making and negotiation process. Another problem of the policy context of physical planning is that often the interaction of plan with other policy initiatives is neglected (Hall, 1992). As mentioned before, the spatial development of a country is affected by many other policies than physical planning. Several government departments and organisations on the national, regional and local level all have their own agenda of priorities. It is up to the national planners to try to make an inventory of all these (often conflicting and incompatible) demands and interests, and to come up with a national planning policy that meets these demands without becoming merely a ‘wish list’. The planners should express the objectives that deserve most priority in their view and
refuse to meet demands that do not fit in their preferred strategy. Inevitably, national plans almost always lead to much controversy, especially in countries where national planners have been given - at least on paper - considerable influence on future spatial development, such as the Netherlands.

Without doubt, the most problematic point is the role of the projection of relevant future developments in the spatial planning process. The procedures the plan has to go through before getting approval of government can cause a considerable time-lapse between the design of the plan and its eventual implementation: the national planners have to negotiate with all parties involved, public hearings are organised, and both often lead to changes in the plan based on comments from these negotiations and hearings. This sometimes has the result that the projections that the plan was based on are already outdated before the plan is even implemented. However, even if this time-lapse problem could be solved, the degree to which future societal developments can be projected based on knowledge of current and past developments is highly questionable. This problem seems to increase with the length of the period planned for, as well as with the geographic size of the area that is targeted. Still, many (if not all) spatial plans rely heavily on projections of demographic and economic processes as a 'best guess' of what might happen in the future.

The element of the 'ideal planning process' described above which tends to be given least priority by planners and planning researchers, if it is considered at all, is the evaluation of the effects of the plan in reality. In the view of many academic planning researchers, if the plan meets all the above requirements it should be good enough to implement it and reach the desired results. However, frequently plans do not reach the desired results after all, even if all these process requirements were sufficiently taken care of (Glasbergen & Simonis, 1979). In this respect, Wissink (1982, p. 4) remarked: "In recent years, a certain neglect of the object analysis can be perceived. (...) Rules for plan preparation, decision making, 'process management' etc. are being defined in a more and more refined way". Meanwhile, however, the gap between the academic discussion on 'the ideal planning process' and the reality of the object to be planned had become too wide in his view.

More recent publications of academic planners give the impression that despite this warning, not much has changed since then. Many planning scientists even no longer define the eventual goal of strategic planning as 'to bring about changes in spatial reality', but 'to influence negotiations' and/or 'to contribute to reaching a consensus'. Consider, for example, the following two statements of Faludi & Van der Valk (1994):

"(...) in our opinion what is often considered its vagueness and lack of immediate relevance, are features which are inherent to strategic planning. If it was not abstract and general, then it would not be strategic planning" (p. 3);

"In strategic planning, meanings are frequently negotiated. It follows that a strategic plan cannot be judged solely in terms of whether outcomes conform to intentions. (...) As long as it has duly informed decision makers, the plan has been useful" (p. 12).

This stress in planning research on the process of negotiation and reaching consensus, which goes together with a relative neglect of the evaluation of planning results in the form of changes in spatial reality, is certainly not an exclusive Dutch phenomenon. Also in the UK, for example, evaluation is poorly integrated in the planning process. This is most of all true for the evaluation of planning results after a plan has been agreed on and
is executed, the so called 'ex post evaluation'. Analysing the recent development of evaluation methods in UK national, regional and local planning, Lichfield and Prat (1998) conclude that 'ex ante' evaluation (evaluation of planning alternatives in the phase of plan preparation) is relatively widespread and that also methods of 'in itinere' evaluation (evaluation during a plan's implementation) are sometimes used. 'Ex post' evaluation, however, was found to be "(...) almost non-existent" (p. 293).

