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Rules versus ideas in landscape protection: is a Green Heart attack imminent?

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ABSTRACT

Landscape protection in metropolitan areas is an ongoing activity that lies outside the remit of political office-holders. As political agendas change, the importance of landscape protection on strategic planning agendas may also change. This paper raises the question whether this strategic level of landscape protection ought to rest on rules or ideas, and uses the Dutch Green Heart as a case study. The success of Dutch planning has been attributed to a planning doctrine which has evolved around a principle of spatial organization consisting of an open landscape (a Green Heart) in the middle of a 'rim' city – in this case the Dutch Randstad. After this success had been recognized, policies were developed to formalize the protection of the Green Heart in strategic planning rules. Political controversies ensued, which resulted in the abolition of Green Heart policies at national level. Recently, the province of Zuid-Holland adopted a new structural vision and a byelaw in which there is no role for the Green Heart in development control. This paper analyses this new system of strategic development control and discusses the role of rules as opposed to ideas in landscape protection.

1. Introduction

The development of large swathes of green areas in metropolitan regions is an issue that has been raised in many contexts (Van der Valk and Van Dijk 2009). Open spaces may serve multiple purposes, including recreation, the conservation of biodiversity, the provision of drinking water and agriculture. Landscapes also have an important cultural dimension as one of the determinants of the identity of a region (Gailing and Kilper 2009). Planning can be geared to 'the protection of the valued landscape' (Healey 2007, 164), and a green area, such as a green belt, may add to the identity of urban areas in this landscape (Morrison 2010). These green areas may serve a dual function by protecting agricultural land, forests and biodiversity on the one hand and providing urban residents with recreational and ecosystem services on the other (Siedentop, Fina, and Krehl 2016). Planning plays an important role in the social construction of landscapes (Gailing and Leibenath 2015). It is planning that determines whether a certain area is part of a green belt, a green corridor, a green buffer zone, a Green Heart or another green structure in a metropolitan region. Planning affects both sites of the social construction of landscapes as has been distinguished by Gailing and Leibenath (2015). First, planning has a role in constructing institutions, such as the formal policies and instruments, that is, the rules that are developed to protect landscapes. Second, planning has an impact on

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landscape discourse, or the ideas, on the quality of landscapes. The question is how rules and ideas interact in planning for landscape protection.

Inevitably, larger green areas which are located within a wider metropolitan region may face urban development. Interdependencies within 'a fragmented and complex web of owners and governments' (Van der Valk and Van Dijk 2009, 5) are just one of the factors that make the preservation of open space in these areas a complex undertaking. The type of institution makes a difference (Van Rij 2008). After all, a regional landscape is not usually a wilderness owned by a public agency; on the contrary, it is more likely to be in private ownership and to have a productive function, such as farming (Van Rij 2008). The specific distribution of ownership may have an impact on the development of a landscape (Van der Molen 2015). Owners may be obliged by specific rules to refrain from undertaking certain actions, but they cannot be obliged to prepare land for a certain function (Van Straalen and Korthals Altes 2014). So, although planning plays an important role in the development of landscapes, it does not play a deterministic role, that is, landscapes are 'the complex products of collective processes of negotiation and struggle' (Gailing and Leibenath 2015, 135). The planning of a landscape does not take the form of a project with a distinct start and end date for the delivery of a product. It is a strategic process (Faludi 2000).

It is through this strategic process that the protection of large green areas as landscape must find, again and again, its place on the planning agenda. After all, plans do change, and strategic planning is in a constant process of rethinking. Politics also play a role. The protection of a certain landscape does not always have the same position on the political agenda. Building political will is one of the strategies followed by actors that aim to protect landscapes (Cadieux, Taylor, and Bunce 2013). Here, it is not only important to build political will to achieve a breakthrough at a certain moment in time, but it is also relevant that this political will lasts. Political will must be nurtured, because protecting landscapes is a durable cause that lasts much longer than a few election cycles. The development of a landscape is, in this way, a matter of 'slow planning' (Van Rij and Korthals Altes 2008, 357). Slow planning is a process that excludes a green area from dynamic urban developments in the surrounding area by a long duration of institutional conditions that allow to preserve and improve the area. One way to achieve this is to develop an institutional framework, such as a specific law that prescribes certain procedures and which, being able to withstand external influences, may be a means 'to prevent dynamic urban developments taking over its green space' (Van Rij and Korthals Altes 2008, 358).

