Innovation Ltd. Boundary work in deliberative governance in land use planning

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After working for many years, first with volunteers in a cultural youth center, later with citizens in Zaanstad, and now with citizens, businesses and non-governmental organizations in a variety of interactive policy making settings, I am surprised again and again by two things. First, the eagerness of people from all walks of life to be actively involved in public policy making is a pleasant revelation. Even when they never learn the results, many people continue to participate. Sometimes this is because there is a lot at stake, but also because they want to improve their environment or even their society. Second, I am surprised by the strong belief that the “right people” at the table make it clear sailing for the democratic quality and the content of solutions to improve. Often, in interactive or network types of governing, good procedures are considered the solution to many problems.

However, in a number of the projects in which I was (and am) involved, I also see that quality of content does not automatically result from improved procedures, even though it is dynamic in the sense that it has to be agreed upon by participants. Procedures are important but so is the creation and input of good content. Moreover, procedures and content can both include and exclude ideas and people. It is important to realize this, since policy makers and politicians sometimes use the argument of procedural inclusion in interactive policy making as a way to make decisions legitimate. Even in situations in which the content excluded many participants, they claim that the decision has support (in Dutch the decision has draagvlak) and that everyone had a chance to participate. This might be considered not only undemocratic but it can also put off the implementation of innovative solutions for problems in society. Even after I had left the university these two surprises fascinated me. I decided I wanted to go back in order to study this in depth and reflect on my work in the policy practice. I wrote a research proposal and Maarten Hajer and Willem Salet of the University of Amsterdam gave me the opportunity to start this challenging, rewarding and sometimes daunting journey.

This journey would not have been so wonderful and perhaps would never have ended without the continual support of colleagues, friends, and family, nor without the time and input that the many respondents gave me. I would like to express my gratitude to them now. First, I would like to thank colleagues in discourse analysis, in science and technology studies, and in the departments of political science and urban planning of the University of Amsterdam. I appreciate our inspiring debates, your comments, and your help in crossing disciplinary boundaries. I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Maarten Hajer, and co-supervisor, Jan van Tatenhove, who stimulated me to find my own way and to be a careful researcher. Also, many thanks to my colleagues at the Amsterdam Discourse Center, in particular Marcel Maussen, Christian Bröer, Kateryna Pishchikova, Margo van den Brink, and Katharina Paul. Your comments on drafts of papers and chapters encouraged me to further develop boundary work in a tradition of discourse theory. Kateryna and Katharina, a friendship has grown that I cherish. More chocolate in the future! Margo, now perhaps we can co-edit another special issue.

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David Laws, thank you for introducing me to the people at the Department of Natural Resources in Wisconsin and to your colleagues in consensus building and mediation. Thank you for the inspiring conversations we had.

The “transversals,” crossing boundaries seems to be our specialty. Barbara, our conversations have helped me reflect on differences and similarities between political science and STS. Thank you for your friendship. In a more practical but very important way, George Allez improved the American English used in this book. Thank you for making me smile about my mistakes.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family. My grandmother at age 92 still is a role model to me. She is a strong woman with a big heart for people of all ages, races, and classes. I also would like to thank my father and mother for making me want to learn forever, and for pointing out the important things in life: happiness, laughter and warm relationships. Serge, I would like to dedicate this book to you since you own at least half of it. I treasure the beer glass mats on which we drew the outline of the book. You made sure I kept my priorities straight and that I did not drown in work. You take care of Luz when I am not around, and when I am around. We share the same passion for our little girl, and many more things. I admire how you always know what is most important and I am very fortunate to be with you. Now we can celebrate — you don’t have to compete for attention with this book anymore! Sweet Luz, the way you try to capture streams of water from the watering can with your bare hands makes me realize the wonder of trying to capture dynamic things. I promise I will not try to capture all.

Tamara
Amsterdam, September 2010