

Regional Design: Discretionary Approaches to Regional Planning in the Netherlands.

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ABSTRACT - Regional design is a practice that has in recent decades frequently been applied in spatial planning processes in The Netherlands. The making and use of spatial representations of plausible futures of regions was employed to refine physical implementation strategies and simultaneously, by reaching out for broad, sometimes public, attention, to acquire institutional capacity for planning. This paper examines whether, and if so how, regional design performs in planning processes. To identify performance, regional design is equated with discretion, a form of decision making that evolves in the context of guidelines for planning and is, when guidelines are indicative, exercised through the allocation of consent. The accountability (and control) of discretionary action is strongly influenced by the flexibility of planning frameworks. Based on these main notions, the paper develops a theoretical distinction of regional design practices and underpins this distinction by means of examples. Overall conclusions relate the performance of distinct practices with forms of control (theoretically defined, practically applied).

1. Introduction

Over recent decade, the Dutch national government has, as other governments in Europe, opened a variety of planning processes to the involvement of sub-national governments and private agencies. Incrementally it formalized development-led planning practices while maintaining its long tradition of plan-led approaches (Needham, 1988; Salet & Woltjer, 2009; Janssen-Jansen & Woltjer, 2010; Salet, 2006; Dammers et al., 2004). A new Spatial Planning Act, effective since 2008, approved the important role of plans in Dutch planning (both local land-use and indicative ones), but simultaneously facilitated their change through enhancing the ‘speed, clarity, consistency and predictability’ of the

ways how planning decisions are made (Needham, 2005, p. 328-329, p. 336). Legal reform has focused on the revision of procedures (Needham, 2005; Buitelaar & Sorel, 2010). Principle ideas about the content of planning, what to plan, were made issues in debates through the frequent revision of indicative planning frameworks in consecutively published planning reports.

Indicative planning frameworks and the conceptual ideas about spatial organisation they incorporate refer to analytically observable development trends, point at normative principles that are touched upon by these and deduct rules for planning in territories from dependencies among norms and trends. Other than statutory or legal frameworks, indicative ones unfold their power through resting on negotiated agreement about why, what and how to plan (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994, Roodbol-Mekkes *et al.*, 2012, Van Duinen, 2013) and their foundation on societal and institutional consent, which is changing over time, requires them to be malleable in episode (Van Duinen, 2013, Zonneveld,). Since 2000, in search of new distributions of responsibilities for planning, the Dutch national government provided four such indicative frameworks. That these became, at least in episodes, less imperative on “what should be done” and increasingly incorporated, through referring to multiple ideas about planning, suggestions on what pragmatically “could be done” (in the terminology of Tewdwr-Jones, 1999, p. 245 that we borrow from the UK context here) has changed the nature of these frameworks. While having been doctrinaire, ‘self-evident and beyond discussion’ (Roodbol-Mekkes *et al.*, 2012, p. 378, referring to Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994, p. 18) over decades, their flexibility increased. Their certainty was also weakened by the simple fact that frameworks were revised so often.

That Dutch indicative frameworks became more open to interpretations has enhanced the engagement of actors in regional planning (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; Teisman & Klijn, 2002; Salet, 2006) but also led to the emergence of distinct decision-making practices, among them a range that was commonly labelled ‘regional design’. Many plan actors, de-central governments, coalitions among these and coalitions among these and private agencies have favoured to respond to indicative plans, set out by the national government, through making plans themselves. Employing spatial representations of regions in argumentations about political priorities, territorial change and spatial transformation in lengthily collaborative processes, with the aid of professionals and at the attention of an often public audience, they engaged in the formulation of regional development strategies and projects, not only (and sometimes not at all) for the sake of their implementation but also, as we will argue in this paper, to purposefully exercise discretion: to distil ‘principles from practice’ (Booth, 2007, p. 139), allocate institutional capacity for principles and use proposals to either compromise existing rules set out in indicative frameworks or suggest new ones to influence revisions of frameworks yet to come.

In this paper we elaborate this preposition, that regional design is a discretionary planning practice, in more detail. By means of theoretical notions, we investigate how spatial representations, maps and plans, refer to different aspects of indicative planning frameworks, and how distinct combinations of references to analytical, political and territorial domains in design processes resemble purposeful, discretionary responses to indicative planning frameworks. More broadly the paper investigates the role of regional design in planning processes. Institutions pursue perceptions of space and time (Jessop, 2001). An equation of regional design practices, the production and use of such perceptions, with distinct discretionary actions is used to investigate the performance of regional design in the context of indicative planning frameworks on the one hand. On the other hand, this equation is used to reflect on how variations in the flexibility of planning frameworks rendered regional design proposals to be either a form of planning or not: to be an relevant interpretation of fact or an arbitrary fantasy; to be precedent, a case to be considered in future planning decisions. or an incident.

The main aim of this paper is to increase the accountability of a planning practice that has over recent years flourished in the shadow of statutory planning in the Netherlands: not outside legally defined values and norms, roles, territories and processes but challenging these through the formulation of development proposals in negotiations. The Dutch plan-led planning system is, in respect to systems in other European countries, seen to provide little room for discretion (Janssen-Jansen & Woltjer, 2010; others). Several authors (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; Needham, 2005; Janssen-Jansen & Woltjer, 2010) have however noted, that this view neglects intense informal collaboration on the construction and application of indicative plans, a pragmatic practice deliberately spared from formalisation in the new Spatial Planning Act (Needham, 2005). That regional design may be, in this context, a form of discretion (and therefore an object of control) is underpinned by the attention that the national government has given to practices, in the fashion of ‘meta-governance’ (Jessop, 2004, p.), through the provision of funding and expertise, through positioning the practice in formal planning protocols, through functioning as a ‘court of appeal’ (Booth, 2007, p.) and, more broadly, through advertising the practice among a national and international planning community. It is also underpinned by the increasing attention to distinct development in Dutch indicative plans. While until the late 1980s these frameworks have set out generally applicable principles for comprehensive planning, since then they have increasingly focused on setting out geographically confined development of national importance such as key projects, core areas and integrated area development. The ways how such units, at times broadly defined as a call for voluntary cooperation in distinct regions, at other times narrowly defined as cooperation around distinct (infrastructural) projects in areas, informed (and were informed by) the engagement of others in development remains, however, largely unclear.