However, even institutional contexts, although more durable than plans, are subject to change and therefore dependent on political will. So, 'because it adapts to shifting discursive environments, pure irreversibility does not exist' (Duineveld, Van Assche, and Beunen 2013, 18). Another way to make a lasting impact on planning is by, for example, the development of a planning doctrine that combines enduring notions about the principles of spatial organization and planning (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994). But here again 'institutional change through ideas, discourses and agencies can take place' (Buijs, Mattijssen, and Arts 2014, 677). Doctrinal development can follow different patterns (Korthals Altes 1992; Faludi 1999; Roodbol-Mekkes, Van der Valk, and Korthals Altes 2012). Take, for example, a doctrine that has remained stable for a long time and changes eventually as the result of a revolution, through which one principle of spatial organization is replaced by another. In such cases a large green area in a metropolitan landscape which has an important role in this principle of spatial organization may be divested of its green status. Another example is a doctrine which gradually changes over time. A doctrine is a set of notions held by a planning community but this planning community develops as time progresses and so does the doctrine.

The archetypal example of a planning doctrine is the doctrine around the 'Randstad/Green Heart complex of ideas' (Van der Wusten and Faludi 1992, 20), which has been developed in the Netherlands since the 1950s (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994; Van der Valk 2002). Moreover, the Green Heart of Holland (Figure 1) is one of the big concepts in the planning literature (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994) and has been hailed as a promising alternative to green belts (Hall 1988, first edition 1966; Kühn 2003). Policies in the Green Heart have been effective (Koomen, Dekkers, and Van Dijk
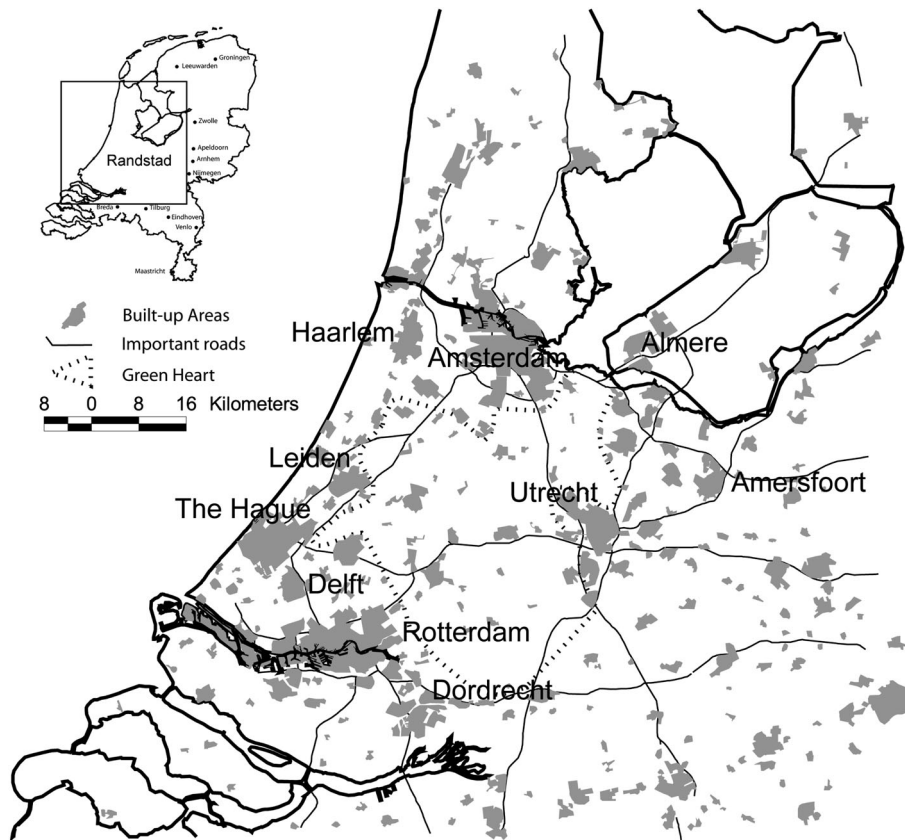
Figure 1. Green Heart.

2008): they have delivered less population growth and a lower gross regional product compared with the urban rim of the Randstad (Manshanden et al. 2014; Berkers 2015). Hence, they have succeeded in steering economic development in other directions.

However, the planning discourse in the Netherlands is changing. The Green Heart is being contested in Dutch planning. The government has prioritized its planning activities, and, as a result, there is no longer a place for a national landscape such as the Green Heart (Figure 1) in national planning policies. The province of Zuid-Holland, in which a large part of the Green Heart is located, has recently adopted a new structural vision and spatial by-law which accords no role to the Green Heart in development control.

Zuid-Holland, with cities such as Rotterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Delft and Dordrecht, is both the most populated and the most densely populated province in the Netherlands. It is also home to a thriving community of greenhouse gardeners, who have built large greenhouses on many fields and made a deep visual impact on the landscape (Korthals Altes and Van Rij 2013; Wagtendonk and Vermaat 2014). Zuid-Holland is therefore regarded as the province with a high landscape degradation (Veeneklaas, Donders, and Salverda 2006; Lola Landscape Architects 2008; Wagtendonk and Vermaat 2014).

