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

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CHAPTER FIVE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction: Approaches in the evaluation of planning policy

As indicated earlier in Chapter 4, there has been a considerable amount of discussion about criteria for the success and effectiveness of physical planning. According to Bukkems (1989), the effectiveness of a plan has at least two aspects. A plan can be considered effective if it has led to changes in the behaviour and decisions of the actors involved, and/or if it has led to changes in ‘spatial reality’.

Faludi & Van der Valk (1994) stress the influence of a plan on the decision-taking behaviour of planning actors in their analysis of the effectiveness of Dutch physical planning policy. If strategic plans would be ‘blueprints’, the evaluation of their success could compare effects with intentions to see whether or not the plans were successful. However, since most strategic plans are not blueprints, an evaluation of planning success based on results ‘on the ground’ is, in the view of Faludi and Van der Valk, not useful. They see the strategic plan as only one of many inputs into the decision-making process of physical planning. Its main function would then be to shape ‘decision situations’, not necessarily resulting in changes in spatial development. In a more recent article, Faludi confirms this view by stating that "(...) strategic spatial plans must be evaluated, not primarily in the light of their material outcomes, but for how they improve the understanding of decision makers of present and future problems they face. Where having such plans increases this understanding, they may have said to perform their role, irrespective of outcomes” (Faludi, 2000, p. 300). This viewpoint seems to put the importance of (national) strategic plans in a too modest perspective, at least in the Dutch situation. Dutch national strategic planning aimed at more than just ‘shaping decision situations’: the Reports on Physical Planning, especially the Third and Fourth Report (Extra) contained very concrete statements on how the Dutch built environment should be developed. The Dutch national strategic plans since the 1960s clearly give the impression that the national planners have always wanted, and still want, to exert influence on spatial developments, not just to advise on them. The same goes for strategic plans in several other countries, most notably the UK and France.

Faludi and Van der Valk are certainly not alone in their approach of physical planning. The recent debate on planning as a science, as expressed in books, on congresses and in international journals, seems to indicate an increasing stress on the administrative and political preconditions for successful plans, as well as a stress on the plan’s design and its communication towards the outside world. Dominant discussions within the international planning community include for example the degree to which the possibilities of planners are determined through the political context in which they have to operate (Forester, 1989), the interpretation of planning as a ‘communicative’ or ‘argumentative’ process (Fischer & Forester 1993, Innes 1996, Healey 1997), the use of spatial concepts as an important communicative tool (Zonneveld 1991, Duinen 1999), and more recently the importance of informal institutions, rules and societal norms (Salet 2000). The focus of planning science seems to have moved away from the eventual aim of physical planning: changes in spatial reality.
Glasbergen & Simonis (1979) view the effectiveness of national physical planning policy in a more result-oriented perspective. They distinguish three phases in the study of effectiveness of policy:

1. Determining the degree of effectiveness of the policy: which are the goals of the policy, during which period should the objectives be reached, and to what extent were the objectives eventually reached in this period?
2. The means used to reach the policy objectives, and the theoretical conception of the problem and its possible solution that lead to the choice of these means.
3. Could the objectives be reached through the means used? Or in other words: was the theoretical conception of the problem and its possible solution justified?

The possible outcomes of a study of the effectiveness of national strategic plans could then be:

- The chosen means could impossibly reach the effect that the policy aimed for,
- The theoretical conception was justified, but the means to reach the policy’s objectives were not used enough or in the right way,
- The theoretical conception of the problem and its possible solution cannot be evaluated because the objectives are too vague or too implicit. In this case, the effectiveness study can only be aimed at the means used and the way these means are applied.

Musterd & Ostendorf (1996), following earlier studies by Bukkems (1989) and Faludi & Van der Valk (1990), use the terms ‘plan conformity’ and ‘goal conformity’ to evaluate the success of strategic national plans. Plan conformity refers to the extent to which a project has been executed according to the plan. It evaluates the implementation process: are the right measures taken to reach the goals of the plan? Goal conformity refers to the extent to which the goals of the plan were actually reached. It is perfectly possible that after all the measures needed to reach the goals of the plan have been taken, the goals are nevertheless not reached. In that case, the execution of a plan meets the criterion of plan conformity, but fails to meet the criterion of goal conformity.

