Planhiërarchische oplossingen : een bron voor maatschappelijk verzet

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Citation for published version (APA):
Summary

This thesis examines the process of making decisions about waste facilities. The background for this research was the introduction in the Netherlands of the NIMBY-Bill in 1994. In the Netherlands the implementation of large infrastructure projects—such as the enlargement of Schiphol airport, the realization of the new freight railway from Rotterdam to Germany (the Betuwe lijn), and also the construction of waste facilities—has been problematic. Decision-making about this kind of project has often been found to be laborious and has frustrated the national government in the achievement of its goals.

Instead of finding ways to improve the quality of the decision-making processes, it was proposed to change national legislation so as to speed them up. As a consequence, several changes in the Dutch Spatial Planning Act (Wet op de Ruimtelijke Ordening) were introduced. One of these changes was labelled the 'NIMBY-Bill'. NIMBY stands for Not In My Backyard.

Behind the changes in the legislation there is a policy theory. It is assumed that decision-making processes are delayed because of the opposition to large projects on the part of local residents and municipalities. Opposition is considered to be based on so-called NIMBY-attitudes. Local residents and municipalities—it is thought—are against the realization of a facility as a result of a rational choice based on egocentric motives. For instance, they would not approve of the construction of a waste facility in their own neighbourhood, but at the same time they would approve of a similar facility if it was sited somewhere else. With the changes in legislation, instruments were provided to speed up decision-making processes in cases where NIMBY-attitudes become manifest and there is deadlock. The introduction of these instruments increased the hierarchical powers of the national government and the provincial authorities, at the cost of the influence of local authorities and the local population.

Over the last few years there has been a lot of criticism of these changes. Firstly, the changes were based on assumptions, but hardly on (scientific) research. Secondly, the assumptions behind the policy theory are themselves questionable: are rational calculations and egocentric motives the only reasons for local residents and authorities to oppose the creation of infrastructure facilities? Thirdly, precisely what is meant by the term NIMBY? It is often used in policy documents and (international) literature, often without a definition and obviously with different meanings; and, if it is defined, these definitions may also vary. Unfortunately, different definitions result in the term being anything but univocal. Finally, are decision-making processes really that laborious and do they always progress only gradually?
To fully understand how decision-making processes about large infrastructure projects develop, research needed to be done. In this thesis the aim of the research was: To gain insight into the processes of making decisions about infrastructure, especially waste facilities, in order to verify some of the major assumptions lying behind the NIMBY-Bill and the renewed Spatial Planning Act.

Within the research project a parallel study on the development of perceptions and attitudes among the local residents was carried out (Devilee, 2001).

We studied the decision-making processes and attitudes in the following six cases:
1. A landfill in Landgraaf (capacity was realized);
2. The landfill Het Klooster in Nieuwegein (capacity was not realized);
3. Enlargement of the composting plant in Wijster (capacity was realized);
4. The waste treatment facility De Marsen in Zwolle (capacity was not realized);
5. An integrated waste treatment facility in Leiden (capacity was not realized);
6. Enlargement of the incineration capacity and a new composting plant in Duiven (composting plant was realized).

The decision-making processes about waste facility siting were studied from a theoretical perspective. We used the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) and the theories about the development of agendas during decision-making of Kingdon (1984) and Van der Eijk and Kok (1975). Based on these theories we tried to examine whether advocacy coalitions existed during the decision-making processes and in which way any such advocacy coalitions influenced the progress of these processes.

Following the ACF of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, we distinguished advocacy coalitions 1) when actors cooperated in a non-trivial way, and 2) when these actors shared the same policy belief system. The first condition was extracted from the descriptions we made of the decision-making process in the selected cases and the interviews we did with actors that were involved in these processes. The second condition was extracted by using the so-called Q-sort method (Brown, 1980). This method provided us with the means to measure which styles of thinking and acting (policy belief systems) could be assigned to the different types of actors. We asked them to evaluate several statements on waste policy, physical planning and decision-making processes in general. For this purpose a set of statements was formulated with a fundamental variance based on Cultural Theory (Thompson, Ellis & Wildavsky, 1990). Statements were formulated from hierarchical, egalitarian, fatalistic and individualistic policy perspectives.
Table 1 shows three policy belief systems that could be identified with the data of the evaluations of the entire set of statements by the key actors. Policy belief system 2 (PBS 2) is characterized by a hierarchical way of thinking and acting. We concluded that in four cases (Landgraaf, Wijster, Leiden and Nieuwegein) dominant coalitions were present. These advocacy coalitions were dominant because they influenced the agenda of the decision-making process drastically. They tried to exclude actors from the arena that were not part of the dominant groups and they also tried to prevent them from putting their issues on the agenda. Three of these advocacy coalitions held the hierarchical PBS 2. Only in Leiden the dominant coalition held PBS 1, which is moderately egalitarian and directed more at waste prevention. In Duiven and Zwolle no advocacy coalition could be identified.