This paper uses the Green Heart as a case study to reflect on the use of rules versus ideas in strategic landscape protection in metropolitan areas. It provides in this way more insight about the ways in which long-term protection of landscapes can be established and the ways and different roles that rules and ideas have in this. It is a novel development that the Green Heart is abolished as formal policy category in the province of Zuid-Holland. The idea of the Green Heart as centre of the

'Greenheart Metropolis' (Burke 1966) is, however, still alive. Analysing the development of the Green Heart provides so insights in different relationships between rules and ideas over time. This analysis will be done by applying the conceptual apparatus of the planning doctrine (Section 2). One relevant factor is that planning doctrine has been acknowledged as a concept that explains planning success without the existence of a formal land-use planning programme. What happens to such a doctrine if the core concepts are discarded? Section 3 explains the three stages of the Green Heart. The first two stages (Sections 3.1 and 3.2) are discussed on the basis of existing literature. The last – current – stage (Section 3.3) is analysed with the aid of primary planning sources, that is, the formal planning documents that are published on the government portal *ruimelijkeplannen.nl*. The results regarding the relationship between the principle of spatial organization in a planning doctrine and formal land-use planning are discussed in Section 4.

2. The Green Heart and Dutch planning doctrine

The Green Heart is an important concept within the principle of spatial organization in the Dutch national planning doctrine. A planning doctrine combines enduring notions about spatial organiz-ation and planning principles (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994). The concept of a planning doctrine emerged from a reflection on Dutch planning practice in which it served 'as an explanation for the unmistakable success of Dutch national planning' (Van der Valk 1991, 32) although there were no methodologically sound plans. If plans are outdated or deficient the 'doctrine simply takes over' (Faludi 2000, 311) and, as planners often live with imperfect plans, the 'absence of a planning doc-trine may be a reason for failure' (Faludi 2000, 314).

The metaphor of the Green Heart is the eye-catcher in Dutch planning doctrine. It is precisely because the Randstad has a Green Heart that it can profile itself as a 'green metropolis' (Van der Valk and Faludi 1997, 58) or even a 'Greenheart Metropolis' (Burke 1966). As such it has attracted the attention of many scholars, including Hall (1988, first edition 1966) in his analytical work on The World Cities.

Although spatial organization is the most catchy principle (the framing figure Faludi 1996) in a planning doctrine, it is not the only principle. There are also principles about the preparation, form and implementation of plans. Planning is not only a world of ideas, but it also relates to planners and those who interact with them. Hence, planning doctrine embraces a planning subject, a planning community, planning education, and the way planners and other players in the planning network relate to one another (Korthals Altes 1992; Roodbol-Mekkes, Van der Valk, and Korthals Altes 2012). The analysis of changes in a planning doctrine therefore involves more than one dimension.

Originally, the idea of doctrinal change was largely inspired by Kuhn's (1962) ideas on paradigm shift in the development of science. Consequently, it was thought that alternative planning doctrines are incommensurable and that change would have to occur through a revolution and not through a step-by-step transition (Alexander and Faludi 1990). Inspired by Lakatos (1974), a theory emerged that a planning doctrine had to have an unchangeable common core (Alexander 1993), which – in the planning perspective – was the principle of spatial organization. The only way that this core could be replaced by another was by a revolutionary change of doctrine (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994, 245).

This idea has been contested by juxtaposing a model of evolutionary change against a model of revolutionary change (Korthals Altes 1992, 1995). Doctrinal development can move through various patterns whereby revolutionary change is not inevitable (Faludi 1999). Moreover, planning is not a science and even planners are claiming less and less 'that planning is primarily a scientific enterprise' (Throgmorton 1996, 53) in which they 'should act like a scientific planner' (Throgmorton 1996, 53). So, the dynamics of science may differ from the dynamics of planning doctrine. Planning is not a quest for truth in which a complex set of interrelated theories is used to explain certain phenomena.

Faludi and Van der Valk have been further inspired by military doctrine as 'a social process invol-ving clashes between notions of warfare and the groups which hold them' (1994, 7). An important

difference, though, is that military doctrines are official and formally adopted (De Goede and De Weger 2008), and are therefore rules that are in force. The Netherlands Defence Doctrine defines military doctrine as 'the formal expression of military thinking, valid for a particular period of time' (Ministry of Defence 2013, 12). Military doctrine is officially adopted as a common frame of reference to be

> … used by all commanders in the planning and execution of military operations. This precludes the need for extensive explanations and discussions at critical moments […]. Yet doctrine is certainly neither dogma nor a set of rules; it must always be applied with common sense. (Ministry of Defence 2013, 12)

Military doctrine works not only within the hierarchical structure of a state and its army, but also in the emerging practice of joint and multinational operations. 'Unité de doctrine' (Ministry of Defence 2013, 12) ensures unity of opinion. So doctrine is a formal way of framing military operations.