In this study, plan conformity and goal conformity are used as criteria for the extent to which Dutch national urbanisation policy can be considered successful. Contrary to the mainstream of recent Dutch (and international) planning research, the analysis presented in the following chapters starts from the assumption that the success of physical planning policy can and should be evaluated by judging the eventual results of the plan ‘on the ground’ (goal conformity). It is important to note here, however, that a plan will not be regarded as a ‘blueprint’ for spatial development. It is fully realised, as discussed before in Chapter 4, that the goals and intentions of national plans will frequently be renegotiated on lower (regional and local) planning levels and even on the national level. However, the evaluation will start from the assumption that the goals and intentions put forward in the national plans (the Reports on Physical Planning) will at least offer a framework for action for the lower government levels. It is also assumed that on the national level, the Reports on Physical Planning generally reflect the national urbanisation policy that is supported by all departments involved in physical planning. It is not for nothing that these Reports on Physical planning are published on behalf of the entire Cabinet and not just on behalf of the National Planning Agency. While national urbanisation policy might not have direct effects on population distribution and urban (regional) form, it should at least show indirect effects (via regional and local plans that are supposed to be in line with the national policy) in order to be regarded as ‘successful’. Even if the plan is not a...
‘blueprint’, still the goals and intentions of national urbanisation plans should to some extent be reflected in the actual developments of population distribution and urban form for a national urbanisation policy that could be called ‘successful’.

In addition to this confrontation of planning goals and objections with reality, the question of the feasibility of plans coined by Glasbergen and Simonis (1979) will also be addressed. Two aspects of Dutch national urbanisation policy are analysed: population distribution policy and daily mobility policy. These aspects are dealt with in two separate analyses. The first analysis, aimed at the goals concerning population distribution within Dutch national urbanisation policy, is introduced in section 5.2. In addition, the results of Dutch population distribution policy are placed in an international perspective. An international comparison of the Netherlands with three other areas in Northwest-Europe is undertaken to deepen the insight in the potential effectiveness of population distribution policies in general. It also functions to explore to what extent the Dutch policy has really been particularly successful compared to other countries, a claim that is frequently made in national as well as international planning literature. The design of the international comparison is presented in section 5.3. The analysis of the second aspect of Dutch national urbanisation policy, concerning the goals with respect to daily mobility patterns, is the topic of section 5.4.

5.2 Evaluation of Dutch national population distribution policy

The evaluation of Dutch national population distribution policy that will be discussed in Chapter 6 focuses on two criteria for planning success:
- the degree to which the actual development of population distribution matches the planned development;
- the degree to which the proposed plans have been feasible and/or will be feasible in the near future.

To judge on the first of these aspects, the aims of national urbanisation policy are confronted with the actual development of population distribution. The indicator used for population distribution trends is the development of the total number of inhabitants on the administrative level of the municipality. The ideal situation would have been to be able to study the population development of settlements. Administrative boundaries often do not coincide with settlement boundaries. In the 1990s, a very detailed account of population size and structure (age, ethnicity, socio-economic situation etc.) became available on the level of the 4-digit postal code: the ‘Wijk- en Buurtregister’ (‘district and neighbourhood register’) of the National Bureau of Statistics Netherlands. This dataset would have made it possible to study the development of the population of different settlements, or even parts of settlements (like neighbourhoods) within municipalities. However, for the largest part of the period under study, this data source was not available. Therefore, municipalities have been chosen as the closest possible approach to individual settlements. The data source used is the yearly account of the total number of inhabitants per municipality on 1 January by National Bureau of Statistics Netherlands. An additional reason for choosing the municipality as the basic unit of analysis was the comparative study, undertaken to judge the specific Dutch situation in a (Northwest-) European perspective (see section 5.3). In the three case studies that were compared to the Netherlands, data on the municipality level were also the most accessible and available source for population distribution trends.
Map 1 in the Appendix shows the municipal division of the Netherlands in 1995 as well as the geographic distribution of the municipality types as they were then used in population statistics of Statistics Netherlands. This municipality typology, to which the category of growth centres is added because of its highly specific recent population development, is used for the international comparison of population distribution dynamics that will be introduced in section 5.3.

A practical problem of choosing the municipalities as the unit of analysis was that between 1970 and 1995, the municipal division of the Netherlands went through many changes. A large number of small and sparsely populated municipalities were merged into larger units that were better able to perform the tasks of local government in a cost-efficient way. Also, some municipalities were split up and divided between several bordering municipalities. This resulted in a decline of the number of municipalities from 890 in 1970 to 633 in 1995. To enable the time-series analysis the municipal borders of 1995 were used as the point of reference. The register of changes in the municipal division of the National Bureau of Statistics Netherlands was used to 'equalise' the municipal divisions of the years between 1970 and 1995 with the municipal division of 1995.

The period of analysis starts with the implementation of the Second Report on Physical Planning in 1966 and ends with the implementation of Fourth Report Extra, a process still running at the time of writing this thesis. Since the 1960s, a number of reports can be singled out that defined the main strategic planning principles of the Dutch government during parts of the period of analysis (Figure 5.1). Each of these reports contained statements on the preferred population development of categories of municipalities and parts of the country. Although these goals of population development can generally not be quantified directly, they can at least be expressed in terms of growth or decline. Some municipality types were clearly stimulated in their population growth, while others were not allowed to grow, or only allowed to grow to a very limited extent.

