Regional integrative territorial strategies in regional development and governance: a closer look at the Dutch MIRT territorial agenda[1]

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Abstract

Metropolises and regions are increasingly competing economically with each other. Public investment is often used to improve the competitive position of these metropolises and regions. In which programmes and projects should the public sector invest to contribute to this aim? This paper discusses the use of a regional integrative territorial strategy to underpin national government investment decisions. We focus on the Randstad (Netherlands) as one of the regions in which governments at different tiers aim at making the region a European economic top region. An important issue is how to arrive at integrative policies in an increasingly fragmented policy environment. Evidence is drawn from analysing three cases within the context of the long-term national government investment programme on infrastructure and territorial development, in short: MIRT. The MIRT programme asks for developing regional territorial agendas in order to provide a strategic framework to assess which projects should be taken up. The agendas are drawn up cooperatively by central and lower tier governments in each region. The territorial agendas provide insight why projects are being pursued and how they contribute to the integrated development of an area. In terms of findings we observe amongst others that the MIRT programme creates an institutional context which enables governmental stakeholders to deal rather effectively with the fragmented governance situation in their part of the Randstad. It is also effective in relating strategy and vision to the concrete implementation of projects and investment.

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1. Introduction

In a globalising economy, territories – and not just firms – increasingly compete with each other. The issue of territorial competitiveness is of growing importance for regional development policy. Metropolises and regions are amongst these economically competing territories. Reasons for competition are to attract private investment and to define a productive role within the international division of labour (Camagni, 2002).

Where there was once financial support by national governments for national industrial firms, this has shifted to public financial support for cities or regions to increase their competitive power (Crouch & Le Galès, 2012). Governments at different levels try to improve conditions for private investment for example by improving the local attractiveness as the living and working environment and the accessibility of the territory. An overriding question becomes then in which programmes and projects the public sector should invest to contribute to this aim. In this respect Crouch and Le Galès (2012) sketch the dilemma of the public sector to focus on already strong territories or to balance investment between favoured and less-favoured territories. This paper discusses the use of a regional integrative territorial strategy to underpin national government investment decisions.

Governance of metropolises and regions has become increasingly fragmented over the course of years as government itself has become a multi-actor system. Different tiers of government each have their own territorial strategies and responsibilities which ideally should be tuned into an integrated territorial vision, development and governance at regional level. Moreover the inclusion of numerous non-governmental actors in processes of policy-making and policy-implementation has important implications for the territories being the object of such processes. Traditionally clearly defined 'hard spaces', based on the geographical perimeters of administrations, have been the focus of integrative strategy making. Instead governance often leads to the emergence of 'soft spaces' in terms of their organizational fabric. Such spaces also tend to have fuzzy boundaries (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009). Their basis is not rooted in government-induced jurisdiction-administrative ordering of a country, but lies in their recognition as places for future development activities by networks composed of both government and private stakeholders.

The increasing fragmentation of government and inclusion of non-governmental actors called for a search for the 'right' territorial organisation of government especially in urban areas. Hooghe and Marks (2003) came up with a distinction between two basic types or models of governance, simply labelled multi-level governance Type I and Type II:

- *Multi-level governance Type I*: describes durable jurisdictions with nonintersecting memberships at a limited number of levels which are general-purpose.
- *Multi-level governance Type II*: is composed of task-specialised jurisdictions. This results in a complex, fluid, patchwork of innumerable, overlapping jurisdictions centred around particular tasks or policy problems.

This distinction is relevant in order to analyse and characterise the actor and stakeholder setting around regional integrative strategy making processes, i.e. the governance networks. Multi-level governance Type I is mainly an affair between different layers of government and thus reserved for those cases which are driven by government bodies, without further coordination between government bodies at the same level. Because governance Type II is centred around concrete policy issues and tasks, it is likely that also non-governmental actors play a role.

As we look at integrative policies theoretical notions on how policy integration can be viewed become relevant. The desire to integrate policy across different sectoral planning domains such as economic development, transport, housing, retail development is not new. Over the years there are many complaints that government departments do not communicate, or that policy actions are contradictory (Peters, 1998). In fact "no suggestion for reform is more common than 'we need more coordination'" (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). Thus while planning systems vary greatly across Europe (Davies et al., 1989; Newman & Thornley, 1996; CEC, 1997), most countries employ mechanisms to seek policy integration amongst different sectors and different levels of governance. There are different levels and different forms of policy integration. We will discuss these at the end of this paper when reflecting on the empirical evidence.

In this paper we focus on the Randstad (Netherlands) as one of the regions in which governments at different tiers aim at making the region a European economic top region. An important issue is how to arrive at integrative strategies in an increasingly fragmented policy environment. Evidence is drawn from analysing three cases of regional strategy making within the context of the long-term national government investment programme on infrastructure and territorial development, in short: MIRT. We studied documents and interviewed key persons in the process making of the three territorial agendas in the Randstad.

2. The ambition for the Randstad

The Randstad (Figure 1) is the object of strategic spatial planning and visioning for more than half a century. Its origins lie in a 1958 advisory report to the national government. The Randstad approach as it was advocated in this report became officially accepted in the 1960, as the very first national policy strategy on spatial planning. The main reason was the growing concern that urban expansion would engulf the whole western part of the Netherlands, forming one huge conurbation (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1990 in: Dieleman et al., 1999). The 1966 second national policy strategy on spatial planning included an ambition to divert population and employment from the crowded western part of the country to other parts of the country. Within the Randstad itself the policy of concentrated deconcentration by subsidising housing development at selected locations became a cornerstone of Dutch spatial planning.

Figure 1 The Randstad
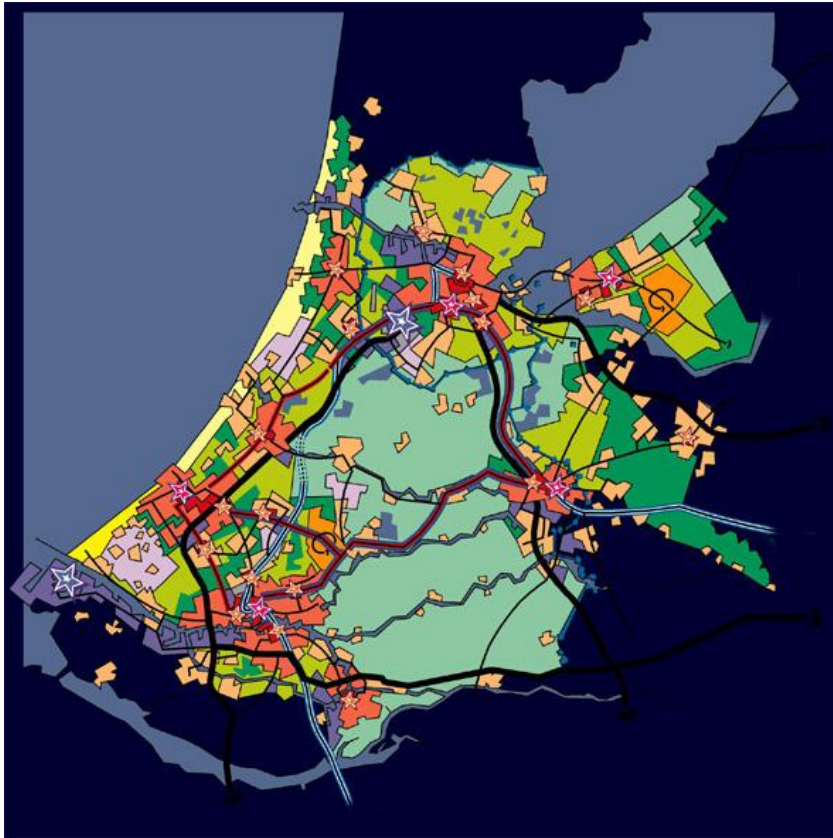
Source: Ministerie van VROM, 2008

In the course of the 1980s, policy shifted towards urban regeneration as the old urban cores faced a decline and urban development changed track. Government focussed on urban renewal and housing sites in and near the major cities in the Randstad. At the same time focus shifted from transfer of employment to remote areas in the Netherlands to promoting the Randstad as an economic top region in Europe. The National Spatial Strategy (*Nota Ruimte*; Ministry of VROM et al., 2004) focused on joining economy, urbanisation and infrastructure. Public investment thus turned more to infrastructure and public transport. The procedure to grant money to major infrastructure projects is handled by the national government. Throughout the years a more refined method has been applied to determine which projects and programmes are to be financed.