The idea of a common frame of reference may fit in with what a planning doctrine does. However, just as planning is not a scientific activity, neither is it a military activity in which, for example, a planning authority aims to reclaim urban and regional landscapes from the disorderly powers of societal and economic development. A military doctrine functions within a context of command and control and is even formulated on that very basis (Ministry of Defence 2012). This does not apply to a planning doctrine. Players in a planning context cannot be positioned in a single hierarchical tree of command and control. On the basis of Argyris and Schön's (1981) distinction between 'espoused theories' and 'theories in use' and the distinction between 'espoused plans' and 'plans in use' (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994, 241), a military doctrine can be considered an espoused doctrine that becomes a doctrine in use through mechanisms of command and control (compare Faludi and Korthals Altes 1994). Authorities adopt such doctrines as they find it more efficient to steer a hierarchical organization in a volatile context by doctrine than by specific commands.

A planning doctrine is, just like a military doctrine, common frame of reference that promotes swift decision-making and an understanding of decisions taken by others and thus promotes joint action. In a way, doctrines are an alternative to strategic plans, which 'serve as a guideline and source of information for subsequent decision-making' (Mastop and Faludi 1997, 821). Such an investment in future decision-making (see also Coenen 1998; Korthals Altes 2006) may relate to the coordination of action by many players (Faludi 2000). In contrast with military doctrine and formal strategic plans, a planning doctrine is a doctrine in use as evidenced, at least, by the doctrines that have been analysed in planning literature such as those in Cardiff (Coop and Thomas 2007), the Czech Republic (Maier 1998), Denmark (Vangnby and Jensen 2002), Israel (Shachar 1998; Hershkowitz 2010), the Netherlands (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994; Roodbol-Mekkes, Van der Valk, and Korthals Altes 2012), Quebec (Boisvert 2010), Serbia (Nedović-Budić, Djordjević, and Dabović 2011) and Sweden (Persson 2013; Petersson-Forsberg 2014). Just as a plan in use 'is not the plan as written on paper, but a plan that is reconstructed each and every time decision-makers and their critics refer to it' (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994, 412), a planning doctrine can be revealed in practice but not adopted by a planning authority. However, an understanding within the planning community may be codified in plans or regulations. A principle of spatial organization can be promoted by a formal plan. Planning principles may be codified in planning law, but this raises the question as to what happens to a planning doctrine if this formal position is changed. If, for example, the Dutch planning authorities decide to do away with their Green Heart policy, would that be the end of the Green Heart?

3. The Green Heart as a national land-use category

There are three stages of development in the Green Heart in terms of planning regulation. The distinction between stage 1 (a strategic planning concept) and stage 2 (linked to land-use regulation) is based on Faludi and Van der Valk (1994) and Van der Valk and Faludi (1997). Stage 3 is the novel situation in which the link to land-use regulation is broken.

3.1. Green Heart stage 1: a strategic planning concept

The concept of the Green Heart was presented in the report by the Working Commission for the Western Netherlands in 1956 and became a central strategic planning spearhead in the principle of spatial organization in the Dutch planning doctrine (Van der Valk 1991; Faludi and Van der Valk 1994; Van der Valk and Faludi 1997). The central position of such a 'green' metaphor fitted in with a more general movement in which strategic planning evolved as a 'quest for open space … out of discontent with spatial development' (Van der Heiden 1989, 38). Originally, this metaphor of a 'beating heart' that brings life to the surrounding cities, although embraced by the relevant policy documents, was not operationalized in the form of land-use regulations (Zonneveld 2007). However, 'Dutch national spatial planning policy operates in fairly subtle ways' (Zonneveld 2007, 665). The provinces were the 'lynchpin' (Faludi and Van der Valk 1994) in these policies.

As there was consensus between the national planning authority and the provinces about the importance of retaining the Green Heart, judicial measures to compel the provinces to prevent urban sprawl into the area were not required. It was however necessary to provide an alternative for suburban growth. This took the form of growth centres in the 1970s, which were generally located on the outside of the Randstad, whereas the Green Heart was located in the inside. The step from a growth-centre policy to a compact-city policy made no impact on the Green Heart, it merely redirected the urban sprawl from new towns to existing built-up areas, or their immediate surroundings.

It was in this period that Faludi (1985) put forward the idea that the success of Dutch planning was attributable to the planning doctrine around the concept of a Green Heart, as a 'substitute' (Faludi 1987, 132) for formal planning. So, ideas were a substitute for rules.

3.2. Green Heart stage 2: linked to local land-use regulation

The position of the Green Heart changed in 1990, when the Dutch government decided to draw a 'firm' (Van der Valk and Faludi 1997, 62) demarcation line around it. At this moment, the Green Heart was no longer a 'strategic concept', but was 'fixed in space' (Faludi 2000, 316), which was criticized as the last bulwark of an old way of thinking (Van der Cammen 1991), endorsed by 'drawing lines of defence' (Zonneveld 2007, 667).