**Figure 5.1** National reports on population distribution policy used in the evaluation study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
In the analysis, then, the goals of population development for categories of municipalities as expressed in the national reports are evaluated, looking at how the total population of the municipality categories in question developed in reality. The evaluation of national urbanisation policy will mainly concentrate on the Randstad and the regions surrounding it. From the 1960s on, this has been the area with the most consistent urbanisation policy from the national level. While in the rest of the Netherlands the goals of national urbanisation policy have often been expressed rather abstract or even vague, the goals for the Randstad and its immediate surroundings were generally quite concrete. Therefore, this is the most suited part of the Netherlands for an evaluation of the success of national urbanisation policy. In Chapter 6, this area will be referred to as ‘Central Netherlands’.

Map 2 in the Appendix shows this research area, including the categories of municipalities that are derived from national urbanisation policy. It should be noted that the municipality typology used here is not the same as the national municipality typology of Statistics Netherlands shown in Map 1 of the Appendix. While the typology of that map is based on the degree of urbanisation of municipalities, the typology used in Appendix Map 2 exists of municipality types that were explicitly targeted in national urbanisation policy since the 1960s. The typology used here is more useful for the evaluation of Dutch national urbanisation policy than the typology of Statistics Netherlands (Appendix Map 1) since it is much more referring to the types of municipalities relevant for this policy. For each of these municipality types, statements on their preferred population growth development (like: ‘fast growth’ or ‘as little growth as possible’) could be derived from official policy documents on national urbanisation policy, either for the whole period under research or for a part of this period. Meanwhile, the typology of Statistics Netherlands shown in Map 1 of the Appendix will be used for the international comparison of urbanisation trends. Because the national urbanisation policies of the three Northwest-European case studies do not contain such precise statements on municipality categories as the Dutch national urbanisation policy, but is more aimed at broad municipality categories (‘large cities’, ‘regional centres’, ‘the countryside’), only a typology based on the degree of urbanisation could be used for the comparative analysis.

The second criterion analysed in Chapter 6 is the feasibility of the national plans on population distribution. This feasibility is expressed in two dimensions:

- who is paying for the planned spatial investments (government or market);
- is the plan mostly in the general (societal) interest or the individual interest?

These two dimensions produce a typology of policy situations as expressed in Figure 5.2. In this typology, two ‘balanced’ situations occur: situation 2, in which the government invests in a general interest, and situation 3, in which market parties invest in individual interests. In situation 1, the physical planning policy seems to be chosen mainly for reasons of feasibility: individual interests are met through government investments. A policy of this type will most probably reach its goals because the space demands of individual households, companies and other parties involved are met to a large extent. Such a policy could, however, have negative consequences for issues of general societal interest. To give an extreme example: when the government would provide a spacious detached house with a large garden for every Dutch household, most of the publicly accessible open green space would be lost. On the contrary, the type of policy of situation 4 seems to be characterised more by desirability than by feasibility. In this situation, market parties are called upon to invest in a general societal interest, a situation that will be hard to realise. An example of such a policy could be that the government urges market
parties to build only high rise housing estates in cities, while the main housing demand exists of detached one-family houses with gardens in a suburban setting.

Figure 5.2 A typology of physical planning policy situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment in physical planning policy by...</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ostendorf, 1999)

The analysis of feasibility presented in Chapter 6 will focus on the two central concepts of Dutch population distribution policy since the 1960s: concentrated deconcentration and the compact city. Especially for the compact city policy, this additional evaluation is useful. Because of the quite recent introduction of the compact city policy, planners can easily argue that it is too early to judge on its efficiency. The instruments to realise the population distribution aims of the compact city policy, the so-called ‘VINEX-locations’, were introduced in the Fourth Report Extra in 1990. However, the actual realisation of housing projects on these locations only started in 1995, the year in which the analysis of population development in the municipalities ends. Still, it is possible to evaluate the feasibility of the plans for compact city development based on the typology presented above. The same analysis is possible for the policy of concentrated deconcentration. In this case, we already know the eventual results, but the analysis of feasibility can contribute to the explanation why this policy succeeded or failed to reach its targets (Bontje & Ostendorf, 1999).

5.3 An international comparison of urbanisation trends and policies in Northwest-Europe

In national as well as international planning literature, the national urbanisation policy of the Netherlands is often presented as exceptionally successful and effective. As already discussed before in Chapter 1, several planning researchers praised the Dutch national planning system with its clear division of tasks between government levels and its consensus on goals and measures to realise a balanced distribution of population over the country. Especially the 1960s and 1970s, when the concept of ‘concentrated deconcentration’ formed the core of Dutch national urbanisation policy, is frequently mentioned as an era of effective planning (Faludi, 1994; Hall, 1992). The evaluation of the results and feasibility of Dutch national urbanisation policy outlined in section 5.2 will give a first indication whether this positive view on the results of Dutch national urbanisation policy is justified. An additional indication of ‘planning success’ might be found when the Dutch situation is compared to experiences of other countries.
5.3.1 A typology of planning systems as a tool for comparative research

Europe contains a huge variety of national planning systems. There are probably not even two countries in Europe with the same planning system. However, some broad similarities between groups of countries can certainly be found. In recent years, several attempts have been made to make sense of the similarities and differences between planning systems in Europe. Healey and Williams (1993), for example, differentiated planning systems with characteristics of the national legal and constitutional settings and the country's administrative and professional culture. Another example of a categorisation of similarities and differences between European planning systems is the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems (European Commission, 1997). The EU Compendium also considered planning systems in the context of legal and administrative structures.