Table 1  Policy Belief Systems

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<th></th>
<th>PBS 2</th>
<th>PBS 3</th>
<th>PBS 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Style of thinking and acting</td>
<td>&quot;More waste capacity is necessary! Government intervention is needed&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;More waste capacity? No, only in consultation with actors involved&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;More waste capacity? Yes, on condition that careful though decisive decisions are made&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waste policy</td>
<td>Hierarchical and moderately individualistic</td>
<td>Strongly egalitarian</td>
<td>Moderately egalitarian and individualistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical planning</td>
<td>Realizing sufficient waste facility capacity</td>
<td>Impact of waste facility on environment</td>
<td>Waste prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speeding up decision-making process is necessary</td>
<td>Carefulness instead of quickness</td>
<td>Careful but decisive</td>
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Another conclusion is that in cases where a dominant advocacy coalition existed, a second advocacy coalition was also present. Actors that were excluded from the arena and obstructed when they tried to influence the agenda, became frustrated. As a consequence they tried to cooperate with others and formed their own advocacy coalition. These non-dominant advocacy coalitions could be linked to policy belief system 3. Their opinions are strongly egalitarian which meant that they were focused on the environment and on their own input in the decision-making process.

In situations where advocacy coalitions with PBS 2 and advocacy coalitions with PBS 3 existed, the decision-making process reached a deadlock. Actors from all sides became frustrated. Only an actor with PBS 1, which was willing to act as a policy broker and had opinions that stood between the ideas present in PBS 2 and PBS 3, could overcome the deadlock in the negotiations. In cases in which the planned capacity was
realized (Landgraaf and Wijster), a policy broker had become active. As a consequence, the polarized situation was resolved and the decision-making process could be led to a conclusion: the dialogue between the actors was present again. In cases in which the planned capacity was not realized, we saw that none of the actors involved could play the role of a policy broker. In Leiden the initiator and developer could be identified with PBS 1; but these actors were too much involved to become active as policy brokers in order to overcome the deadlock. In Nieuwegein no actor was present to play such a broker's role.

Based on this research, we cannot conclude that the presence of a policy broker is a sufficient condition for realizing the planned capacity. On the other hand, we can conclude that the presence of a policy broker is indeed a necessary condition if a deadlock needs to be overcome. Either way, in situations in which there is no dialogue between the various actors and where a confrontation leads to an impasse, because the actions of a dominant coalition causes the emergence of a second coalition, delays in the decision-making processes are inevitable.

Using the research results of Devilee (2001) we can also conclude that the presence of dominant advocacy coalitions with a hierarchical policy belief system (PBS 2) has a negative influence on the attitudes of residents when confronted with the planned capacity. In these situations, local residents feel that they are not well informed about the plans and are being confronted with facts accomplis. In view of uncertainties that local residents already have as a result of the new developments in their environment, they tend to estimate risks, costs and health effects more negatively in situations in which an advocacy coalition with PBS 2 dominates the decision-making process.

Uncertainties also influence the way local residents perceive procedural unfairness. The feeling that the procedure is unfair subsequently influences their perceptions of risks, costs and health effects. These negative perceptions lead only from this moment on to resistance in decision-making processes about waste facilities. Assuming that this resistance is merely based on NIMBY-attitudes seems to be problematic, however, as these attitudes are combined with already existing negative perceptions that are far better predictors of opposition. Real NIMBY-attitudes on the part of both local residents and municipalities—such that there is no opposition to plans for a new waste facility in general but rather opposition to this facility because it is planned in their own neighbourhood—can hardly be found in either study.

In cases in which a policy broker was present we found relatively positive attitudes regarding procedural fairness and regarding the opportunity for local residents to participate in the decision-making process. It also positively influenced their satisfaction with the final result.
Summary

Decision-making processes in the cases that were studied progressed slowly and were indeed laborious. This is inevitable concerning the complexity of the processes and the plurality of actors that were involved in these processes. The most significant factor we found was the hierarchical dominance that is present in current physical planning practice as well as in waste policy. As a consequence, physical planning projects become delayed when compared to the unrealistic expectations of the initiators and the goals of waste policy are hard to achieve. Trying to improve these laborious decision-making processes by developing new instruments that strengthen the hierarchical authorities will have an undesirable effect on the involvement of the other actors in the decision-making process. Our findings run counter to current trends in the development of planning in the Netherlands. With the introduction of the NIMBY-Bill and the Bill of Trajectories in 1994 the hierarchical tendency in the Dutch planning system was strengthened; this tendency can be found even more notably in the current recommendations concerning the renewal of the Spatial Planning Act.