Since 1999 infrastructure projects financed by the national government were included in an annex to the Infrastructure Fund in the yearly national government budget. This annex was called the MIT project book in which MIT stands for Long-Term Programme for Infrastructure and Transportation (*Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur en Transport*). In 2008 this programme was broadened to MIRT in which the R stands for Territory (*Ruimte* in Dutch). Reason was a better tuning of accessibility and territory. Since the late 1990s infrastructure planning came up as a policy arena alongside the spatial planning policy arena. It even appeared to surpass the latter one (NSCGP, 1999; Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000).

The government decision to shift from MIT to MIRT can also be seen as an attempt to involve and integrate these two policy arenas more closely.

The procedure through which projects are financed in the MIRT is based on consultation and deliberation between regional and national governments. The MIRT is an implementation instrument; it links budgets with projects (De Jonge, 2011). It contains national government investment in projects and programmes of two ministries: (1) Infrastructure and Environment and (2) Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. The MIRT project book is an overview of all territorial related programmes and projects in which the national government jointly participates with lower tier governments. The aim of the MIRT is to bring more coherence in investment in territory, economy, accessibility and quality of life. In doing so the government aims at reinforcing the cooperation between both central departments and between central and lower tier government.

We will elaborate on the instrument used, i.e. the MIRT territorial agenda, to provide a strategic framework to assess which projects governance should finance in the MIRT project book. Marshall (2009) concludes that there is an awareness of the problem of departmentalism, silo mentalities, separate communities in the Netherlands. The territorial agenda is one of the attempts to tackle these issues. Marshall indicates that efforts as the MIRT to gain a productive interrelationship with infrastructure planning are critical for the effectiveness of spatial planning. We looked into the three MIRT territorial agendas covering the Randstad to analyse the use of this integrative territorial strategy.

The MIRT territorial agenda
In the Randstad there is an abundance of integrative territorial strategies at the regional level. Most of these strategies are drawn up by provincial government – based upon their statutory planning competences – and by the urban regions around the four main Randstad cities. The MIRT territorial agenda is one of the integrative territorial strategies. It combines both horizontal (i.e. between different sectors) and vertical integration (i.e. between different tiers of government) and overall vision and investment programme.

In order to provide a strategic framework to assess which programmes and projects should be taken up, the national government asked eight regions to develop a territorial agenda. Together these regions cover the entire country. The agendas are drawn up cooperatively by central and lower tier government in each region. They constitute the underpinning with respect to content for potential new programmes and projects. They are meant to stimulate the coherence between the different policy fields and between national and regional policy. The agendas are agreed upon in multi-level government meetings and form the basis for the agenda of these meetings. The territorial agenda provides insight why programmes and project are being pursued and how they contribute to the integrated development of the area. An additional characteristic is that central and lower tier government share this vision.

The MIRT territorial agendas serve a confined goal – basis for decisions on public investment in particularly infrastructure – and are based on existing policy. Whereas this

new practice is still on-going and has not fully crystallised yet, it is possible already to deduce a few observations in terms of how these MIRT territorial agendas – positively and negatively – contribute to integrative regional strategy making and implementation.

Three agendas for the Randstad

Three of the in total eight territorial agendas are located in the Randstad: (1) South Wing/South Holland, (2) Northwest Netherlands and (3) Utrecht. The formulation process of the territorial agendas started by an umbrella document on the Randstad, called Glimpse on the Randstad (*Blik op de Randstad,* Randstad Urgent, 2009). It build upon the Randstad 2040 Structural Vision[2] (*Structuurvisie Randstad 2014*, Ministerie van VROM, 2008) and presents the ambitions for the Randstad, bundling them into the following four principles:

- Living in a safe, climate proof and green-blue delta
- Making quality by a stronger interconnection between green, blue and red (nature and agriculture, water and urban land uses)
- Reinforcing what is internationally strong
- Strong and sustainable cities and regional accessibility.

After the presentation of this umbrella document under the responsibility of the national government each of the regions in the Randstad formulated its own agenda in a joint collaboration of central and lower tier government. The national government was represented by the ministries of (1) Traffic and Water management, (2) Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (including the department of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration), (3) Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and (4) Economic Affairs[3]. A project team at national level with representatives from each ministry was coordinated by the representative of the ministry of Traffic and Water Management. No new policy was developed for the purpose of the agenda. There was an input from existing regional sectoral policy with a spatial component and relevant in the relation between national and regional government. The agendas were agreed upon in multi-level government meetings of central and lower tier government in November 2009 (Northwest Netherlands and Utrecht) and November 2010 (South Wing/South Holland) respectively. The regional statutory and non-statutory government actors of each MIRT territorial agenda are listed in Table 1. Voluntary and private stakeholders were not involved in putting together the vision as it was considered a government exercise for a joint vision. The elaboration of each agenda consisted of three phases: developing a vision, putting together a list of projects and prioritising these projects.

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[2] The Randstad 2040 Structural Vision is part of the government-wide programme, in which the national and provincial governments, municipalities and urban regions jointly tackle various issues in the Randstad. The aim of this programme is an economically strong Randstad. The Structural Vision sets the course for a long-term spatial development in terms of building and planning and relationship between spatial development and nature, leisure activities, education, health and labour market participation. This Vision is officially a national document, but its content was decided upon after elaborate deliberations with authorities within the Randstad at provincial and local levels.

[3] This was before a new Cabinet changed the number, names and responsibilities of ministries.

Table 1   Regional statutory and non-statutory government actors in the MIRT territorial agendas in the Randstad

MIRT territorial agenda	Regional statutory government actors	Regional non-statutory government actors
South Wing/South Holland	Province of South Holland and the municipalities The Hague and Rotterdam.	Urban regions of Haaglanden and Rotterdam and regions of Drechtsteden, Holland Rijnland and Midden-Holland.
Northwest Netherlands	Provinces of North Holland and Flevoland.	Urban region of Amsterdam.
Utrecht	Province of Utrecht and the municipalities of Utrecht, Amersfoort and Hilversum.	Urban region of Utrecht and the regions of Amersfoort and Gooi and Vecht.

The agreement upon the territorial agendas in each region was slightly different. The Agenda South Wing/South Holland was not agreed upon by the Provincial Executive and each municipal Mayor and Aldermen separately, but by the political supervising group in which all South Wing partners were represented. The one on Northwest Netherlands passed the regular process: executives at the different levels decided. At the provincial level the agenda also passed the council. In the case of Utrecht the document has not been made subject to approval by each of the municipal councils involved. The Amersfoort region decided not to consult all municipal councils, after all, they reasoned, the territorial agenda was based on existing policies. In this sense the official status of the document remains that of an agreement between the national government and lower tier public administrations, rather than an officially approved formal policy.

In the following sections we will address each of the three agendas in greater detail. We will focus on the actors involved, how they cooperated, the difficulties they had to overcome, the vertical and horizontal integration and the relation with existing policies.