Elaborating on the work of Healey and Williams, the British planning researchers Newman and Thornley (1996) constructed a typology of planning systems in Europe that provides a useful methodological tool for international comparison. Newman and Thornley divided Europe into five groups of countries (Figure 5.3). Existing groupings of legal families and administrative families in Europe were merged in order to form a typology of national planning systems. The groups are mainly based on the country's legal style (defined in terms of historical development, legal mode of thought, legal sources and ideology) and its administrative system. The most important aspect of the administrative system considered in the typology is the division of responsibilities between the national, regional or local level.

The authors themselves used their typology to compare recent urban planning projects in three countries, each representing one group of their typology. However, the typology could be applied to national or regional physical planning as well. In this case, the Newman and Thornley typology is applied to national and regional urbanisation policies, i.e. policies aiming to influence patterns and trends in population distribution and the distribution of economic functions across a country or region.

The comparative analysis starts from two main pre-assumptions:
- physical planning policies can influence the process of population distribution;
- differences in physical planning systems and ambitions lead to different trends in population distribution.

If these pre-assumptions are true, the four selected cases should show clear differences in their population distribution trends since the 1970s, despite all the characteristics they have in common. The main hypothesis of the comparative study, then, is that urban sprawl will be much less pronounced in countries with a strong position of the national government in physical planning than in countries where planning powers are concentrated on the regional or local level. This hypothesis is in line with the viewpoint that coordination of physical planning actions on the national government level is essential to reach an effective national physical planning policy (Glasbergen & Simonis, 1979). In countries with a dominant position of the national level in physical planning, urbanisation policies on the sub-national level will be strongly determined by the strategic policy framework set out on the national level. In countries with a high degree of autonomy on the regional or local level, it is much less likely that national guidelines on urbanisation policy are followed throughout the entire country. Of course, it is hypothetically possible that several regions or even municipalities, independent from one
another, design a comparable urbanisation strategy. However, because of the natural tendency of municipalities and regions to meet their own interests before considering spatial problems on higher scale levels, it is much more likely that local and regional authorities will come up with different urbanisation strategies. These strategies will without doubt be beneficiary to the development of the region or municipality in question, but the chances that the strategy will reach across regional or local borders are not very high. This will lead to a collection of strategic plans for parts of a region or country that will most probably be in conflict with each other.

Figure 5.3. Groups of national planning systems in Europe according to the typology of Newman & Thornley (1996) ¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>'British': UK, Ireland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|     |  → 'evolutionary case law' (legal framework for planning is built up gradually, 'decision by decision')  
|     |  → no legal protection of local government  
|     |  → strong control / monitoring from national level of local planning actions |
| 2   | 'Napoleonic': Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece |  
|     |  → planning 'systematic', with general rules and laws (national law on spatial planning)  
|     |  → planning system is hierarchic, with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities between the national, regional and local level (subsidiarity)  
|     |  → national and local level most influential, regional level relatively weak |
| 3   | 'Scandinavian': Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland |  
|     |  → national (and regional) planning reduced to minimum  
|     |  → local level most important; local governments make very detailed plans |
| 4   | 'Germanic': Switzerland, Germany, Austria |  
|     |  → planning 'systematic', with general rules and laws (like the Napoleonic countries)  
|     |  → planning system is hierarchic, with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities between the national, regional and local level (subsidiarity)  
|     |  → regional level (Bundesländer, cantons) most powerful  
|     |  → federal government gives 'guidelines' but has hardly any powers to force the regions to follow these guidelines |
| 5   | 'East-European': Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Yugoslavia, Albania, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldavia |

¹ The case study countries are mentioned in bold italics.

An important shortcoming of the typology of Newman and Thornley (1996) is that the types of planning systems are purely based on a country’s legal and administrative system. This makes the typology rather 'mechanical' and limits its explanatory value.
Apart from differences in legal style and administrative framework, also the ‘ambition level’ of (national) governments in physical planning should be considered. The degree to which national governments are involved in physical planning could also be connected to the political colour of the parties in power, the influence of societal groups and non-governmental organisations, a tradition of prioritising certain tasks of ‘national concern’ etc. For example, in the Netherlands during the 1970s, a concept dominating the national political scene was ‘de maakbare samenleving’. This concept expressed the firm belief that it was possible to develop an ideal society through policy measures. It is no coincidence that the 1970s were also the decade in which national physical planning policy demonstrated its highest ambition level (Kreukels, 1992). Within the groups of planning systems distinguished by Newman and Thomley, considerable variation can be found in the extent to which governments not only have a legal and administrative planning framework, but also use it to implement physical planning policy in general and population distribution policy in particular. Although it is hard to make a factor like ‘ambition level’ operational, it was taken into account when the case studies for the comparative study were selected.