The legal definition of the Green Heart, as suggested by the government in 1990, was part of a so-called key planning decision (*planologische kernbeslissing*) in the Fourth Report Extra, which was discussed by both Chambers of Parliament and came into force after its publication in 1994 (Korthals Altes 1995). This key planning decision defined the boundaries of the Green Heart and indicated that it would be subject to a 'restrictive policy', which basically meant that urban land use would be curtailed. It further indicated that the restrictive policy would be more stringently enforced in the Green Heart than elsewhere.

The provinces of Zuid-Holland, Noord-Holland and Utrecht were asked to adopt a 'contour policy' (Healey 2004, 53). The key planning decision indicated that they were supposed to adapt, prior to March 1995, a revised regional plan to define an 'outermost building boundary' (*uiterste bebouwings-contour* VROM 1993, 55) for every built-up area, that is, every town, village and hamlet (see Figure 2). This 'contour' had to take account of the capacity of existing local land-use plans. So, no urban extension in the Green Heart was operationalized that greenfield development beyond the current plans was not allowed. Although the minister initially wanted no greenfield development at all, he soon learned that, given the generous planning compensation legislation in the Netherlands (Hobma 2010), this would be unaffordable. Some specific provisions were created for greenhouse development, which (except for the Boskoop tree-nursery complex) would no longer be allowed in the Green Heart (see also Korthals Altes and Van Rij 2013).

Accordingly, the Green Heart policy entailed a twofold definition of land-use regimes: first, the Green Heart as a bigger area including existing centres, and secondly, the contours around these centres, which defined the ultimate reach of open land take in the Green Heart.
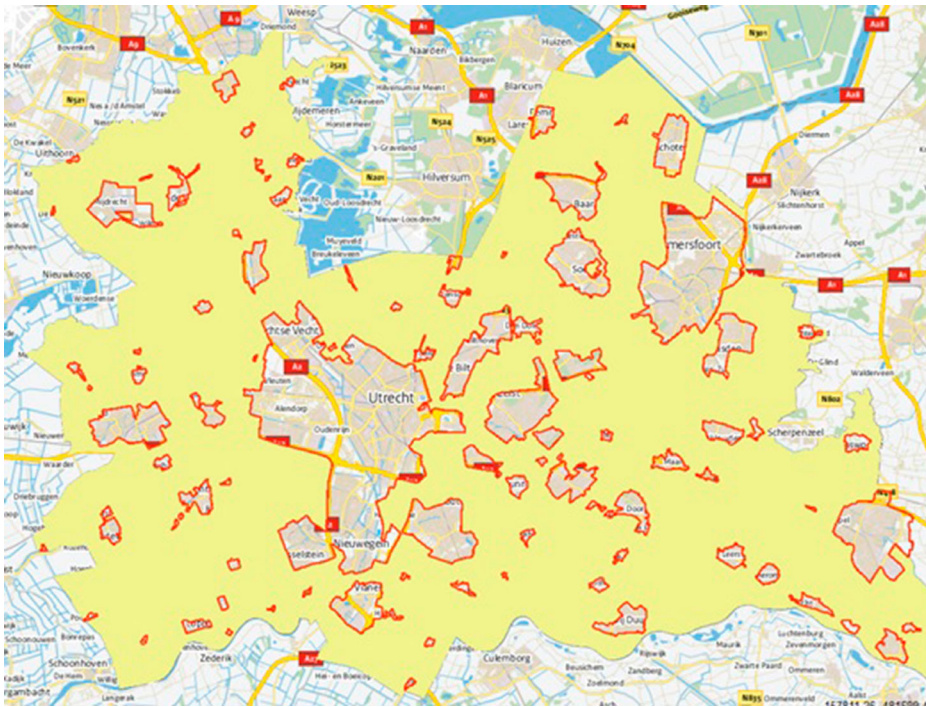
Figure 2. Current 'contours' in the province of Utrecht (Provincie Utrecht 2013).

One of the issues was the enforcement of plans. The national planning inspectorate concluded that enforcement was inadequate in many local authorities in the Green Heart of Zuid-Holland, for example, the enforcement of the spontaneous reuse of a former agricultural stable for an urban function. These practices were often legalized in a new plan (VROM 2006).

The Fourth Report Extra also marked the start of the politicization of the Green Heart. One of the main Dutch parties (VVD, centre-right) proposed a motion (TK 1991b), which was subsequently rejected (TK 1991a), against the precise demarcation of the boundaries of the Green Heart and voted later against the key planning decision, because of the stringent urban concentration policies, claiming that they were 'too rigid and too imperious' (TK 1992, 5994). Consequently, the Green Heart became part of the political debate – which was not the case when it was a strategic planning concept.