3.   Territorial Agenda South Wing/South Holland
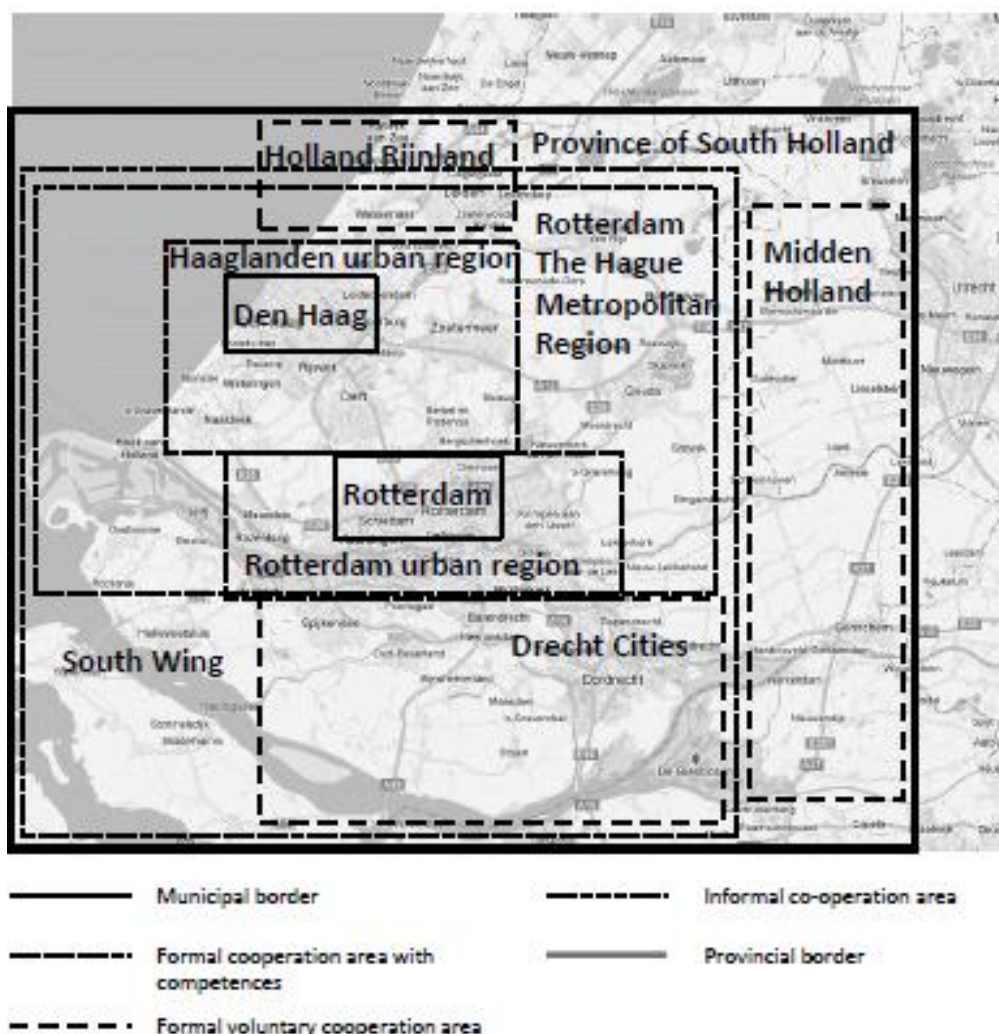
Introduction

The territory covered by the agenda is the entire province of South Holland, although it focuses on the South Wing as about 80-90% of the MIRT programmes and projects are located here. The South Wing is in effect the metropolitan area of Rotterdam and The Hague, including cities as Leiden, Delft, Dordrecht, Schiedam and Vlaardingen. The agenda considers the period 2010-2028. The five ambitions for territorial development are: (1) to promote economy, (2) to intensify cities, (3) to bring landscape close to home, (4) to improve accessibility and (5) to take on water and energy objectives. For each of these ambitions a vision is formulated based on sectoral policies. This results in a map with key projects and programmes and the time range in which they have to be implemented. It concludes with a top ten of projects and programmes, which reflects the importance the region attaches to an integrated approach.

Actor network responsible for the MIRT territorial agenda

Regional government is represented by the South Wing partners (Table 1). The South Wing partners are a mixture of statutory and non-statutory bodies, while some of these bodies are multi-actor systems in themselves. As the agenda does not cover only the South Wing, local authorities outside the South Wing were invited to join the project team. Two supervising groups were formed: one at the political level, one at the organisational level. In both supervising groups there was a representation from different sectors, although there was a strong focus on spatial planning. Chairperson of the political supervising group was the provincial spatial planning delegate.

Although this Agenda covers only one province, it is administratively complex due to the presence of two major cities, two major urban regions and some other regions (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Some argue that the South Wing Platform is potentially a strong platform, but that it lacks the will to cooperate. Research by Dijkink et al. (2001) and Minnesma and Rotmans (2007) confirms this. They concluded that no single agency, actor or person has a decisive influence in the South Wing. The province of South Holland is the natural 'puller' of the South Wing, but this actor is confronted with two main players – The

Figure 2 Actor situation MIRT Territorial Agenda South Wing/ South Holland

|		
——————— Municipal border		– – – – – – – Informal co-operation area
— · — · — · Formal cooperation area with competences		——————— Provincial border
— – — – — · Formal voluntary cooperation area		

Hague and Rotterdam – who like to keep planning in their own hands (Dijkink et al., 2001: 83). The resulting lack of joint orientation results in a complex process of prioritisation. In this setting the joint formulation of the agenda can be labelled as positive.

Policy integration

The statutory provincial structural vision was in the phase of being approved (July 2010) when the national government introduced the MIRT territorial agenda. The province was thus not very keen on starting this partly overlapping process. Provincial sectoral policy with spatial relevance was plugged into the territorial agenda process via the provincial project organisation. Remaining policy items were then filtered according to relevance in the relation between national and regional governments. As a result policy which was only relevant for lower tier governments were not included in the agenda. Policy for the Green Heart and the Southwest Delta areas which are located in more than one province, was put forward in the agenda via the provincial project groups. In the process to get from a joint vision to a prioritised list of projects, the phase of putting together a joint vision was felt to be the easiest part and the last phase of prioritisation of programmes and projects (see Figure 3) the most difficult. This is not surprising as it is often easier to reach agreement on the soft 'layers' of policy instead of harder issues as in which projects to invest.

Figure 3 Projects and programmes in the Territorial Agenda South Wing/South Holland
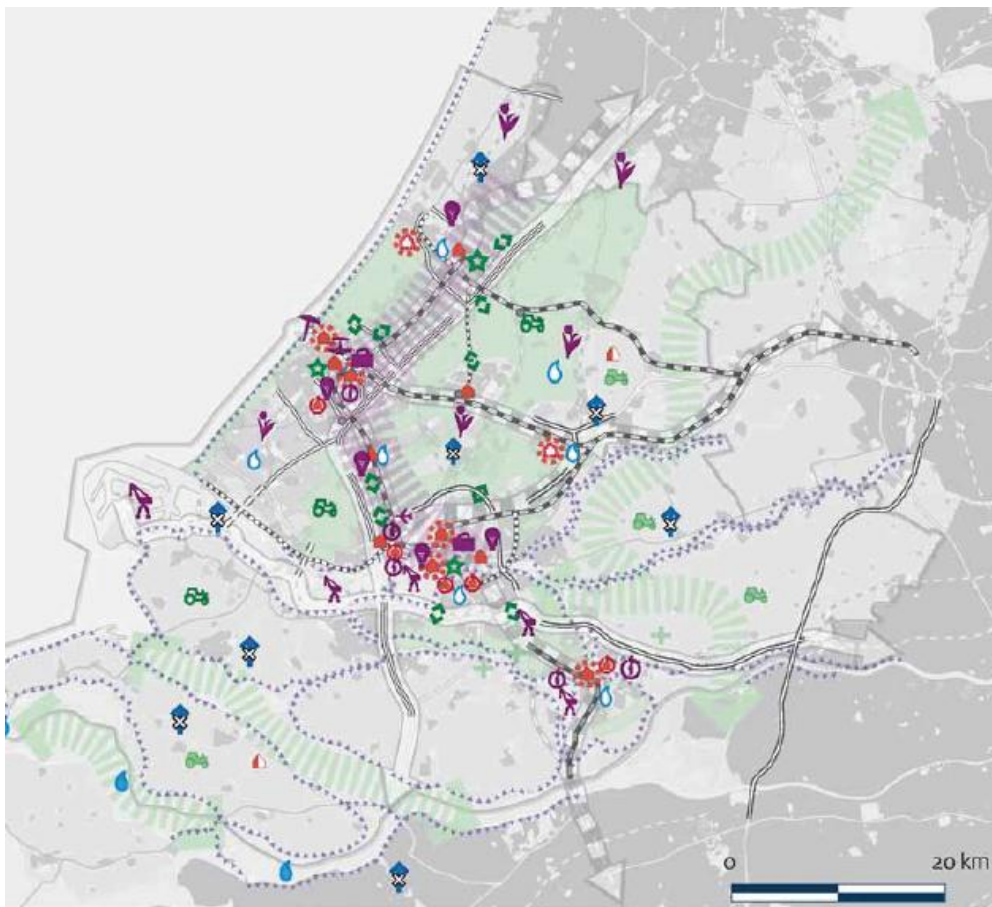
Source: Rijk and Zuidvleugelpartners, 2010