5.3.2. Selection of case studies

For the comparative study, countries or regions were sought that represented the types of planning systems of Newman and Thomley. In addition, the selected case studies should demonstrate a clear variation in the ambition level of national planners with respect to physical planning in general, and population distribution policy in particular. At the same time, however, the comparison regions had to be as much like the Netherlands as possible on other factors that determine the dynamics in population distribution. In the ideal situation, the planning system and the governmental ambition level with respect to physical planning would be left as the only factors on which the case study areas would differ from each other. This situation was of course impossible to reach in reality. As Dickens et al (1985) made clear, it is not possible for social scientists to replicate the experimental method of natural science. The variables that social scientists work with can never be isolated completely from each other. This certainly applies to planning policy, which inevitably takes place in the context of an open and constantly changing society. Furthermore, each country and region in Europe has responded to economic, socio-cultural and demographic changes in its own specific way.

The eventual selection of case study areas, however, shows a lot of similarities on important factors influencing the dynamics of population distribution. So, to refer to the work of Dickens et al (1985) once more, it has at least been possible to reach a considerable reduction in the variability of the case study areas. The most important aspects of similarity are population density, the settlement system and geographical size of the area, recent socio-cultural and demographic processes, and recent economic development. The geographical scope for the other case studies was limited to Northwest-Europe. This was done to make the foreign case study areas as comparable as possible to the Netherlands with respect to recent socio-economic, demographic and economic developments.

The case study areas that were eventually selected for the comparison with the Netherlands were Switzerland, West-Sweden and Northern England. The case study area West-Sweden consists of the counties Västra-Götaland, Halland and Skåne and stretches from the Norwegian border in the northwest to the Öresund in the south. The case study
area Northern England includes the 'standard planning regions' North West, North East and Yorkshire & Humberside, and is bordered by Scotland in the north and the West- and East-Midlands in the south. Within the case study selection, Northern England represents the British group; the Netherlands is a member of the Napoleonic group; Switzerland belongs to the Germanic group; and West-Sweden is an example of the Scandinavian group.

The fifth group of Newman and Thornley (1996) is called 'East-European'. This group was left out of the international comparison. The only common feature of the East-European planning systems is their socialist heritage. After the breakdown of the Iron Curtain, the countries in this group all went their own way. Some Eastern European countries gradually developed Germanic-style systems, some countries more or less stuck to the socialist system, and some countries undertook no planning actions at all. The huge differences in planning systems within the Eastern European group make it impossible to choose a region that is more or less representative for the group.

Of the remaining four groups, the group of the Netherlands is clearly the most diverse and complicated one. It is not easy to find a country that is representative for this group. The Napoleonic countries vary between intensive government involvement in planning on the national level (Netherlands, France) and almost no national government involvement (some of the southern European countries). Adding to the complexity is the tendency to increasing federalisation of Italy, Belgium and Spain. Still, the planning systems of the countries of this group are based on the same principles: a systematic approach with a national law on spatial planning and a hierarchical planning system with a national, regional and local level, each with its own clearly defined responsibilities.

On the second dimension, the ambition level of the national government with respect to physical planning, at least a dichotomy could be made. The national governments of the Netherlands and the UK have demonstrated a clear ambition to influence population distribution through physical planning in the recent past. Of these two, the UK national planning policy seems to demonstrate the highest ambitions to determine what happens regionally and locally. These ambitions are expressed in a series of reports on topics that are considered to be of national concern, the so-called 'Planning Policy Guidances'. In Dutch planning, the national planners write highly ambitious reports too, but in the end, the municipal planners most often decide what happens 'on the ground'. The reports of the national planners could be characterised as 'integral': the national reports cover all aspects of the desired national spatial development. Contrary to the UK and the Netherlands, the national planning agencies of Switzerland and Sweden limited their activities to advisory documents for the lower tiers of government where the actual planning policies were designed. Although Sweden has a reputation of being a planned country, this does not mean that the national government is very active in physical planning. Traditionally, physical planning policies were mainly left to local authorities and the strong position of the municipalities in this respect was even strengthened since the 1980s.