The paper is structured in three main parts. In the first part its proposition (regional design is a discretionary planning practice) is underpinned by theoretical notions. Conclusions of this section detail the proposition by equating types of regional design practices with types of discretion. In the second part of the paper we use these notions to illustrate by means of examples how distinct regional design practices evolved in the context of indicative frameworks with differing degrees of flexibility. The four frameworks that have been set out by the Dutch national government to guide planning in the Dutch Randstad region since 2000 (and the one that preceded these frameworks, as a backdrop for analysis) are briefly analysed on their flexibility (comprehensiveness?). Regional design initiatives that emerged in the context of (the making) of these frameworks are examined on their references to frameworks and the way how these references have been rationally combined for the purpose of policy argumentation and discretion. The analysis of the flexibility of indicative frameworks is based on a review of publicly available policy documents (most importantly the national reports themselves) and abundant academic literature that is concerned about the nature and role of indicative frameworks in Dutch planning over time. The analysis of types of regional design practices is based on various written and drawn material including regional design products (maps and plans), jury reports and comments of policy makers and professionals on practices. The choice of examples of regional design practices is not arbitrary but was guided by the abundance of available documentary evidence. In the third, concluding part of the paper, the distinction of regional design practices is associated with forms of control (theoretically defined, practically applied).

2. Equating Regional Design and Discretion

2.1. Contextual remarks: governance, discretion and regional design

‘The evolution of cities is the largely unplanned and unintended outcome of more or less deliberate actions by many individuals and dispersed agencies searching to find a way out of the problems and circumstances they experience’ (Salet, et al., 2007, p.3). This statement counts as much for cities as it does for the evolution of regions: conglomerates of dependant places and activities, stretching across multiple and multi-scalar administrative boundaries and being shaped by the ‘the rapid

decentralization of economic activities; the increased mobility due to new transport technologies; the multiplicity of travel patterns; the fragmentation of spatial distribution of activities; the changes in household structure and lifestyle; and, the existence of complex cross-commuting (Davoudi, 2003, p.981).’ Despite the complexity of autonomous spatial developments at the regional scale and a broadly shared doubt (Boelens, 2006; Salet, 2007; Sager, 2009) about the efficiency and effectiveness of means to intervene in these, there is a continuing desire to guide development along the lines of common and collective interests through planning.

Over recent decades, a multitude of planning efforts at the level of the European Union and in regions thereof have under the header ‘spatial planning’ (Faludi, 2010; Schön, 2005; Waterhout, 2008; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010, Nadin, 2007; Nadin & Stead, 2008) been summarized to form a distinct group of approaches to regional, inter-regional and transnational development. In contrast to planning, which builds up upon a hierarchical and statutory system for the provision of public goods within predefined administrative boundaries, spatial planning starts off with shared, yet adaptable conceptual ideas about plausible futures of regions and deduces responsibilities and guidelines for planning from these. Frameworks are, through their resting on shared and desirable ‘world views’ (Jessop, 2001, p. 1232) to motivate engagement of actors across preconceived, formal boundaries and focus planning on areas that are evidently affected by spatial development instead. Since spatial planning relies on negotiated agreement on required action, it is seen to not only improve the provision of public goods but also the engagement of stakeholders in planning and thus a response to ‘... a relative decline of the role of the state, a growing involvement of nongovernmental actors in a range of state functions, the emergence of new forms of multi-agency partnerships and more flexible forms of networking at various spatial scales (Davoudi, 2008, p.63).’

The importance of consent underlying spatial planning and indicative planning frameworks more specifically, has focused attention on the modes of spatial planning, ways to construct and sustain agreement on guidelines with little formal status. Investigations into these modes have positioned spatial planning as an empirical and experimental approach to investigate new forms of (democratic) decision making, as an interactive process, open to the involvement of stakeholders, and driven by a normative perception of governance (Healey, 1999). In this perception government and governance are not contrasted. It is alternative rather since it replaces a statutory and stable configuration of plan actors with an adaptive relational network of participants in negotiations, including public authorities and planning officials, socially embedded and responding to calls for planning from above, below or beside. As Healey summarizes, spatial planning *is* a form of governance and concerned about ‘the mobilization of concepts of spatial organization with the ambition of accumulating sufficient allocative, authoritative and imaginative force to shape both the materialities and identities of particular places (Healey, 2006, p. 527).’

The role of indicative planning frameworks differ in planning systems: how and by whom guidelines are constructed, for whom and when they are binding and how they relate to statutory and legal planning varies strongly (Nadin & Stead, 2008). Whatever their role is, frameworks define at any moment of their construction and application ‘a temporary compromise between competing elements characteristic of any approach to planning or land-use control, not least between speed and comprehensiveness and between a desire to provide discretion and yet create certainty (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010, p. 809)’. Discretion is a form of decision making, generally concerned ‘about making choices between courses of action (Booth, 2007, p. 131)’. What distinguishes discretion from other decision-making is a reference to rules, predefined instructions for action. Discretion is an interpretation of rules with the purpose to bend them; a search for ‘leeway in the interpretation of fact and the application of precedent to particular cases (Booth, 2007, p. 129)’. Discretionary action investigates mutual dependencies among the certainty and flexibility that guidelines contain. If such

action seeks to refine rules, compromise them or suggest new ones through pointing at exemplary development becomes accountable in the context of planning frameworks that define not only what, how, who and when to plan but also, through the degree of detail to which rules are set out, the room for their interpretation.