In the interviews provincial respondents brought up that they anticipated a more integrated way of prioritising programmes and projects by the national government after the change from MIT to MIRT and the introduction of the territorial agenda. The vision is the result of this more integrative approach and the list of projects presents many types – not only infrastructure – of projects and programmes. But afterwards they felt the focus nevertheless remained on infrastructure. Partly this is due to financial cutbacks and less focus on territorial, nature and landscape objectives and involvement in regional matters (such as regional economy) by the national government which was installed afterwards. Infrastructure therefore keeps major attention and resources.

4. Territorial Agenda Northwest Netherlands

Introduction

The territory of the agenda on Northwest Netherlands covers the provinces of North Holland and Flevoland, although the main focus is on the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. The main ambition is to strengthen the international competitiveness of the Randstad. The agenda covers the period until 2040. The vision is based on a document which had been elaborated shortly before the agenda formulation process started: Development Perspective North Wing 2040 (*Ontwikkelingsbeeld Noordvleugel 2040*[4]). Projects are elaborated on the basis of five challenges as they are called in the document: (1) economy, (2) urbanisation, (3) accessibility, (4) nature and landscape and (5) sustainability and climate proof. The four priority areas are Westflank, Zaan-IJ-oevers, Zuidas and Almere.

**Actor network responsible for the MIRT territorial agenda**

In general the regional government representation (Table 1) is comparable with that in the agenda of the South Wing/South Holland, although it is somewhat simpler in terms of actors and the multi-actor nature of some of them. This points to a higher level of cooperation compared to those in the South Wing and the Utrecht areas. Coordinator of regional government is the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area[5], in which the three formal representatives participate amongst others. But as this is a voluntary and informal government structure it was not chosen as the official author of the agenda. Lower tier government bodies in North Holland North – i.e. Province of North Holland, and the regions of Alkmaar, the northern part of North Holland and West Friesland – which are not represented in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area loosely cooperated to plug in relevant policy. In the province of Flevoland the local authorities of Almere and Lelystad participate

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[4] The provinces of North Holland and Flevoland, the urban region of Amsterdam and the local authorities of Amsterdam, Almere, Haarlem were the authors under the umbrella of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area.
[5] The two provinces, the urban region of Amsterdam and 36 local authorities cooperate under the name of Amsterdam Metropolitan Area.

in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. The remaining other local authorities were represented by the province (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Actor situation MIRT Territorial Agenda Northwest Netherlands
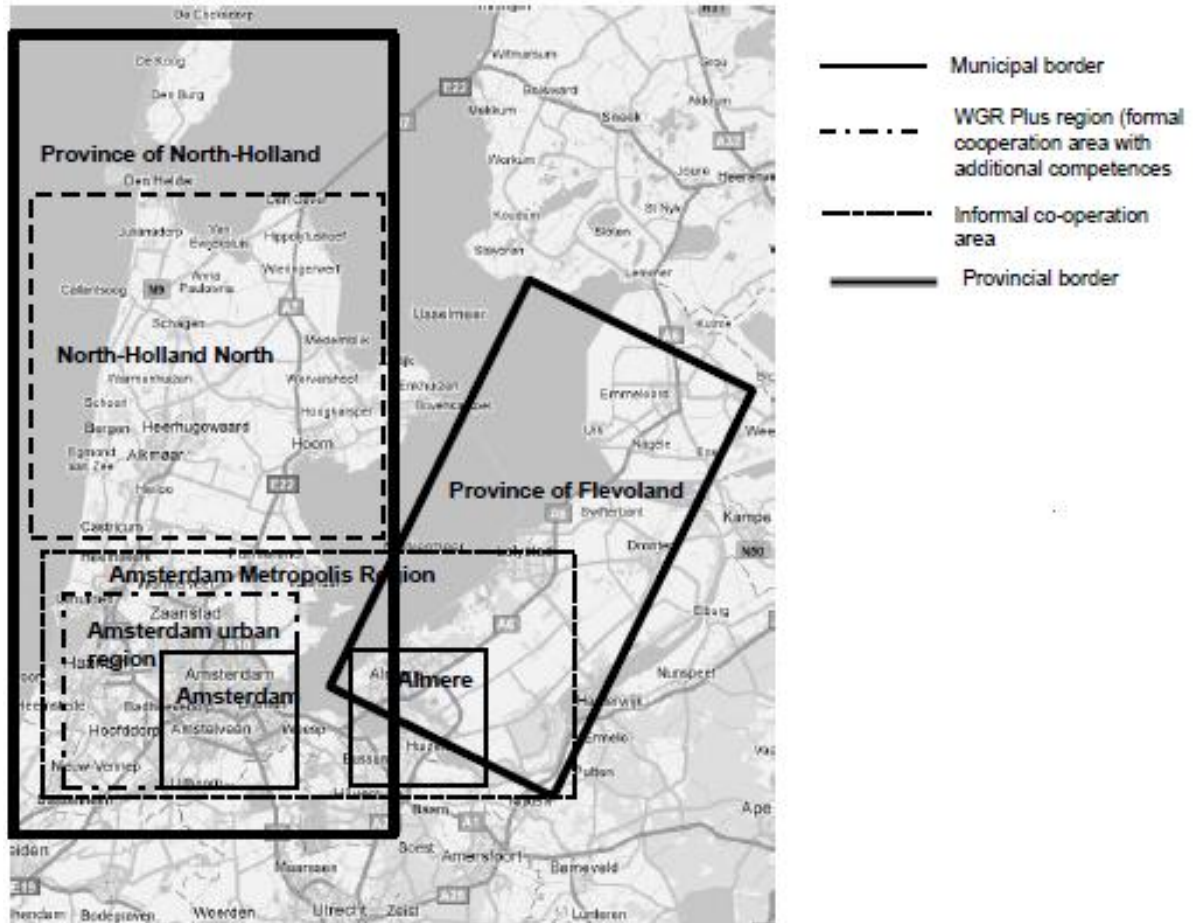
Policy integration

Central ambition for the Randstad is reinforcement of its international competitive position and this has been translated in the agenda of Northwest Netherlands. The policy document Development Perspective North Wing 2040 on which the agenda elaborates, presents the vision on the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area in the year 2040. The vision in this document was supplemented with the visions on the Northern part of the province of North Holland and the area of the province of Flevoland outside of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area by the two provinces on the basis of existing policy documents. In the case of Flevoland the statutory provincial Environmental Management Plan (*Provinciaal Omgevingsplan*) was used. The structural vision (*structuurvisie*) for the province of North Holland was approved in June 2010 and thus after the agenda was finalised. So in its wideness this agenda could well be compared with the previous one.