This study takes the position that (national) strategic plans can and should be evaluated 'ex post', in terms of the match between intentions and outcomes. This is not to say that reaching consensus about a planning strategy cannot be seen as an admirable result in itself. However, reaching such a consensus and agreeing on a planning document is not the end of the planning process. On the contrary, once the plan is agreed on, the most crucial phase is still to come: taking concrete actions to come from a plan on paper to the desired interventions in spatial reality. Of course, it is inevitable that details of strategic plans are negotiated repeatedly with the parties involved in implementing the plan. Inevitably in this negotiation process, some compromises to the original plan will have to be made. Therefore, the idea that the effectiveness of a (national) plan could be exclusively measured by its eventual outcomes 'on the ground', in terms of its eventual effects on spatial developments, is unrealistic. This would require 'blueprint planning', a practice that certainly not exists in the Netherlands, if it exists anywhere at all. However, if negotiations lead to a change of the goals and objectives that were agreed on earlier in a strategic plan, or if it results in not reaching or even approaching the initial goals and objectives of this plan, the strategic plan can hardly be considered 'successful' anymore. In 'ex post' evaluations of spatial plans, it is perfectly valid to expect that spatial developments have at least to some extent developed in the direction that the (national) planners wanted. When the plan implementation 'on the ground' is evaluated, it might also appear that factors influencing spatial development overlooked by the planners were causing its failure. If this turns out to be the case, these factors could be taken into account in future plans to prevent repetition of the failures. Also, before a plan is thought out, it might be advisable to look at earlier experiences with comparable planning initiatives and under which circumstances these initiatives were implemented. Some plans might only work under very specific circumstances: only in one country, or political system, or period. Recently, the Dutch National Planning Agency has launched a yearly review of the goals and objectives of national physical planning which is a valuable attempt to evaluate its own work in a critical and objective way (Ministerie VROM / RPD, 1999). One might wonder why this increased interest in 'ex post' evaluation is hardly shared by the Dutch scientific planning community.

4.7 Conclusions

Physical planning as we know it today has its roots in a long tradition of attempts to create the ideal living and production environment. This tradition has been particularly strong in Northwest-Europe. Starting from utopian pioneers such as Howard and Geddes, physical planning gradually developed from a mainly local activity to an important element of national welfare state policy. One of the most important elements of national physical planning policies has traditionally been urbanisation policy. As appeared from the discussion on the development of urbanisation policy, there have been striking similarities in goals and approaches between several Northwest-European countries throughout the twentieth century. The spatial planning concept has become the most popular tool of planners to reach consensus on the preferred urbanisation strategy with all parties
involved. Two concepts have dominated the Northwest-European scene since the 1940s: concentrated deconcentration and the compact city.

Many obstacles have to be conquered before the ambitions of a plan result in the desired changes in the spatial development of an area. Physical planning is only one of many factors influencing spatial development. The influence of economic, technological, socio-cultural and demographic trends was already discussed in Chapter 2. These trends develop largely autonomous and can only to a very limited extent be influenced by government policy. In this chapter, the limitations and opportunities the political context offers to physical planning have been highlighted. Apart from all these contextual factors, the physical planning process itself also plays a decisive role towards a potentially successful plan. This involves not only a careful consideration of alternatives and their possible effects and negotiations with all parties involved, but also the translation of abstract goals into concrete measures 'on the ground'. Many planners and academic planning researchers tend to pay more attention to how a good plan should be created than to what happens after this plan has been completed and approved of. In their view, a strategic plan can already be considered successful if it managed to convince all parties involved. Although reaching consensus on a planning strategy is an essential precondition for a potentially successful plan, this is only a partial success. If all parties agree on a planning strategy, but do not take any actions, or counterproductive actions, to translate this strategy into concrete spatial changes, the plan cannot be considered a success. The same can be said if the necessary actions are taken, but do not lead to the desired results. The realisation of planning goals and objectives in reality is a crucial element of the success of planning policies. If the goals and objectives of a plan are not realised through concrete measures, the plan is nothing more than a set of good intentions on paper. It will then not contribute to changes in spatial developments in the direction the planners aimed for. It is therefore perfectly valid to evaluate strategic plans by looking at the extent to which the actual spatial development matches the goals and objectives expressed in the strategic plan, meanwhile realising of course that the national plans should not be considered 'blueprints' for future spatial development. Such an analysis will be presented for the Dutch urbanisation policy since the 1960s, as it was expressed in national strategic plans, in the chapters 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 5 will introduce the research methodology used for this evaluation of Dutch national urbanisation policy.