Discretion is, in planning, usually related to formal rules defined by legal and statutory frameworks (Booth, 2007, Buitelaar & Sorel, 2010; others) but has also been associated with less imperative and more indicative guidelines that rest on the formation of agreement and consent (Booth, 2007; Tewdwr-Jones, 1999; Janssen-Jansen & Woltjer, 2010). In the context of indicative planning, complication is added though. The reliance on consent of both, the construction of guidelines and their interpretation, raises questions not only about who exercises discretion and who controls it, but also about forms of control. While discretion in the context of legal and statutory frameworks is controlled by highly accountable jurisdiction and administration, discretion in the context of indicative frameworks is both exercised and controlled by often loosely defined (look up Booth), 'other schemes of values' (Booth, 2007, p. 136, referring to Bell, 1992). The importance and constraints of guidelines are highlighted through political advocacy, administrative pragmatism and/or professional knowledge (Booth, 2007) and in the form of policy argumentation. Despite being contested because such argumentation is a complex and time-consuming endeavour, discretion in the context of indicative guidelines bore, in often experimental approaches and driven by the wish to motivate engagement of actors in planning and development, not only distinct modes of decision-making but also distinct forms of control.

Ways to influence discretion in the context of indicative planning frameworks are various. The desire to increase the certainty of such frameworks leads to procedural change, generally aiming at settling conflict and agreement early onward to avoid delay at later planning stages (sources). Dutch planning reforms have sustained the important role of indicative plans and have more strongly confined discretion through an formal allocation of such action to restricted, early planning phases (Needham, 2005; other). Jessop (2004) has noted that the destatization of planning in the context of governance produces forms of 'metagovernance', in which higher levels of government 'act as the primary organizer of the dialogue among policy communities', 'deploy (...) organizational intelligence and information', 'provide rules for participation', 'organize negotiations', serve as a 'court of appeal', among others mechanisms (Jessop, 2004, p. 13). In the Netherlands such ways to influence the interpretation of fact has a long tradition. They form, according to some authors (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; other) a main characteristic of Dutch planning, led to the emergence (and disappearance, see for example Lagendijk & Needham, 2012) of a multitude of policy institutes and have, also in recent legal change, been spared from formalization. Last not least, the content of indicative frameworks and the degree of detail to which it is defined is a form of control since it renders discretion accountable. In the Netherlands the wish to simultaneously create and respond to future development opportunities has sustained normative and persuasive agenda-setting approaches and core beliefs. It has, however, also led to strongly debated variations in the flexibility of indicative frameworks. Since 2000 Subsequent versions of indicative frameworks varied in the degree of detail to which normative goals were predefined, the detail of evidence with which the necessity for planning was supported and, last not least, the degree of detail to which responsibilities for planning were set out. In summary, and based on theoretical reflections on a decision-centered view of planning (Faludi, 1985, 1987), frameworks differed in the room for interpretation they provided through variations in prescriptions of 'externalities of the second order' (or: their comprehensiveness), at times encouraging political, professional and/or administrative engagement.

Remarks above are contextual. Resuming notions, discretionary action in the context of indicative planning frameworks is a form of decision making that aims at consensus and that is argumentative: it relies on political advocacy, administrative pragmatism and/or professional knowledge and responds

to rules set out in planning frameworks with the purpose to bend them. More importantly, discretionary action becomes accountable only in the context of planning frameworks: it is agreement on these that renders discretionary action to be an interpretation of fact or a case to be considered in planning decisions. The main object of this paper is regional design, a practice that has emerged in the Netherlands over the recent decade and that is concerned about the formulation of development proposals by means of spatial representations. Below it is described how such argumentation is carried out by means of spatial representations.

2.2. *Spatial Representations and Regional Design*

The most fundamental characteristic of regional design is, in respect to other collaborative spatial planning modes, the making and use of spatial images of regions. Authors such as Kunzmann (1996), Faludi (1996), Neuman (1996/2000), Dühr (2004, 2006), Zonneveld (2008), Thierstein & Förster (2008), Van Duinen (2004) and De Jonge (2009) acknowledge that planning images are powerful media in decision making processes on high levels of scale and in complex organisational settings. Amongst these authors there is agreement that their influence can be attributed to the fact that images are open for multiple interpretations and thus perform as ‘institution builders’, as Neuman (1996, p. 293) labels them.

Relating policy images, maps and plans, to institutions and interpretive planning approaches turns them, as Davoudi (2011, p. 437), referring to Fischler (1995) has noted, into spatial representations: ‘The term ‘representation’ differs from a positivist understanding of visualization as a communication system. It emphasizes the interdependence between: the symbolic structure that frame what is being said, written and shown during planning processes and the political structures that frame interactions during those.’ Representations, other than visualisations, incorporate references to broader frameworks and the making and use of spatial representations (as well as the reading of them in retrospect for the purpose of planning research) thus require an understanding of these frameworks. Several authors who have investigated spatial representations in the context of planning have deduced rationales of representations from their references to planning domains (Förster, 2009; Dühr, 2005; Van Duinen, 2004). Seen these notions in conjunctions, three main logics of representation in planning processes can be distinguished: an analytical, political, and organisational one.

When representations are used for *analytical reasoning*, a hypothesis on spatial development is under investigation and representations refer to (invariable) scientific knowledge. That spatial representations are used in reflections on what is observed in material settings is broadly recognized (Dühr, 2005, referring to Moll, 1991; Förster, 2009; Van Duinen, 2004). It can be noted that the use of representations in analytical reasoning can also produce conflict. The broad body of analytical knowledge that exists allows for variable references to this landscape of information (Davoudi, 2006) and may cause argumentations among experts.

The *political logic* of representations can, according to Förster (2009), be understood through theories from the field of political sciences, and evolves against the background of values and normative agenda’s. When spatial representations refer to values and norms, they are used to note and promote a perceived importance of specific planning objects or more general conceptual ideas about spatial organization. Many of such representations, frequently named visions, gained over recent years and in the context of spatial planning academic attention (Van Duinen, 2004; Dühr, 2004; Thierstein & Förster, 2008). Also Moll (1991) assigns representations that note ‘the objectives of a plan in its final form’ to an own category. He also notes that to understand the use of such representations, if they are either used to create awareness and attention or to prescribe action, requires not only the understanding of political circumstances but also the understanding of planning systems. Several authors suggest that representations that refer to the organization of planning are distinct.