The themes which are addressed in the agenda are spatial economy, urbanisation, accessibility, nature and landscape, and sustainability and climate adaptation. The projects which are considered crucial in the relation between regional and national government are

shown in Figure 5. While respondents of the interviews on the territorial agenda of South Wing/South Holland indicated that there was a strong focus on spatial planning in the formulation of their territorial agenda, respondents on the territorial agenda of Northwest Netherlands replied that the focus on spatial planning was less dominant in the formulation of their agenda. It also has a dynamic character: yearly – or as often as needed – issues can be added or removed in consultation between national and regional governments.

Figure 5 Projects and programmes in the Territorial Agenda Northwest Netherlands

Source: Stadsregio Amsterdam et al., 2009

Discussion during the process of the agenda focussed on the way in which the agenda and the list of prioritised projects could be fleshed out. The national government aimed at a shortlist whereas the region saw this list as a breeding ground of potential projects in the long term. For this reason and also contrary to some other agendas not only national government projects have been listed, but also some regional ones for which the national government is not the main responsible, but nevertheless plays a role. As the region considered these projects essential for the integrated vision on the region, they have been included in the list of projects. Examples are large regional public transport and road projects which exceed the threshold of 225 million euros.

Input from existing policy documents in the MIRT territorial agenda
Figure 6 gives an overview of national and regional policy documents which were used as

basis for the agenda[6]. This figure shows that the policy environment in which territorial agendas are brought about is characterised by a very high density of plans, programmes and strategies. Roughly speaking they all have the ambition of policy integration albeit from different perspectives and angles. The MIRT agenda implies a kind of meta approach joining up different levels and policy domains. We will come back to this in the concluding section.

Within the area of the agenda there is another programme where national and regional government closely cooperate and agree upon: the National-regional government programme Amsterdam-Almere-Markermeer (RRAAM; *Rijk-regioprogramma Amsterdam-Almere-Markermeer*). It is considered as an elaboration of the territorial agenda. In this sense the Northwest Netherlands Agenda is the only agenda which is followed up by consecutive strategy making. While the ambitions of RRAAM are more operational, the actor network is much more inclusive: jointly with voluntary organisations, market parties and involved citizens national and regional government agree how the ambitions in the field of housing, transport and ecology may be realized in coherence. A decision by government is expected at the end of 2012.

Figure 6 Overview of policy documents feeding into the MIRT Territorial Agenda

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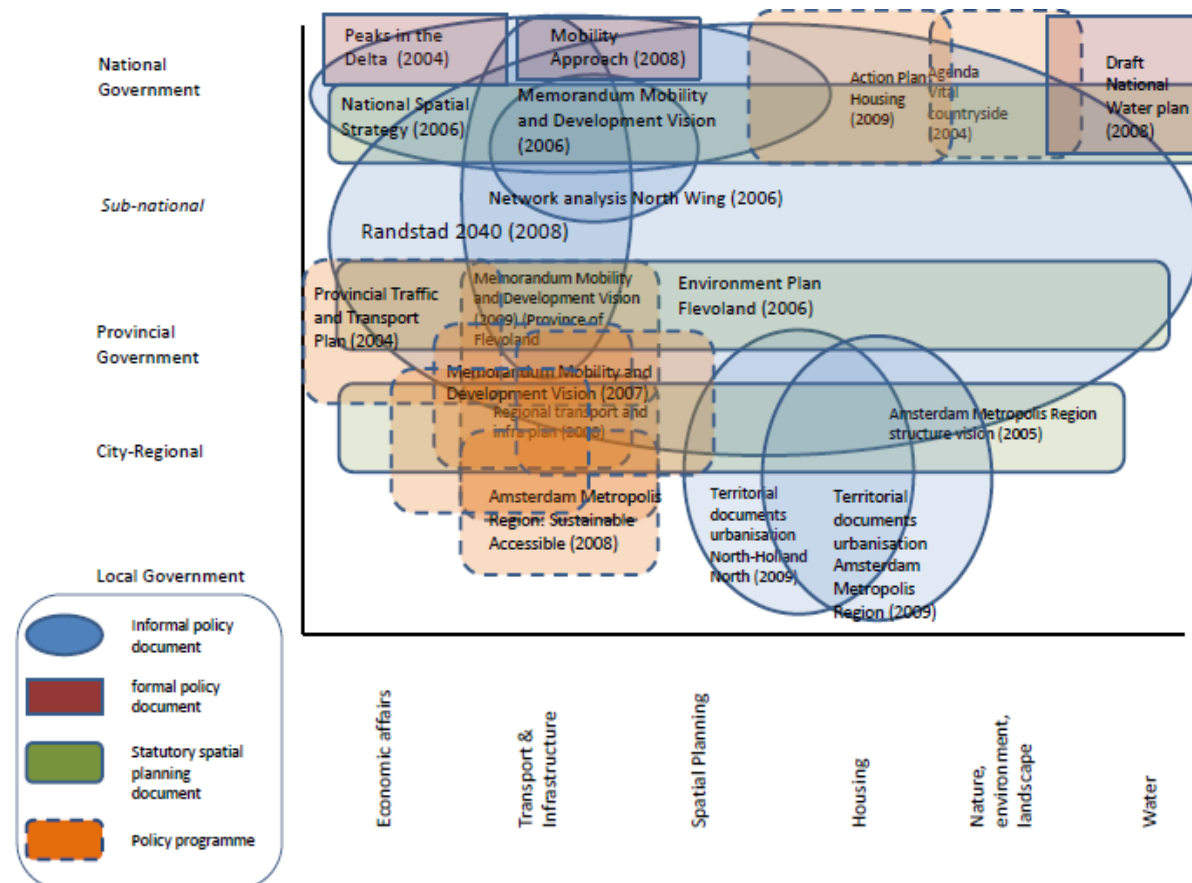
[6] Such a document overview was not included in the agenda for South Wing/South Holland and thus we were not able to draw a comparable figure. Against the background of the governance complexity in the South Wing we doubt whether such an image would have been much simpler.

5. Territorial Agenda Utrecht

Introduction

The vision of the Territorial Agenda Utrecht covers the province of Utrecht and mentions the Gooi and Vecht region – located in the province of North Holland – because of the strong thematic and functional interrelations with Utrecht. The vision thus territorially overlaps with the Territorial Agenda Northwest Netherlands. However, the part on MIRT projects the agenda only covers the province of Utrecht. According to the respondents of the interviews the borders of the area should be considered soft when speaking about the vision, but hard when speaking about the MIRT project list. The latter follows strict administrative boundaries for the simple reason that agreements have to be made between various tiers of government. The time horizon covered by the agenda is not explicitly mentioned.

The ambition is to strengthen the region's sustainable development and economic competitiveness by focusing on 1) housing and urban intensification, 2) improving accessibility and 3) investing in environmental and nature development. The two priority areas are the urban region of Utrecht and the Amersfoort region. Two other areas which are mentioned concern the western part of the province where Utrecht together with other provinces is focusing on the Green Heart and the south-eastern part of the province – Wageningen, Ede, Rhenen and Veenendaal – where it borders the province of Gelderland.

Actor network responsible for the MIRT territorial agenda

The representation of the lower tiers of government is included in Table 1. Both Hilversum and Gooi and Vecht region took a role on the side-line, because of their formal involvement in the Territorial Agenda Northwest Netherlands. Figure 7 provides an overview of the actor situation. Following the respondents of the interviews the writing process of Territorial Agenda Utrecht was a smooth affair, although getting from ambition to concrete projects turned out to be more difficult. Few – if any – issues stirred serious debate and stakeholders easily could reach consensus over the ambitions of the vision document. This is explained by referring to two policy development processes which took place in the years before and are now combined in the territorial agenda: the Development Vision 2015-2030 (*Ontwikkelingsvisie 2015-2030*) and the Utrecht Traffic and Transport Meeting (UVVB; *Utrecht Verkeer- en Vervoerberaad*). So the agenda could take profit from investment in previous policy processes.