In Switzerland, the national (federal) government has recently demonstrated an increased interest in a coordinating role in physical planning policy. However, in a political context of a country that is highly sensitive of too centralised government, the federal planning reports can hardly become more than advisory strategies without concrete planning actions. In the end, the 'real' planning is done in the cantons and municipalities. The
variety of the case studies on the two dimensions 'planning system' and 'planning ambition' is summarised in Figure 5.4. The case studies are placed in a tentative hierarchical order. On the basis of the dimensions 'planning system' (expressed by the variable 'most influential government level') and 'planning ambition', Northern England is expected to demonstrate the strongest influence of national planning policy on population distribution, followed by the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden. The type of national planning documents, which is also mentioned in Figure 5.4, results from the combination of the ambitions of the national planners and the possibilities given to them by the planning system in which they have to operate.

Figure 5.4. A typology of national physical planning policies in the case study areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study</th>
<th>Dominant government level</th>
<th>Type of national planning documents</th>
<th>Ambition level of national planners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern England</td>
<td>national</td>
<td>thematic strategic plans</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>national / local</td>
<td>integral strategic plans</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>regional / local</td>
<td>advisory strategy</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>local</td>
<td>advisory strategy</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the regions that are included in the case studies have a size of about 40,000 square kilometres. The regions are characterised by a fairly high population density. In 1995, Northern England had the highest population density of the four regions: 381 persons per km², closely followed by the Netherlands with 372 persons per km². Switzerland and West-Sweden as a whole have a much lower population density, but the density figures in the most urbanised parts of these areas approach the overall figures for the Netherlands and Northern England.

The case study areas all have a poly-nucleated settlement system, without a primate city that dominates the region in all respects. An equivalent of metropolises like London or Paris is lacking. Instead, each of the regions contains a number of relatively small cities that have gradually grown together into a network configuration. The area's population is spread quite evenly over the several cores of this network. Each core within the network has its own economic specialisations that are largely complementary to each other. The poly-nucleated configurations in the case study areas are:

- The Randstad and its wide surroundings in the Netherlands;
- The 'Transpennine' zone with the metropolitan regions of Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and South- and West-Yorkshire in Northern England;
- The Mittelland in Switzerland, an urbanised zone stretching from Geneva to Basel between the Jura and the Swiss Alps;
- The border-crossing Öresund region, partly located in West-Sweden (with Malmö and Lund on the Swedish side, and Copenhagen on the Danish side of the Öresund as its major centres).

Although the regions have reacted to socio-cultural and demographic developments in different ways, the main trends of the last 30 years have basically been the same in all of
the regions. Among the many trends that influenced population distribution in each of the case study regions are:

- Mobility trends, such as the continuous increase of car possession and car traffic;
- Demographic trends, such as the rapidly dropping birth rate and the decrease of average household size;
- Socio-cultural trends, such as the increase of foreign migration;
- The changes in internal migration behaviour resulting from the above-mentioned factors.

A major difference between the case study regions Netherlands, West-Sweden and Switzerland on the one hand, and Northern England on the other hand, is the recent economic development. All case study regions suffered from severe economic crises following the two oil crises of the 1970s, and again in the early 1990s. While the Netherlands, Switzerland and West-Sweden have shown a steady economic growth in the late 1990s, Northern England is still struggling with the negative effects of de-industrialisation. The largest share of recent economic growth in the UK has been concentrated in the South East. The effects of this difference in recent economic development between Northern England and the other case study areas on population distribution trends might make a comparison between the case study areas on the effects of national urbanisation policy on population distribution problematic.

Another difference between the case study regions lies in the housing preferences of their populations. In Northern England, the most preferred living environment is the countryside. People who want to leave the large cities show a tendency to move across relatively long distances to the non-metropolitan countryside (Champion, 1992). In West-Sweden, on the contrary, the peripheral countryside has suffered continuous population loss in recent decades. While the countryside is valued highly positive by the majority of the English, the Swedes have negative associations with countryside life and prefer being close to cities (Nyström, 1996). Switzerland and the Netherlands are in-between these two extremes. However, these differences in housing preferences do not seem to have led to large differences in population distribution trends, as will appear in Chapter 7.

**5.3.3 Methods of data collection**

At the start of the international comparison, the knowledge available about the three foreign case study areas was minimal. When the Netherlands is compared internationally, the United States and the United Kingdom are the most common countries of comparison. In the case of the UK, the focus is most often on London and the South East region. Switzerland and West-Sweden were hardly studied by Dutch geographers and planners in the past. Therefore, the help of local specialists on population distribution and planning matters in Switzerland, West-Sweden and Northern England was needed.

Initially, one or a few 'key persons' were contacted in each of the case study areas. These persons were known to have done several studies on topics related to this study in the recent past. In addition, the key persons had access to national and regional databases of population development that could serve as an empirical basis for the study of trends in population distribution.

Each of the case study areas was visited to gather data on recent dynamics in population distribution and the forces behind these dynamics. The key persons provided a first
general introduction to the case study area. They also helped to gather literature references and a network of specialists on physical planning (academics as well as people 'in the field'), migration, demography, geography and regional economy in the case study areas. As many specialists as possible were interviewed within the limited time period available. The information gathered in these interviews, including ideas for field trips and many useful literature references, provided useful extra information that certainly could not have been gathered from the literature. After returning to the Netherlands, the key persons were contacted once more and asked for their comments on the case study draft. This was a very useful insider's check on the validity of the conclusions that certainly contributed to the objectivity of the observations.