The *organisational logic* of representations evolves against the background of organisational behaviour (Förster, 2009). Representations refer to roles, routines and working areas or more broadly aspects of planning systems and forms of territorial management. When representations refer to politics, what to plan (space or, if valued, place) is of interest. In their organisational dimension representations refer to how to plan, they show territories. The meanings of ‘space’ and ‘territory’ frequently overlap in theoretical reflections (Waterhout, 2008), but some authors have stressed a difference among them. The concept of space, when used in analysis, relates to questions about ‘how the spatial organization of our societies influences the economic, social and environmental performance (...)’ (Schön, 2005, p. 391); the concept of territories ‘relates to a concern with regional impacts and incidences of policies and the question of how specific local and regional entities (territories) are affected by those policies (p. 391)’. When representations refer to an organisational logic they are abstractions of territorial demarcations, no matter if they take the form of soft clouds, being constructed by governance arrangements with little formal planning power at hand or hard administrative boundaries projected upon regions by authorities with legal planning power.

Design, the production and use of spatial representations, is an argumentative practice, a process that is focused on change and improvement and evolves through synthesis-evaluation iterations, steps in which representations of solutions are explicated and comprehended, reflected upon and adapted (Rittel, 1987; Schönwandt & Grunau, 2003; Van Aken, 2005). This general notion on design, in conjunction with observations of logics of spatial representations that occur in planning processes, allows for the conclusion that regional design is a form of decision-making in which references to planning domains are explicated by means of spatial representations for the purpose of policy argumentation. A map or a plan may refer to a single domain; it may for example through referring to a scientific hypothesis, explicate analytical knowledge only. References may also be a comment on a planning domain, an interpretation of fact. Combinations of references may be internally consistent, a spatial representation (or a sequence of such) may combine references to scientific hypothesis, political goals and territories in a narrative, a story line (sources). Both roles become apparent only in the context of frameworks.

2.3. *Regional design in the context of indicative planning frameworks*

Indicative planning frameworks and the conceptual ideas about spatial organisation they incorporate rest on an agreement about evident development trends, normative principles and (deducted) guidelines for action. In the context of the Netherlands, the ways how such frameworks inform planning has received much attention. Elaborations of ‘planning doctrines’ (Faludi & Van der Valk, 1994; Korthals Altes, 1995, Priemus, 1996; Roodbol-Mekkes & Van der Valk, 2012) have focused on interrelations among enduring ideas about spatial organization and planning. An interest in interrelations among core beliefs and behaviour has motivated a distinction among the conformance and performance of plans in planning research, the latter being concerned about the quality of decision-making in the context of frameworks, defining a ‘field of choice’ that renders argument accountable (Mastorp & Faludi, 1997; Faludi & Korthals Altes, 1994). Investigations of ‘planning concepts’ (Van Duinen, 2004; 2013; Zonneveld, 1991; Zonneveld and Verwest, 2005), in principle ideas about spatial organisation pursued by actors and institutions (Zonneveld and Verwest, 2005), have shown how such ideas have framed planning, not only through setting out shared and persuasive normative agendas but also, in processes of claiming, through ordering coalitions and their actions by such ideas and thus perform in planning (Van Duinen, 2004; 2013). Davoudi (2003) has, analysing the use of the concept ‘polycentrism’ in European spatial planning, noted that planning concepts have several dimensions. In their analytical dimension they explain spatial structures by providing a hypothesis on the way that unplanned and unintended individual action affects spatial development. In their normative dimension planning concepts are a metaphor for desirable spatial structures and also,

(in what, when separating motivation and practical action, may be called an organizational dimension), a guiding principle to achieve a policy goal.

Above it was noted, that a spatial representation, map or a plan, may be used to (1) explicate analytical knowledge, (2) allocate meaning in politics and normative goal setting and/or (3) indicate impacts and incidences of policies in territories. A recognition of dimensions of planning concepts, allows for a distinction of roles of such representations in indicative planning. In analogy to models of boundary arrangements that emerge from political preferences and professional expertise (and administrative pragmatism, as we would like to add) and are based on the convergence and divergence of logics (Hoppe, 2005), it also allows for an equation of spatial representations with forms of discretion. A spatial representation may be an interpretation of fact and contribute, when rationales converge, to learning though making spatial implications explicit. When rationales diverge, a spatial representation may also be a comment on a weak empirical foundation of rules, formulated from the point of view of professional expertise (or from a scientific stance); it may suggest other normative goals than the ones with which rules are associated and therefore be a form of political advocacy; it may also be a call to apply rules elsewhere than defined in indicative frameworks and therefore be a pragmatic (or fearful) interpretation of territories motivated by administrative pragmatism. A spatial representations may refer to a single dimension of planning concepts. Sequences or combinations of references, referring to each other, may also suggest alternative relations among analytical, normative and organizational principles and, in the context of indicative frameworks, start to resemble precedent: cases that, since they are internally valid, question rationalities incorporated in such frameworks.

The equation of regional design with discretion that is described above is based on the fairly simple assumption that regional design is a search for a match of ideas of various institutions, distributed across levels of government and also the public and private sector, carried out through the production and use of spatial representation. In such context a regional design proposal is snap-shots of a struggle in which organizations and institutions compete for interpretations. Complications arise from practice. Through being composed of related dimensions planning concepts resemble discourse, ‘an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005, p. 175).’ As discourses, indicative planning frameworks, when seen to be composed of intertwined analytical, normative and organizational dimensions, often lack clarity, they are generally ‘wooley’ (Davoudi, 2003. p. 995), ‘fuzzy’ in the way they combine evidence and agency (Markusen, 1999, p.869) or, when attention focuses on their organizational dimension, ‘soft’ in the way they frame (or variably mask) administrative pragmatism by strategic normative and analytical underpinnings (Almendinger & Haughton, 2010). Also spatial representations, maps and plans are a source for confusion and misunderstandings. Faludi (1996) who conceptualized the use of images in planning processes warned that representations that incorporate above notions on what is important also notions about how to plan disrupt argumentations as they introduce a conflicting system of codes, or reference to planning domains in our terminology. Last not least, a focus on the object of planning, spatial development,

Despite these warnings regional design, the production and use of spatial representations, became, encouraged by an increasing importance of development-led approaches in Dutch planning, a popular practice among governance arrangements in the Netherlands. To neglect that development proposals have been used for multiple planning purposes causes even more confusion and also means an ignorance of ways how the performance of practices was influenced. While until the late 1980s Dutch indicative frameworks have set out **instructions for actions** (principles for comprehensive planning?), since then they have increasingly focused on setting out geographically confined development of national importance such as key projects, core areas and integrated area development. When using the

notions above, these changes took strongly account of performance. As announced, political argument was, decentralized to governments that were seen to better be in state to formulate . Through the definition of territories it made responsibilities accountable, whatever political convictions of other governments are. Below, we set out this process in more detail.