The Development Vision 2015-2030 – agreed upon in 2009 by all relevant local and regional councils – concerns a strategy for housing development in the Utrecht province until 2030. It was written to answer the question posed in 2006 by the minister of housing and spatial planning to Utrecht how to cope with the future demand of 54.000 houses in the area. The vision is authored by the so-called NV Utrecht, which is composed of the same network of public stakeholders that later on drafted the territorial agenda, with the limitation that the NV Utrecht only involves spatial planning representatives. It has been in

the development of this vision that many stakeholders – public, private and voluntary – have been consulted. The resulting consensus and vision has been translated into the territorial agenda.

Figure 7 Actor situation MIRT Territorial Agenda Utrecht
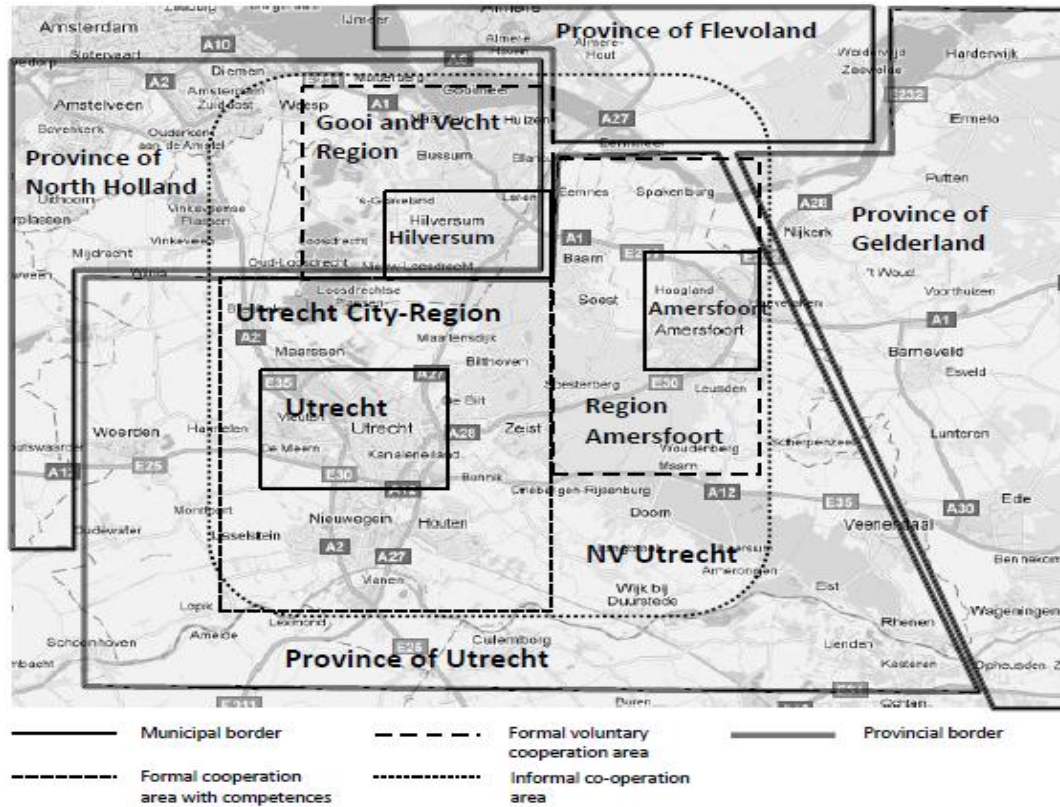
In terms of horizontal integration the origin of the NV Utrecht may be of interest in a sense that it only emerged as a reaction on the separation of Utrecht from the overall North Wing Cooperation (covering the area Haarlem-Amsterdam-Almere-Utrecht). Once this had occurred the urban region of Utrecht, the various local authorities and the province realized that they did not stood a chance of receiving any national funding, unless they jointly addressed the national level. Whereas the Utrecht stakeholders had always been unable to define common objectives while participating in the North Wing Cooperation, suddenly, when they were on their own they realized they had no other choice than to cooperate. In this cooperation the national government was regarded as the common enemy.

Similarly the Utrecht Traffic and Transport Meeting (UVBB) has been meeting as from mid-2000 in the context of the Randstad Urgent Programme (as elaboration of Randstad 2040 Structural Vision) and discusses issues related to congestion and accessibility in the region. The UVVB actor network fully overlaps with that of the territorial agenda except for the inclusion of the Eemland area and *Rijkswaterstaat* (the national infrastructure and water works executive) and the fact that stakeholders are only represented by their infrastructure representatives. Two main products of the UVVB include firstly an analysis of the infrastructural situation in the Utrecht area and, secondly, a multi-level government

agreement which allocates a rough 3 billion euro to infrastructure and transport development in the Utrecht region until 2020.

Basically it has been these two networks, the NV Utrecht and the UVVB, and their policies that have been merged into the territorial agenda. The agenda complements the resulting consensus with issues taken from the nature, landscape development and water policy domains. Both the NV Utrecht and the UVVB have been operating within the context of a national policy programme, i.e. Randstad Urgent. It has been via this band that vertical coordination with in particular the ministers of spatial planning and transport and infrastructure, has taken place. This experience too helped drafting of the territorial agenda.

Policy integration

In terms of horizontal and vertical coordination it can be noted that the vision in the agenda could be drafted fairly easily and quickly without much need for negotiation between stakeholders. According to our respondents this can be explained from the fact that the vision is both non-binding and exclusively based on existing policies. In other words, the territorial agenda does not aim to develop any new policies. With regard to developing the list of projects, it has been noted by respondents that this was and still is more difficult. In contrast to the vision part the list of projects has direct policy consequences in terms of priority, status and allocation of, in particular, national budgets. The list is subject to further development and negotiation during each multi-level government meeting. Here both on the vertical and the horizontal level negotiations take place. Although reference is made during these negotiations to the vision part of the agenda, and although there is quite broad consensus among the stakeholders, the project list remains politically sensitive. Yet, once agreement has been reached the list starts to function as a point of reference, with the agenda fading to the background. The list creates transparency as regards when which project will be addressed and how. It enables stakeholders to mutually remind each other about scheduled tasks and commitment. In so doing, and this is regarded the major added value of the MIRT territorial agenda and project list, it creates trust and rest between the stakeholders, vertically as well as horizontally.

So far it is not possible to distinguish between projects that have been more politically sensitive than others. Nor is it possible to indicate which topics have been more difficult to agree upon in the context of the vision part of the agenda. What is clear though is that in particular around border areas – in this case the provincial border with North Holland where the Gooi and Vecht region is located – it is more difficult to come to agreements. With regard to the Gooi and Vecht region Utrecht stakeholders asked for better public transport services, in particular to better connect Utrecht with Almere. This being the competence of the province of North Holland required additional effort and negotiation from the Utrecht stakeholders to convince the province of North Holland.

In terms of added value by means of mainly horizontal integration it can be noted that merging the various sectoral territorial claims, objectives and projects – in particular those developed by the UVVB and NV Utrecht – led to a more complete picture of both the

ambitions for the area and the measures taken to realise them. Before the territorial agenda such a picture did not exist. For some of the stakeholders concerned the exercise made clear that some ambitions would be difficult to reach with the current set of projects. They sensed a gap. At the same time the agenda also made clear how particular projects contributed to achieving multiple ambitions and objectives. This in turn raised support for these projects.

As regards vertical integration some interviewees noted that the territorial agendas and multi-level government meetings facilitated the trickling down of national discourse and helps new concepts and principles to be introduced in the regional debate. Figure 8 shows the official map from the Territorial Agenda Utrecht of 2009 with focus areas and projects and programmes.