The political discussion hinged upon a more stringent or a decentralized Green Heart policy. Both happened. At the start, steps were taken to carve the contours in stone in a draft Fifth National Policy Document (National Spatial Planning Agency 2001). The minister proposed a regime which strait-jacketed provinces into formulating contours, which could not be changed without ministerial consent. The contour principle became 'one of the most fiercely debated issues in spatial planning' (Zonneveld 2007, 670). In 2002, there was a change of government in the Netherlands and a VVD minister took office. This resulted in a more relaxed policy in which contours ceased to be a matter of national policy and the Green Heart was designated as a national landscape (VROM, LNV, VenW, and EZ 2004). This designation meant that development was allowed, provided the core landscape qualities were conserved or strengthened. Furthermore, building capacity would not be sanctioned if it exceeded the internal demand in the area. In practice, however, the provinces in the Green Heart all continued with their contour policies.

In this stage, the attempt to protect the Green Heart using rules did not last as setting stringent rules came hand-in-hand with opposition to these rules. At provincial level, rules have been established to protect the Green Heart and the idea of a Green Heart was part of national policies.

3.3. Green Heart stage 3: no Green Heart in the planning policies of Zuid-Holland

In October 2010, a Cabinet took office which was soon presented by the parties on the left 'as the most right-wing government the Netherlands had seen since the Second World War' (Buijs, Mattijssen, and Arts 2014, 679). The incoming VVD minister presented a draft Structural Vision on Infrastructure and Spatial Development (MI&M 2011) to Parliament in which she indicated that planning would confine itself to a strict selection of priorities. The Green Heart was not one of them. The Green Heart was consequently scrapped as a national strategic planning concept. This did not change after a new, much more centrally positioned coalition Cabinet took over, and the same minister was made responsible for planning in 2012 (MI&M 2012). In contrast to the past (as analysed by De Montis 2014) landscape protection ceased to be a matter for national planning. This new coalition government did, however, declare that sustainable urban development was a matter of national importance (MI&M 2012) and amended the Spatial Planning Decree (Section 3.1.6. paragraph 2) in such a way that any local land-use plan to enable a new urban development had to, first, show that the proposed urban development met an actual regional need; secondly, explain how far this need could be met within the existing urban areas in the region and, thirdly, describe how the need for urban development was being met by locations that were accessible by multiple modes of transport if it could not be accommodated in the existing urban area of the region.

Recent case law shows that such a description is not just a formal requirement, that is, you can tick the box if the authority provides a document called a 'description of regional need' (compare Beunen, van der Knaap, and Biesbroek 2009), but the content must be sound. If the number of dwellings proposed for a region exceeds the regional population forecasts, a court may nullify the plan (Raad van State 2015). It should be noted that Dutch plans are not drafted for an indefinite period, but with a 10-year horizon. Developments due to take place in more than 10 years' time must wait for the next revision of the local land-use plan. So, the regional need must be imminent and not for a distant future.

Another step was taken by the province of Zuid-Holland, the province with the largest share of the Green Heart. Based on the idea that the minister had not decentralized the Green Heart policy by defining strict national interests (see also Roodbol-Mekkes and van den Brink 2015), but had actually deregulated it, Zuid-Holland abolished the Green Heart at provincial level. It also abolished the contour policy by enacting an ordinance and structural vision at a meeting of the Provincial Council on 9 July 2014 (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2014a). So, although a Green Heart policy still exists in the provinces of Utrecht and Noord-Holland, it has 'disappeared' in Zuid-Holland. This is hardly conducive to a concerted approach to the Green Heart.

However, the end of the Green Heart as a policy does not necessarily imply a 'Green Heart attack' (as formulated by Faludi and Van der Valk 1994, 248) for the province. It merely implies that a location inside or outside the Green Heart will not influence a feasibility study for a development. The province still pursues a general urban containment policy, which is certainly important as the quality of green areas is at risk in Zuid-Holland. It has introduced three categories of protection for rural areas and specified three kinds of development that may affect them (see Table 1), viz., Category 1, areas of exceptional quality; Category 2, areas with specific values and Category 3, rural areas. An amendment to assign the entire Green Heart to Category 1 failed to win sufficient support in the Provincial Council. One councillor stated that although she supported the protection of the Green Heart, her party was opposed to the amendment as it would not only protect the Green Heart, but also effectively lock it up for all development (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2014a).

Table 1. Action framework for spatial quality (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2014c).

	Category 3 Rural area	Category 2 Specific values	Category 1 Exceptional quality
Fits into place	Yes	Needs approval	Needs approval
Adjustment	Needs approval	Needs approval	No
Transformation	Needs approval	No	No

The province also distinguishes three kinds of developments (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2014b, Section 2.2.1; 2014c): new developments that fit into the nature and scale of the area; new developments that do not fit into the nature and scale of the area, but which deliver a quality of place that is at least equal (with adjustment) through careful positioning of the developments and, if necessary, compensatory place-making measures; and new developments that do not fit into the nature and scale of the area, but which are (as transformations) only allowed if the quality of place is guaranteed by an integrated design, which also takes account of phasing in space and time and, if necessary, extra place-making measures.