Below, we use the notions above to illustrate how distinct regional design practices have emerged in the context of indicative frameworks in the Netherlands. The five frameworks that have been set out by the Dutch national government over the recent decade are briefly analyzed on their empirical foundation (their analytical dimension), the political, normative principles they incorporated (their normative dimension) and the rules and guidelines for planning they set out (their organizational dimension). Their flexibility is deducted from the amount and diversity of these three aspects and the way how tight they were related to each other in the form of conceptual ideas about spatial organisation. Regional design initiatives that emerged in the context of (the making) of these frameworks are analyzed on their references to dimensions and the way how these references have been rationally combined for the purpose of policy argumentations and discretion. We note that descriptions are not the product of a case study but are meant to illustrate our theoretical reflections by means of examples instead.

3. Exemplary Dutch Regional Design Practices

3.1. Early regional design practices: Outside the national government

A characteristic of the Dutch planning system is the continuously negotiated association of ideas about spatial organization with institutional settings, political regimes and the kind of planning they practice (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000). The most well-known example of a Dutch conceptual idea is the Randstad (Rim City) concept, invented, as part of the building up of the welfare state, in the 1950s. In its original form and in conjunction with its counterpart, the *Groene Hart* (Green Heart), the Randstad was a distinction among rural and urbanized land. In use it was associated with a fair and healthy distribution of the post war housing production by means of restrictions and regulations. The ‘urban-rural dichotomy’ behind the concept (Van Duinen, 2004, p. 49) remained stable, or in the words of Faludi and Van der Valk (1994) doctrinaire, beyond discussion, over decades (Roodbol-Mekkes et al., 2012). In the 1980s the Netherlands made, as many other European countries, a break from a spatial policy based on social justice to one promoting international competitiveness tough (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; Van Duinen, 2004; Waterhout et al., 2012), The move towards a new core belief has caused critical reflections about indicative planning frameworks and the conceptual ideas they incorporated.

Critical remarks were various. Existing frameworks were, underpinned by observations of increasing regionalization and internationalization, to have a weak empirical foundations. They were seen to neglect new political values and norms, not only required by overly frequent elections in the Netherlands in the period (mostly approving centre-right governments) but also by an above party lines accepted shift towards neo-liberalism in Dutch planning (Waterhout et al., 2012). New frameworks were also to strike new balances among responsibilities for planning. As will be shown below the four since the 1980s consecutively published indicative frameworks concerned about the Randstad region have differed in the way they responded to these multiple challenges. Each framework focused on revising distinct aspects and relations among aspects were more or less tightly packaged in sometimes single and sometimes a multitude of new conceptual ideas.

The distinction of the highly urbanized Randstad region from other less populated ones in the Netherlands was loosely associated with its economic competitiveness in an international setting already in the 1950s. However, for several reasons (reviewed by Lambrecht & Zonneveld, 2004) it

was only the 4th report on planning, published in 1988 (VROM, 1988), that first explicitly anticipated on market-driven regional development (Van der Valk, 2002). The belief in fair, distributional principles, the backbone of the original Randstad concept, endured in this report, in the form of the *Stedenring Centraal Nederland* (Dutch Central City Rim), a version of the Randstad concept that included some urban agglomerations in the east of the Netherlands. New ideas, in the form of urban nodes, main ports and transport corridors, prioritized development in distinct territories for the purpose of economic success on international markets tough (Van Duinen, 2004; 2013). Ideas were developed as a response to the economic downturn in the early 1980s and their incorporation in the the 4th report was the product of informal negotiation among several ministries and some select societal organisations (Korthals Altes, 1995; Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000, Van Duinen, 2004; 2013). Despite this inclusion, change created substantial disaffection among a broader planners community. New ideas were seen to be spatially incongruent among each other (development in transport corridors was, for example, seen to compromise urban nodes) and, through referring to exemplary development instead of broader tendencies, rest on a weak empirical foundation. That new ideas were promoted by overlapping ‘informal circuits’ within governmental departments, new institutions with unclear positions in formal deliberation structures, raised, above all, concern about the legitimacy of the framework and planning more broadly (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000).

The making of the 4th report on planning was accompanied by lively debate among planners and in the course of this debate, in the mid-1980s, a group of regional design initiatives emerged (De Jonge, 2009). Among them was the *Nederland Nu Als Ontwerp* initiative (The Netherlands Now As Design, NNAO), taken by a consortium of planners and architects organizations in 1985. For the purpose of a public exhibition, the influence of four emerging societal trends on four Dutch regions was examined. The exemplary design proposals, imaginary but plausible futures of four different regions deduced from trends, were to raise attention for how new societal behaviour influences spatial development patterns. Through demonstrating that trends either affect large cities or rural communities, proposals also resembled political options and were used to advocate the consideration of trends in formal decision-making (Frieling, 2006). As other initiatives in the period, the NNAO had a concern about the informality of intra-governmental negotiations that had led to the 4th report. Combining the capacities of actors with ‘professional affiliations’, they did not promote distinct development but sought to illustrate publicly, that deciding about considering societal trends in formal planning (or not) is a political practice and not just an administrative one.

That new guiding principles were not sufficiently supported by political and analytical principles caused unrest not only among professionals but also within the national government itself. Strengthened by the observation of a broad range of initiatives for development on the local level (fostered by the 4th report extra, that has enhanced pragmatic involvement of municipalities in planning to meet a shortage of housing) consensus increased that the emerging engagement of actors in spatial development were not sufficiently guided by then current planning frameworks. In 1998 the Scientific Council for Government Policy summarized accumulated concern. Reflecting on the possible making of a new 5th report, it concluded on a fundamental mismatch among spatial and organizational principles and a, in retrospect influential, call for the modernization of deliberation structures, more open planning protocols and new ideas about spatial organization (WRR, 1999, p. 74): ‘The basic principles of spatial planning and the way in which these have been elaborated into practical concepts face radical problems (...). In the Council's view, the challenges being posed for the deliberation structure require the latter to be reviewed.’