The most important aspects of the planning systems considered in the comparative study were:
- The dominant government level: national, regional, or local;
- The dominant spatial concepts used in population distribution policy, as an expression of the relative importance given to concentration and dispersion of people, work and services;
- Other policies determining government power in physical planning: policies related to the land market, housing, infrastructure and regional economic development;
- The relative powers of government, private parties and lobby groups. This last point is especially important in the case of Northern England, where lobby groups like the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the House Builders Association have powerful positions in the planning debate.

5.3.4 Obstacles towards a 'working' comparison

In the process of realising the comparative study in practice, numerous obstacles occurred. One of the major obstacles was already mentioned above: the fact that a comparison on the basis of strategic plans with a national or regional scope was impossible because these plans appeared to be available in the Netherlands only. Another, also earlier mentioned obstacle was the contrasting economic development of Northern England vis-à-vis the other three case study areas in the 1990s. The comparative study was complicated even more because of problems connected to administrative and political boundaries.

First, two of the case study areas are countries, while the other two are regions within countries. In the case of the Netherlands and Switzerland, national developments and policies could be used as reference point. However, in the case of Northern England and West-Sweden, the regional developments and policies always had to be interpreted in the context of national developments and policies, including physical planning policy. As will appear in the case study reports of these areas, the development of population distribution of these areas was to a considerable extent influenced by other parts of the country, most notably the metropolitan region of the nation’s capital (London and Stockholm, respectively) that attracted many migrants from the case study areas.

Second, also within the case study areas administrative boundaries caused problems. The municipality appeared to be the lowest administrative level on which population growth figures could be compared between the four areas for the entire research period. Unfortunately, the number of municipalities differed immensely between the four areas. In the end year of the comparative study of population distribution trends, 1995, only
Northern England (90 municipalities) and West-Sweden (87 municipalities) came very close to each other in this respect. The Netherlands counted 633 municipalities in 1995, and Switzerland had no less than 3021 municipalities. Since the total surface of the case study areas is more or less the same, this implies that the size of the municipalities differs considerably between the case study areas. Shifting the focus of the study from individual municipalities to municipality types largely solved this problem. Since the main goal of this study is to discover the general recent trends in population distribution, the type and location (part of large-city agglomerations or outside of them) of the municipality are more important than municipality (area) size. In each of the case study areas, a typology could be found which classified municipalities into metropolitan, (medium-sized and small) urban, suburban and rural groups. In this way, it was possible to compare trends like suburbanisation and urban-rural migration between the four case study areas.

The problem could have been solved 'the other way round' as well, by increasing the local units in the Netherlands and Switzerland. But this would without doubt lead to very heterogeneous local units in both these countries, and a loss of valuable information on the municipality level.

A totally different obstacle hard to solve refers to the relative powers of government, private parties and lobby groups in the planning process. The relevance of this aspect of planning systems becomes especially clear when studying the case of Northern England. Lobby groups are constantly involved in the planning process and this is reflected in the eventual plans. For example, the persistence of British national and regional planners to hold on to the Green Belts is mainly due to the continuous lobby of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. In this way, a broad consensus on planning goals is reached on the national, regional and local level. The involvement of lobby groups might contribute strongly to the eventual effectiveness of growth management policies in Northern England. This is a factor that cannot be left out of the comparative study, but unfortunately, it is also a factor that is hard to make operational.

5.4 Evaluation of Dutch national spatial mobility policy

The analyses described in the sections 5.2 and 5.3 are both concentrated on one specific aspect of national urbanisation policy: attempts to influence population distribution through physical planning. Another aspect of national urbanisation policy that has gained an increasing importance in the Netherlands since the 1960s is spatial mobility policy. Spatial mobility policy involves attempts to influence the mobility behaviour of individuals and organisations through physical planning. The type of mobility most directly connected to population distribution is daily mobility. As already mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, population distribution and daily mobility can be considered as two sides of the same coin. When people change their residence, this inevitably has consequences for their daily mobility pattern. People will either try to relocate their daily activities as close to their new residence as possible, or choose to travel longer distances to realise their daily activities. The possibilities of people to travel (time, vehicle possession, money, etc.) and their willingness to travel in turn also determines if people want to move, and if so, where they will move to. Therefore, it is also no coincidence that both population distribution and daily mobility have been central issues of concern in Dutch national urbanisation policy since the 1960s.

