Ever since the 1950s, the Dutch national government has struggled intensely with the trade-off between the economic significance and environmental impact of Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, the largest airport of the Netherlands. By 2005, the ambition to combine the growth of ‘Mainport’ Schiphol with comprehensive environmental measures has resulted in a firm policy deadlock – a situation in which policy makers no longer recognise the nature of the problem, and are thus unable to generate effective solutions.

This thesis provides a detailed account of the emergence and enduring persistence of the Schiphol policy deadlock, covering the period 1989 - 2009. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s genealogical approach to widely accepted discourses, we will describe, assess, and explain how the policy debate around the development of Schiphol sank into the gripping reproduction of specific ways of thinking, talking and acting. By exposing the mechanisms involved, and by reflecting on the daily practices that have hitherto been considered self-evident, the thesis aims to create the opportunity to find the strategies necessary for breaking out of the impasse.