One of the by then loosely arranged associations of plan actors that responded to this call for ‘practical concepts’ (the one that has been observed best by authors such as Lambregts et al., 2008; Van Duinen, 2004; Van der Bol, 2010; Zonneveld & Verwest, 2005; Lambrecht & Zonneveld, 2004) was a

partnership among politicians from the four large Randstad municipalities (provinces). In 1998 this partnership introduced a new idea about spatial organization which was named *Deltametropool* (Delta Metropolis) (for a review see Van Duinen, 2004, p. 219 - 270). By covering the Randstad territory, the concept was developed to critically review the empirical foundation of the 'old' *Randstad* concept (for example its ignorance of uncontrolled sprawl in the Green Heart) and suggested, in the light of deficiencies, new normative principles: the boundary between red and green land-uses turned into a dotted line and maps were crowded with arrows to shift focus from singular compact cities in rural settings to their embeddings in national and international networks. The initiative not only suggested an inherently consistent new concept, but also employed new ways to claim its importance. Van Duinen (2004, p. 221) remarked that 'never before had a coalition made such a deliberate, well-orchestrated attempt to introduce a new planning concept'. Regional design took an important role in the engagement of this coalition. According to one of the leading figures of the association, regional design is a technical expertise, but above this a way to 'clarify political options' and 'forge social alliances' (Frieling, 2002, p. 491-500). While earlier regional design initiatives have operated in professional circuits mainly and commented on principles incorporated in indicative planning frameworks, advocates of the Delta Metropolis promoted their ideas in the hallways of public administrations, with the aim '...to bring major elements of the metropolis nearer to realization' (Vereniging Deltametropool, 1998, p. 5). A major claim for planning.

In 2001 the first version of the 5th report on planning became available (VROM & RPD, 2001). This report, which remained because of political turmoil a draft, was the first Dutch national report to explicitly discuss decentralization in The Netherlands (p. 260ff) and also the first formal attempt to substantially revise relations among conceptual ideas about spatial organisation and planning through increased flexibility. The framework referred to several vaguely defined normative goals (such as vitality and diversity) and pointed at three main spatial structures in the Netherlands (soil, transport networks and urban occupation) whose mutual development were seen to matter for these purposes. Above an advice to consider these 'layers' in conjunction, the idea about a national 'main structure' established few further guidelines for planning. Instead the report emphasized flexibility through referring to a second idea about spatial organisation, the conception of *Stedelijke Netwerken* (Urban Networks) (VROM & RPD, 2001, p. 179). These networks were deducted from activity and travel patterns on scales above the city regional one. Inspired by a European planning discourse, the Urban Networks have been given, above all, an organisational dimension though; the idea was to enhance cooperation and engagement. If development patterns are a threat or an opportunity to the vitality and diversity of regions was to be decided by partnerships among de-central governments (VROM & RPD, 2001, p. 269).

That the flexibility of indicative planning increased and that ideas of governance arrangements, most prominently the Delta metropolis concept as one of the urban networks, were mentioned in this report (p. 180) inspired a period of optimism among regional policy makers. Several initiatives that resembled the Association Delta Metropolis in its organisational structure, grouping politicians, policy makers and professionals, emerged and regional design became a popular practice among them. The *Atelier Ijmeer* (Studio Ijmeer) was, for example, initiated by the municipality of Almere, a new town to the North-East of Amsterdam, to provoke discussions about its integration in the Amsterdam region in 2003. Under the guidance of a well-known Dutch urban designer and an experienced alderman, this initiative engaged a broad range of policy makers and experts in collaboratively formulating a vision on how Almere could look like in 2030 (for a review see Koolhaas & Marcusse, 2006). The final design, becoming available after 3 years of argumentation (and decisively hallmarked to not be finalized plan), showed that the integration of Almere in the Amsterdam region should rest on the development of their common waterfront and a concerted action among planners in the region. The design also addressed the national government though. A costly piece of public rail infrastructure across

the IJmeer formed the centrepiece of the plan. Annotated with a rhetoric question mark, it was suggested that the urban networks around Almere (first the Delta Metropolis, and later, in the context of the next report on planning, the North Wing) can, if the normative guidelines for regional development set out by the national government are valid, hardly do without this piece. The design process stretched across the making of two planning reports. I may, however, serve as an example for

When using the equation of discretionary action and regional design that we have established above, some differences among examples that we mention come to the foreground. Regional design practices, emerging in the context of the making of the 4th report on planning, such as the NNAO initiative, used representations of plausible futures of regions to point at feeble empirical foundations of guiding principles of planning. Design called for revisions of rules and regulations from an extra-parliamentary, professional perspective through pointing at societal trends and the political implications of planning. When unrest about the indicative planning frameworks incorporated in 4th report peaked and substantial revisions became likely, the Association Delta Metropolis formulated a new concept for an old territory. It tightly packaged analytical evidence on emerging trends with new political norms and simultaneously appealed, through demonstrating agreement on these new ideas among a coalition of sub-national government, to administrative pragmatism. **It created precedent.** Encouraged by the success that the Association Delta Metropolis had, later design practices, such as the Atelier IJmeer, employed similar design strategies. Underpinned by proof of its standing on stable societal consensus, achieved in lengthily collaborative processes among politicians, policy makers and experts, it formulated however, responding to an increased attention to development in the 5th report, not an alternative spatial concept to be taken up in planning frameworks though but an alternative development proposal challenging guidelines in place instead. While regional design practices differed in their relations with indicative frameworks, they also shared characteristics: all were taken outside of the national government. Below we review how in a following stage of planning, the national government has, as its interest in development increased, also increased its own involvement in regional design.