For all measures there is a 'quality card' which, as part of the structural vision, describes the current qualities of the area and indicates the kind of developments that fit into the respective frame of reference.

The implications of this Action Framework for spatial quality (Table 1) cannot be adequately assessed without considering the changing role of the province in Dutch spatial planning (Van Straalen, van den Brink, and van Tatenhove 2016). Changes that the Dutch government made to the law on physical planning in 2008 were expected to have a major impact on the operational practices of the provinces (Needham 2005; Evers 2015). In the past, all local land-use plans had to be approved by the Provincial Executive on the basis of regional plans and other decisions by the Provincial Council. This power was abolished, which means that municipal land-use plans now come into force without provincial approval, and provinces are empowered to formulate legally binding guidelines in a planning ordinance, which must be adhered to by local authorities. Provinces must develop a strategic non-binding vision and they can oblige local authorities to change their land-use plans and even make a land-use plan themselves to accommodate provincial interests. In practice, however, provinces have managed to retain a reactive position towards major urban development by, for example, using prohibitions based on exceptions (Evers 2015). Apparently, the planning culture – or the planning principles which were used in the planning doctrine – was stronger than the determination of the legislator to change the relationships. The Action Framework for Spatial Quality is a case in point that illustrates the durable nature of these planning principles, that is, all major development needs approval by the Provincial Executive. Moreover, if transformations exceed three hectares, this approval can only be granted after consulting the Provincial Council. This need for approval is based on the use of complex criteria such as 'scale of the area' and 'quality of place', which, in the case of transformations, must be guaranteed by 'integrated design'. The underlying idea is that a transformation will result in a new sense of place which needs to be designed carefully. This might give rise to the idea that areas for which a good design is available get priority over other areas. Alternatively, it may provide discretionary leeway to argue that a new design does not fit. It may also play a role in selecting a new location for development. The quality of place-making may become more important than the current quality of place.

The province also states in the vision that it aims to accommodate low-density high-end housing in a green setting, which almost by definition, does not fit in with existing urban areas. The Green Heart might be a prime location for this.

The Green Heart, as a whole, is not an area of exceptional quality and it has, according to the province, no specific value. So parts of the Green Heart (not all, because many areas are of exceptional quality or do have specific values) enjoy the same protection as any other rural area. In practice this protection may be even less than areas outside the Green Heart; locations inside the Green Heart, between various cities, are more likely to have multi-modal connections than locations outside. One good example is the Category 3 area between the city of Alphen aan den Rijn and Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, which is well connected by frequent high-quality public transport (Figure 3). Under the new rules, this could serve as an extension area if a regional need emerges that cannot be accommodated in current urban areas.

In Zuid-Holland there are no rules anymore that protected the Green Heart. The Green Heart is, however, still an idea that may have an impact on provincial council debates on transformations of green areas, but there are no specific legal proceedings in place.
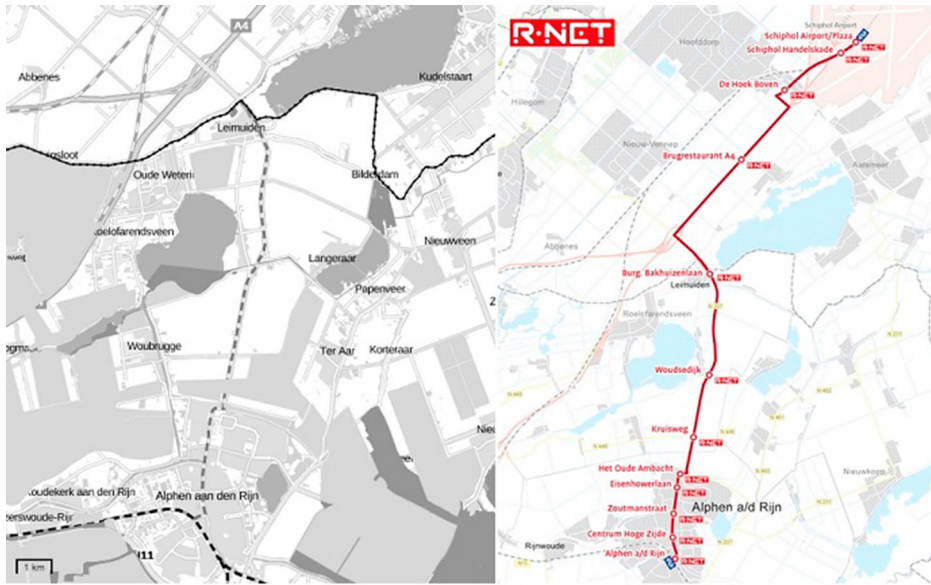
Figure 3. Protected landscape categories (non-shaded areas are Category 3) North of Alphen aan den Rijn (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2014c) and high-quality public transport connections through the Green Heart (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2015).