**Figure 8 Projects and programmes in the Territorial Agenda Utrecht**
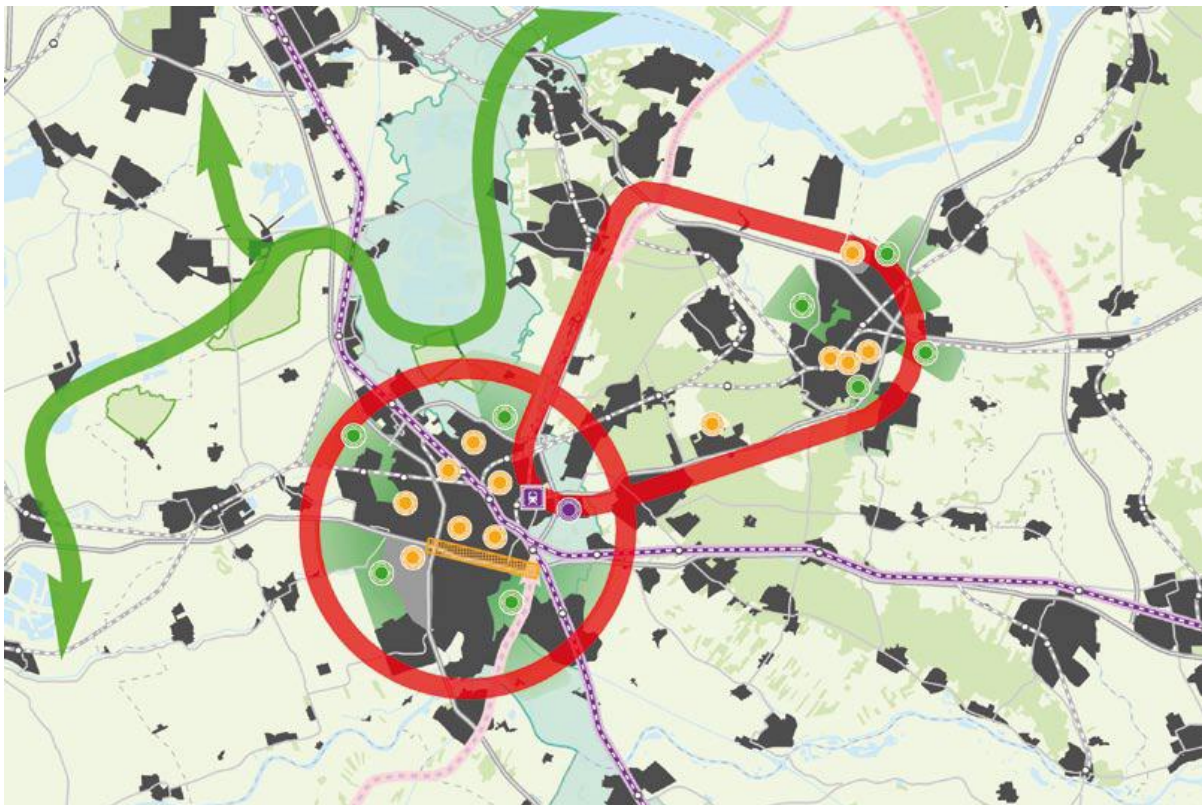
Source: Rijk et al., 2009

Input from existing policy documents in the MIRT territorial agenda

The Territorial Agenda Utrecht has been informed by a wide range of policy documents, including formal and informal policies, visions, strategies and programmes at all administrative levels and from a variety of policy sectors. But there is a relative absence of statutory spatial planning policy documents. Figure 9 attempts to provide full picture of the various policy documents, their sectoral scope and administrative involvement. The sheer overlap between documents and policies indicates at least two things: the governance

thickness in the area and – if anything – the need for some kind of coordination between the various policies which all have some kind of territorial component.

Figure 9 Overview of policy documents feeding into the MIRT Territorial Agenda Utrecht
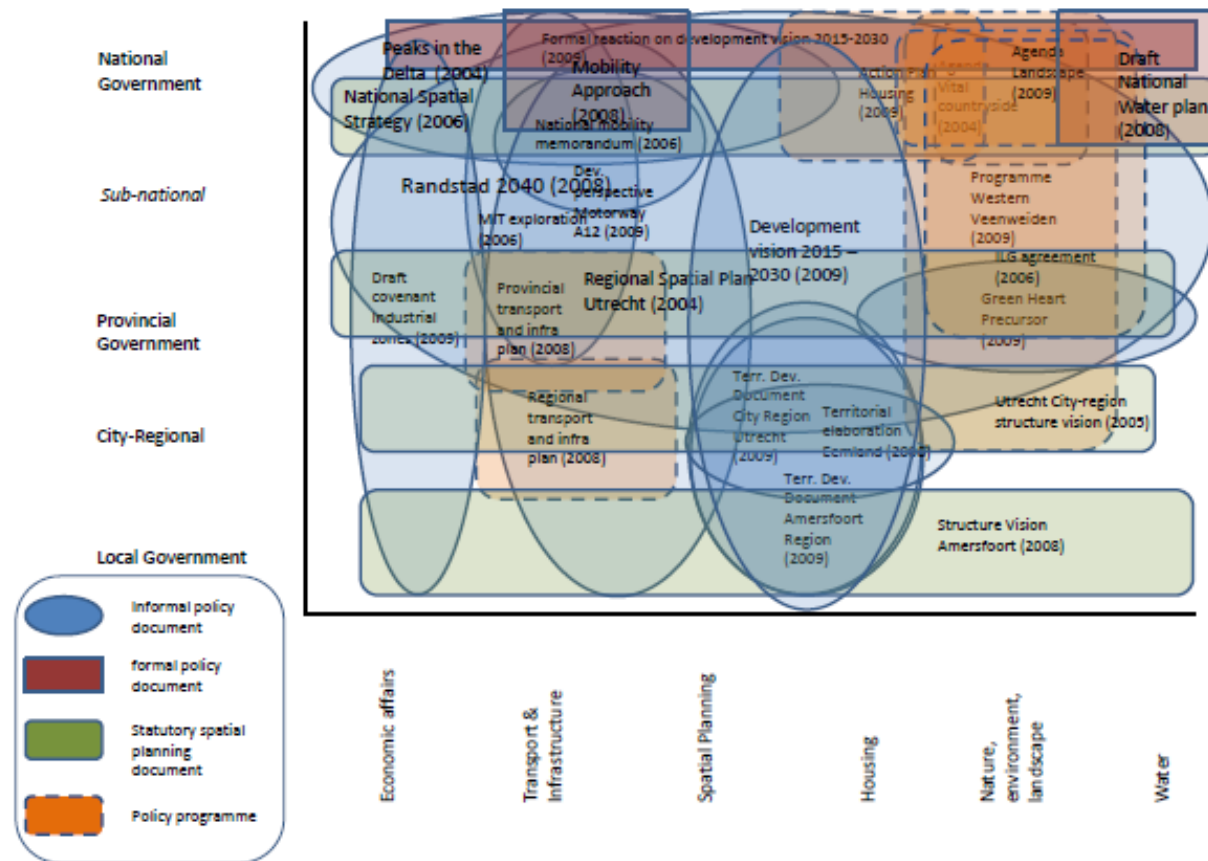
6. Conclusions

This paper discusses the use of a regional integrative territorial strategy to underpin national government investment decisions. We focus on the Randstad in the Netherlands as one of the regions in which governments at different tiers aim at making the region a European economic top region. The Randstad can be characterised by an abundance of regional integrative territorial strategies and by a complex government structure. We address the issue of how to arrive at integrative strategies in an increasingly fragmented policy environment by elaborating the notions of multi-level governance and policy integration. We looked at one example of such an integrative strategy – the MIRT territorial agenda – which serves as a means to come to balanced decisions about national territory related investment with a focus on infrastructure. This strategy had to take into account the existing structure of integrative strategy documents and government as it would be too difficult to tailor the existing situation to a new strategy.