3.2. *New regional design practices: Inside government*

While the 5th report on planning has increased the flexibility of indicative frameworks to encourage deliberate involvement of de-central governments, the following national report, the *Nota Ruimte* (Spatial Strategy, VROM et al., 2004) tightened the room for interpretation and engagement again. Notions about why to plan remained vague. The Spatial Strategy was preceded by a range of policy documents in which the ministries of spatial planning, economic affairs and transport set out their ideas about spatial organisation (EZ, 2004; V&W & VROM, 2004). In an attempt to marry these perceptions the Spatial Strategy included a broad range of sometimes contradictory normative planning principles and packaged these with distinct territories in several conceptual ideas (Zonneveld, 2005). Akin collections in the 4th report, the Spatial Strategy included transport corridors, main ports and urban networks but now these ideas were more formally established and had, through being underpinned by some evidence, a slightly more stable analytical foundation. While normative and analytical dimensions remained vague, instructions about how to plan were more substantially refined. The Delta metropolis was substituted by a set of urban networks which resembled the territories of provincial administrations in the Randstad. The national government pointed at distinct arrangements of subnational governments within these ‘wings’ and formally invited them to make suggestions on where and what to plan. Under the header ‘responsibility for the system’ (source), it promised to support arrangements through the provision of expertise, through hosting negotiations and through considering development proposals in the allocation of funding. It also explained that it is, next to being responsible for the system, also responsible for results, specifically the delivery of strategic (infrastructure) projects (Vink & Van der Burg, 2006).

Also a new group of regional design initiatives emerged. While initiatives taken in the context of the 4th and 5th report sought to influence indicative planning from outside, this next generation of experimental design practices tried to fill in the organizational void that the national government has deliberately erected at the regional level. In their organisational structure initiatives resembled practices such as the Association Delta metropolis and the Studio IJmeer but while these practices were provocative, new initiatives resembled policy institutions. They were taken by partnerships that the national government has appointed and carefully placed at arm's length from day to day regional policy making. Although distances of design initiatives to the official planning apparatus differed, it was frequently this apparatus that delivered the political demarcation of their activity spaces. The tasks they were given were managerial ones: they were to assist the formulation of regional strategies in the light of predefined political agendas and deduct projects of national importance from these. The *Atelier Zuidvleugel* (Studio South Wing), a design studio initiated by the province of South Holland and a range of partners from municipal and city regional levels within the southern part of the *Randstad* can serve as an example here (for a review see Balz & Zonneveld, 2014). Design processes carried out by this studio were largely concerned about finding common geographic denominators of the many plans which different institutions in the region had formulated before, examine their relevance for the emergence of the 'urban networks', set out by the national government, and package them in projects to be considered for national support. The national government supported these practices with the provision of funding, knowledge and expertise, arguably interested itself in examinations of the flexibility and certainty of the concepts it had established.

From roughly 2005 onward the ministry of VROM increased its own engagement in regional design. While earlier it has participated in initiatives taken by governance arrangements, in the late 2000s especially the ministry of VROM took own initiatives also. The match among spatial and organisational principles in the National Spatial Strategy, once more favouring pragmatic interpretations by semi-formal governance arrangements, untied from 2005 onward unrest in the Dutch parliament. Dissatisfaction was specifically caused by the way how the allocation of national infrastructure funds was loosely associated with a fuzzy range of normative principles and accommodated informally. Criticism found its expression in March 2005 in the *Motie Lemstra* (Petition Lemstra) (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2005) and this call for a better underpinning of long term investment led in 2007 to the *Urgentieprogramma Randstad* (Urgency Program Randstad, V&W, 2007). The program was to prioritise investment and from the beginning onward developed along two, albeit related tracks. The ministry of Transport was to guide, for the sake of short term effect, a selection process to the large amount of infrastructure projects that had, due to delays in implementation processes and an increased scope of projects, started to crowd the national agenda. This track was called *Randstad Urgent*. The ministry of VROM was to establish guiding principles for longer term selection processes and rest these principles on a stable societal base: The Structural Vision Randstad 2040.

The making of the Structural Vision has been carried out in great haste and caused some controversies about the way it was accomplished. However, the final framework, published in September 2008, did not revise earlier frameworks substantially. Instead it referred back to many of the principle ideas that have ordered planning by the ministry of VROM over the last decade, among them concentration of urbanisation within existing city limits, spatial differentiation in the form of landscapes of national and metropolitan importance and economic competitiveness in the form of 'top functions' (VROM, 2008, p. 94), six groups of internationally operating economic activities and facilities. The framework differed from earlier ones in its lack of rules tough. Few long term infrastructure projects were adopted from V&W programs. Besides these, instructions on how to plan were, as agreed upon earlier, reserved for being the object of the *Randstad Urgent* document. This left the ministry of VROM with the difficult task to render institutional support for planning in the far future. It did so through

imagining three ‘windows’, an economic, social and environmental one, through which the Randstad can be perceived and which were used to associate normative principles with distinct (societal) groups.

The ministry of VROM employed (next to a range of other activities, such as the online participation of citizens, public debates, ex-ante evaluation), also a regional design exercise in the construction of the Structural Vision Randstad 2040 (for a review of the design process, see Blank et al., 2009). The ministry defined, with little reference to normative goals, three future spatial configurations of the Randstad, concentrating new development inside and outside of urban cores and along its coastline. Professionals from the field of urban planning and design were asked to reflect on the implication of these configurations for planning. According to the ministry, the design practice was to, above all, inspire debate (Blank et al., 2009). However, in the context of the diminishing influence of the ministry of VROM, it can also be assumed that the exercise was to raise attention for the importance of spatial planning as a political practice, thus resembling design practices that emerged much earlier, in the mid-1980s, but, other than these, practiced by the government itself. That the ministry saw regional design as a way to encourage involvement in the public and professional domain is underpinned by the way it started to advertise the practice more broadly, among others by funding a chair entitled ‘Design and Politics’ at the Faculty of Architecture at the Delft University Delft and the publication of a series of books under the same title. In these publications regional design is consistently portrayed as a collaborative and reflexive planning approach to the accumulation of consent for measures. Issues of the edition relate the practice to argumentations on variable plausible futures (Blank et al., 2009), the importance of story lines in planning (Hajer, et al., 2010), reflections on basic ideas about spatial organisation (Boelens et al., 2010) and the necessity of adaptive planning practices in complex institutional settings (Hartman et al., 2011).