Those searching for any empirical basis for the current spatial scale of urbanisation, taking daily mobility as an indicator, encounter severe problems. There are data available
from in-depth studies on people's mobility behaviour (for the Dutch case, for example Dijst, 1999 and Smit, 1997), but these studies are generally based on small samples of a few hundreds or thousands of respondents, either living in one or a few small geographical areas or belonging to specific professional or socio-economic population categories. The conclusions of these studies are impossible to generalise on a national or sub-national level. On the other hand, several countries undertake studies of daily mobility behaviour of their population regularly. The samples taken in these studies are generally fairly large but the data gathered are not very detailed. These studies lead to vague general statements on 'the' daily mobility behaviour of 'the' population, without being able to specify differences between population categories, regions or types of living environments.

The ideal empirical data set to study daily mobility behaviour on the spatial scale of daily urban regions is yet to be formed. The data set coming closest to the ideal situation in the Netherlands so far is the Research on Mobility Behaviour of Statistics Netherlands. This is a yearly study on daily mobility patterns of the Dutch population. Respondents are asked to register all trips they undertake on a given day. For each trip, the respondent is asked to fill out the location of departure and destination, the time needed for travelling, the motive of the trip and the type of vehicle used. The response is spread out across the country as equally as possible and all days of the week and of the year are equally represented. To control for inequalities still present in the sample, a number of weighing factors is added to the data set. These weighing factors allow to base generalising statements on the mobility behaviour of the Dutch population. An additional advantage is that comparison through time is made possible. Since 1995, the data sample of the Research on Mobility Behaviour is enlarged considerably, but with the correction of the weighing factors, the years before and after 1995 can be compared in a reliable way. Although the data sample of the Research on Mobility Behaviour is quite large, it is still too small to use it for analyses of daily mobility on the local (municipal) level. It is, however, possible to undertake an analysis on the level of daily urban systems. For these daily urban systems, as well as for those parts of the Netherlands not belonging to any daily urban system, the standard regional division of Statistics Netherlands in so-called COROP-regions is used. The resulting daily urban systems generally have a radius of 20 to 30 km from the largest central agglomeration (in some cases, there is more than one centre). The parts of the Netherlands that do not belong to daily urban systems are also divided into regions of a comparable size, again based on the COROP-regions. The resulting regional division of the Netherlands is presented in Figure 5.5.

In Chapter 8, data from the Research on Mobility Behaviour in the years 1987, 1992 and 1997 are compared, through which a period of 10 years is covered. The analysis is being undertaken at the national level and the daily urban system level. The data sample used is limited to the population of 12 years and older. Since 1995, the Research on Mobility Behaviour was extended to include also a large group of children up to 12 years. Since comparing one data set with young children (1997) with two data sets without young children (1987 and 1992) would most probably lead to false conclusions on daily mobility trends (considering that the daily mobility behaviour of young children differs markedly

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1) The COROP region is the statistical regional level applied as the NUTS-III level in European comparative statistics. In the following analysis, in some cases two COROP-regions were merged to come closer to the actual daily urban system. The regions not belonging to daily urban systems are also combinations of COROP-regions.
from that of the average population) the children under 12 years are excluded from the 1997 data set. The three data samples eventually resulting from this procedure contain respectively 10,000 households making about 90,000 trips in 1987 and 1992, and 60,000 households making 490,000 trips in 1997. The results of the time series analysis of daily mobility on both spatial scales will suggest that the assumption that urban fields or poly-nucleated urban regions are being formed or will soon be formed in the Netherlands is at least questionable, if not unrealistic.

Figure 5.5
Regions for the daily mobility analysis

Regions for the daily mobility analysis

E / H = Enschede / Hengelo
A / N = Arnhem / Nijmegen
M / H = Maastricht / Heerlen
R.O. R = Rest of Randstad
The Research on Mobility Behaviour contains only very limited data on household categories. The only variables available are household income, occupational status of the respondent (employee or professional, full- or part-time), age group, educational level (highest level of education successfully completed) and household size (only expressed in number of persons, without any reference to the household type). Even with these variables, a regional analysis is problematic because of problems of statistical reliability on regional level. This means the regional analysis remains limited to aggregate data on trips made by people with very different lifestyles and opportunities. It could well be that certain specific professional groups or household types have action spaces coming pretty close to an urban field, while other groups stay much closer to home. Additional surveys would be needed to get a really ‘in-depth’ knowledge of mobility behaviour, to find out for example if long-distance travelling is growing among certain categories of household types or professions and if this is a national or a region-specific trend. However, the aggregate data on daily mobility produced by the Research on Mobility Behaviour are very useful for the question that Chapter 8 seeks to answer. While in-depth knowledge on the mobility behaviour of specific categories is valuable, an overview of the aggregate mobility of the population is probably at least as important to determine the future direction of urbanisation and spatial mobility policy. In the end, it is the combination of many individual and categorical mobility patterns that produces concentrations of mobility and interaction in functionally coherent urban regions. And rather than planning an urban region for small categories with a radically different mobility behaviour, urbanisation and spatial mobility policy should preferably concentrate on the design of urban regions that fit well to the mobility behaviour of the majority of its inhabitants.