4. Discussion and conclusion

There is no quick fix for the challenge of long-term landscape protection. Even the Green Heart, one of the most powerful metaphors in planning thought, does not have an enduring position in official landscape policy.

The Green Heart is no longer part of national and provincial planning policy in the province of Zuid-Holland, the province with the largest share of the Green Heart. This marks a third stage in the development of the Green Heart. In the first stage, the Green Heart served as a frame of reference which explained the success of Dutch planning, despite the absence of formal policy. In the second stage, government authorities started taking steps to impose a specific form on the Green Heart. This resulted in disagreements. In the first stage, it was possible to simultaneously support the idea of the Green Heart and development at the edge of a city close to the Green Heart. In the second stage, this was no longer feasible as strict demarcation boundaries resulted in more polarized positions. In the short term, this meant that certain developments could be presented clearly as a breach of Green Heart policies and could be stopped by exercising legal powers. The polarization, however, turned the Green Heart into a party political matter and made it sensitive to political change. The third stage was marked by a political outcome, which enabled the abolition of this policy, which was considered too stringent.

This step from the second to the third stage is relevant in relation to debates on the importance of zoning for landscape protection in regional plans. According to a recent survey by Gurrutxaga et al. (2015), European experts and Spanish researchers have much more confidence than Spanish practitioners in the use of zoning at regional level to protect landscape quality. Half of these practitioners believe that it is more appropriate to have a combination of local zoning and 'certain regulations, without zoning' (Gurrutxaga et al. 2015, 825) at regional level. The Dutch experience shows that these practitioners might be right and the European experts and Spanish landscape researchers might be wrong. A combination of local zoning with more malleable regulations at regional level may be more capable of stopping unwanted development on the one hand, and of securing long-term political support on the other.

Rules can be changed but they need authorities that are willing and able to enforce them. So, rules need to be supported to be effective. The idea of a binding zoning obligation at regional level fits into a 'Mediterranean approach' (Kang and Korthals Altes 2015, 237) to planning which is criticized by Janin Rivolin (2008) as a conformance-based approach without sufficient emphasis on public accountability. In such a Mediterranean approach ' … the responsiveness of local planners towards local needs and demands is constrained by binding higher-level plans and in which non-conforming development may become prevalent to meet these needs and demands outside the planning system' (Kang and Korthals Altes 2015, 237). After all ' … it is crucial that a level of flexibility be inserted in local plans so that carefully articulated aims […] can be met together within each city's unique socio-ecological context' (Ives and Kelly 2015, 11). Flexible land-use planning practices are often recommended which involve 'periodic re-examinations of policies in terms of land supply' (Siedentop, Fina, and Krehl 2016, 73). In the Dutch context, regulating the Green Heart did not result in a lot of informal development (although some non-conforming urban uses of former agricultural buildings did not face enforcement), but in the abolition of the Green Heart as leading principle of spatial organization.

The abolition of the Green Heart as a national planning concept has had an impact on the planning in the province of Zuid-Holland where the Green Heart as an area of special significance has also been abolished. Based on the criteria of the new ordinance, certain locations in the Green Heart appear to be set for urban development. They have no more protection than any other sites outside a built-up area. Locations inside a ring of cities have better multi-modal connections than locations on the outside.

The question remains whether urban development will get its way. The planning doctrine may be stronger than spatial policy, and council members may be critical of the quality of the 'integrated design' presented for this area and turn it down. After all, a planning doctrine is not a military doctrine that operates in a context of command and control. A planning doctrine is a set of guiding and durable ideas that serve as a frame of reference for the planning community. It still may work as a frame, even if it is not adopted formally. This even holds for the member of the Provincial Executive responsible for planning, who chairs the Steering Committee for the Green Heart National Landscape and who endorsed the importance of the Green Heart (Bom-Lemstra 2015), although landscape protection is only one of the important challenges for the area (Pieterse et al. 2015). Plans for transformation in the Green Heart still need provincial approval and the province can use its discretionary powers to ensure that the quality of the plans fit in with the quality of the landscape. Current developments are giving a relatively positive account of the development of the Green Heart (Berkers 2015).

The case study of the Green Heart not only shows that durable landscape protection is based on rules and regulations that stop pending development and can be regulated locally, but that it is also necessary for the quality of such an area to be accepted and for people to be willing to rethink and reconceptualize the policy. A planning doctrine that is open to doctrinal development may help with this. Landscape protection at strategic level might be better safeguarded if new majorities have the space to search for new interpretations of a principle of spatial organization in a way that allows them to support it, instead of interpretations being fixed by stringent rules at a strategic level, which may result in alienation between landscape protection and political majorities over time.

Disclosure statement

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