The Structural Vision Randstad 2040 lived a very short life. In July 2008 the change of the Dutch Spatial Planning Act, under discussion since 2002, became effective. This act clarified the planning protocol in the context of decentralized planning. It approved the formal status of national indicative plans but asked, to foster regional planning and enhance the coordination among planning at levels, the provincial and local governments to also set out such frameworks and in July 2011 the National Structural Vision, replacing all earlier indicative frameworks, became available in a draft version (I&M, 2011). The vision, named ‘The Netherlands, competitive, accessible, liveable and safe’, was selective indeed. Besides incorporating obligatory guidelines set out by the European Union and important measures to guarantee water safety, it sustained just one of the ideas from earlier frameworks: the idea that concentrations of economic activities that operate internationally matter for the international concurrence position of the Netherlands. Policies to enhance their performance were mainly non-spatial. The vision also gave little attention to the Randstad. The measuring of accessibility conditions, set out to allocate and control investment in infrastructure, however showed that it is the western part of the Netherlands that most decisively in need of funding for infrastructure. The Randstad re-appeared, not a political or organisational construct anymore, but as a problem area from a transport user’s perspective.

The decisiveness with which the national government packaged ideas, empirical foundations and measures seemed to leave little room for interpretation. However, in the same period frameworks to guide investment into infrastructure increased. In 2008 advice to the ministry of I&M has indicated that the implementation of large scale infrastructure is often delayed through disagreement and conflict among the many stakeholders that are affected (Commissie Versnelling Besluitvorming Infrastructuurele Projecten, 2008). and has led to a revision of the so called MIRT rules of the game, procedures (for a review see Spaans et al., 2012) regional design became a mandatory moment in decision making about large scale, infrastructural, projects. Policy makers who promoted this formalization assumed that interactive design processes can, when employed at an early stage of

implementation processes, explicate interdependencies among planning issues at different scales, facilitate discussions and agreements on these and in this way help to avoid conflict, delay and costs at later stages (Ovink, et al., 2009, Hartman, et al., 2011).

Most of the design processes carried out in this context since then took the form of scenarios exploring the impact of spatial options, such as different trajectories of infrastructure. Their concern about broader indicative frameworks was marginal. They were more strongly related to the technical verification of policies, or as the name given to the 2012 Rotterdam Architectural Biennale (largely funded by the ministry of I&M) suggests: 'The making of projects'. Example: PPAAM. The allocation of societal consent by means of design, became, next to other prerequisites such as an estimation of societal costs and gains and environmental assessment.

4. Conclusions

In this paper we distinguished roles of regional design practices in planning through equating practices with discretion. By means of theoretical notions and examples, it was shown that spatial representations of futures of regions refer to different planning domains and that distinct references to analytical, political and territorial domains, when seen in the context of dimensions of indicative planning frameworks, resemble either interpretations of fact or, when references are combined to form alternative rationalities, cases that challenge the application of indicative guidelines for planning (or inform their construction).

Employing the equation of regional design and discretion in an analysis of regional design examples that occurred in the Netherlands over recent years made apparent that practices that were commonly labelled regional design varied. Regional design is often seen to be a technology (variably an art or craft), employing know-how and separate from political deliberation. When investigating relations among regional design and indicative planning frameworks, it becomes, however, apparent that maps and plans may have a broader scope in planning. At times representations may be produced and used to, through referring to emerging development trends, debate the empirical foundation of planning principles from a professional perspective. At times a representation may be, through referring to desirable futures, a comment on the values and norms that stabilize guidelines for planning and therefore a form of political advocacy. At yet other times representations may be used to construct territorial demarcations, not necessarily deducted from values and norms but possibly also the product of a pragmatic (or fearful) interpretation by plan actors of their social environment. A spatial representations may be an interpretations of fact. When packaging claims for responsibilities with emerging normative values and evidence, maps and plans may also represent alternative rationalities for planning, cases suggested to be precedent for future planning decisions.

The theoretical notions that are proposed to conceptualize regional design as a planning practice are, as was noted above, simple. They rely on an equation, a match or mismatch among conceptual ideas about spatial organization, pursued by institutions with professional, political or administrative affiliations. An interest in a decision-making practice that merely relies on the representation of geographies has motivated reduction, a focus on the ways how objects of planning are perceived, a priori excluding any other concern. Added complications arise from practice and may render any regional design experimental. We however argue that, based on the notions that were presented, an equation of regional design with discretion may not only increase some basic understanding of the role that regional design practices have in planning, but also make forms of control more accountable, at least in the Netherlands. Indicative frameworks set out by the Dutch national government have changed over recent years. From the perspective that we employ, variations were not only motivated by reflections on rules and responsibilities (decentralization), but also by considerations about who should do what. The room for interpretation that frameworks provided changed. Variations in the

flexibility of indicative frameworks, their degree of wooleyness, fuzziness, softness or comprehensiveness rendered development proposals to be an relevant interpretation of fact or an arbitrary fantasy; to be precedent, a case to be considered in future planning decisions. They also varied in what they left open to interpretation and in this way influenced political, professional or administrative engagement in planning more specifically.

The main aim of this paper is to increase the accountability of a planning practice that has over recent years flourished in the shadow of statutory planning in the Netherlands. An increasing importance of development in Dutch planning has encouraged plan actors to engage in the formulation of development proposals and regional design became a popular practice. In search for ways how to balance plan-led with development-led approaches, the indicative frameworks that were published by the Dutch national government changed also: they rested on more or less stable empirical foundations, incorporated differing numbers and abstractions of normative values and changed in the decisiveness with which they introduced distinct territories for planning. The most recent compromise is uttely pragmatic: as it sets out territories in the form of core areas. From the perspective that we employ here the latter change is above all pragmatic. The question that arises is, when the interest lies on the performance of regional design, if such narrow definition indeed encourages the involvement of actors in planning.

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