Multi-level governance

Crucial in finding consensus on national investment decisions among different tiers of government is finding an effective way of dealing with the fragmented multi-level governance environment. Figures 2, 4 and 7 show the complexity of the government structure of the Randstad where a number of bodies and platforms with shared members have been created between the levels of the local authorities (around 80 in the Randstad area) and the (four) provinces to deal with shared policy issues. All these statutory and non-statutory bodies played a role in the making of the MIRT territorial agendas. The situation is such that not a single one could be excluded from the agenda processes because they all play a politically legitimized role in relation to the subjects (to be) covered by the territorial agendas (see Figures 6 and 9). One of the striking effects is that the largest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht as well as Amersfoort and Hilversum) are represented no less than three times: (1) directly, (2) via the statutory and (3) via the non-statutory cooperation body in which they participate. Seen from an international perspective the resulting complexity is not truly exceptional though (De Vries & Evers, 2008). Nevertheless this complexity is so high that involvement of actors from outside government (private and voluntary sectors) would increase the complexity too much, although in a sense it could make sense to link public investments with those made by semi-public or private investors. Such actors can only be included in processes and trajectories – like RRAAM – which are loosely connected to the MIRT territorial agenda processes.

The vision is grounded in existing policy documents which on their part involved a wider set of stakeholders, including voluntary and private ones. For that reason there was no focus in the territorial agendas on inclusiveness in the sense of involving other than government stakeholders. Another consequence of grounding the territorial agendas in existing policy documents is that there is less urgency for government executives and councils to formally agree upon these documents. Whereas the policy documents on which the agenda elaborates, were by and large all formally agreed, the agenda has no fully covered legitimacy.

We applied the typology on multi-level governance introduced by Hooghe and Marks (2003) to the actor network of the MIRT territorial agendas. Although we consider this as an example of governance type II, it also has characteristics of governance type I. Reasons to label it as type II are the complex patchwork of overlapping jurisdictions centred around the making of the territorial agenda. What relates it loosely to governance type I is that only government bodies are involved and no non-governmental bodies.

We also introduced the distinction between soft and hard spaces. We assume a governance type II situation to be closer related to soft spaces than a governance type I situation. When looking at the actor situation in the MIRT territorial agendas this merely boils down to a government related network, most of them related to administrative areas. The space covered by the vision in the agendas can either be soft (as in the Utrecht agenda) or hard, but when it comes to the prioritised list of projects it boils down to a hard space.

The explanation is that this list relates projects to a specific government being responsible for implementation and financing.

The making of a vision in general implies a kind of fuzziness which makes it easier to arrive at consensus when compared with the much harder characteristics of operational decision-making. It is politically more binding as the result of much clearer commitments. Scharpf (1993) suggests that some sort of pressure increases the level and type of integration of policies. The process from vision to prioritised projects is easier when an outside actor is able to superimpose a kind of framework on lower-level actors as a unified force. In the case of the MIRT territorial agenda the national government budget and the MIRT rules of the play can be seen as such. The MIRT agenda implies a kind of meta approach joining up different levels and policy domains. The purpose of meta-governance is to create some form of coordination, coherence and integration in the fragmented structures of network governance without completely undermining the autonomy, engagement and self-regulation in governance networks (Sørensen, 2006). The meta-governance regime was helpful in creating integrative joint visions by allowing full flexibility to the regional partners in terms of how they organised the process of developing the agenda. Given the governance thickness and the variety of formal and informal governance levels each with its own dynamics in each of the regions, the issuing of generic rules would have been counterproductive.

Policy integration
The second notion we look at in relation to the use of an integrative territorial strategy is policy integration. Literature differentiates between levels and forms of tuning different policy sectors. As regard to levels of integration Stead and Meijers (2009) distinguish between (1) policy integration, (2) policy coordination and (3) policy cooperation. Policy integration is regarded as the most far-reaching level of tuning policy sectors and involves management of cross-cutting issues in policy making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, and that do not correspond to institutional responsibilities of individual departments. It results in joint new policy. Coordination is concerned with outcomes and avoidance of either redundancies or gaps in services and results in adjusted and more efficient sectoral policies, while policy cooperation is mainly concerned with interorganisational cooperation and results in more efficient sectoral policies.

The MIRT territorial agendas – rather than developing new policies – only combine existing policies. It is exactly this condition ('no new policies') that makes it possible to develop the agendas and to give them added value over existing policies. From a governance perspective this condition makes it possible to involve only a limited amount of key stakeholders. From a substantive perspective it becomes easier to reach consensus with regard to the overall vision, objectives and ambition of the document. The necessity to get organised at regional level – for example to get national funds – sometimes creates a policy framework in which local and regional actors can be in reaching a minimum level of policy and actor integration. We thus position the agendas at the level of coordination.

A second distinction which can be made, is between the various forms of policy integration. De Boe et al. (1999) differentiate between 1) organizational, (2) sectoral and (3) territorial integration. Organizational integration emphasizes the actor perspective. Different forms are strategic integration (the alignment of linked strategies, programmes and initiatives) and operational integration (the alignment of related delivery mechanisms). In the case of the territorial agendas the actor network only involves governments and thus organizational integration narrows down to multi-level government or vertical integration (as in Figures 6 and 9). In the territorial agendas the emphasis is on vertical integration. The reason might be its gestation process is a multi-level government context. This vertical multi-level process materializes in the so-called project list that accompanies the MIRT territorial agendas. The result is transparency for all government levels as regards the timing of projects and their role in them. In so doing the MIRT territorial agenda and the accompanying list of projects create relative rest between the levels of government. This makes the MIRT territorial agendas rather unique in the Dutch context, as there are only very few integrative territorial strategies which combine the complete stretch from vision to actual projects on the short term.

Sectoral integration is about the 'joining up' of different public policy domains and their associated actors within a given territorial area. Two dimensions can be distinguished: 1) cross-sectoral integration between different policy areas which can operate at a range of different administrative and spatial scales; 2) stakeholder integration between public, private and voluntary sector agencies. The territorial agendas touch upon cross-sectoral integration which can be labelled as horizontal integration. Even though focus is on vertical integration in the agendas, horizontal integration does play a role. Driven by the contextual process architecture laid down in the so-called MIRT programme, the MIRT territorial agendas necessarily combine transport and infrastructure development objectives with spatial planning objectives.

The third and final form of integration – territorial integration – is about the integration of public policy domains between territories, often advocated in the case of positive or negative externalities of certain developments or in the case of so called 'intrinsic spatial relations': spatial structures or systems which cross administrative boundaries but to their nature cannot be easily split up in different parts. Although the administrative boundaries of each agenda are more or less defined at the start (at least for the prioritised projects), territorial integration plays a major role in tuning policies within the area.

The MIRT territorial agenda as an integrative strategy to underpin government investment decisions

How does the MIRT territorial agenda relate to the debate we started with on competing metropolises and regions? In the context of MIRT a deliberate choice has been made to use territory as a frame of integration. The ambition for the Randstad is to turn it into a European economic top region. This has been translated into the MIRT territorial agendas which thus have a spatial-economic focus as opposed to other countries – as the UK – where

regional integrative policies have a more socio-economic focus. Other choices could have been made as well when revising the former MIT programme. For example, the MIT programme, which initially only dealt with infrastructure provision, could also have been made more integrative along the line of economic development. The result would have been a MIET programme: Long Term infrastructure and Economic Development Programme. Not illogical given the close relationship between accessibility and economic development. Yet, for reasons we do not know, it has not been economic development but territory that has been chosen as integration frame. Or at least, this is how it currently works out. By including territory in the programme and by making the development of a territorial agenda mandatory the former MIT programme now has taken quite a different and new direction.

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