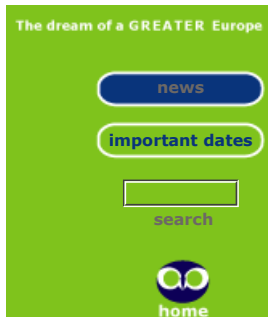


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Paper ID 279

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Title **Planning, Contract and Commitment. Towards a Relational View on Regional Contracts in Spatial Planning**

Keywords regional contract, New Public Management, collaborative planning, trust

Abstract The emergence of contractual planning instruments in the Netherlands stems from the fact that the Dutch government seeks new planning strategies and planning instruments to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of its planning policy. The idea to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policy by introducing contracts reflects a broader public sector reform that is commonly referred to as New Public Management. Dutch planning authorities have high expectations of the possibilities of regional contracts in legally binding regional and local authorities and private parties to the goals set by the national government. However, the first experiences with this kind of instruments reveal that a contractual approach of planning is more problematic than the authorities have foreseen. The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, we want to examine the possibilities and limitations of the use of regional contracts in spatial planning. Secondly, by examining these regional contracts and the government's view on these planning instruments, we want to reflect on the assumptions of the Dutch authorities about planning and planning instruments. The reason for this reflection is that although the regional contract is introduced as a new instrument, it shows similarities with the traditional blueprint plan, which has shown over the years not to work. To address both aims, we examine the emergence of contractual arrangements in Dutch planning policies, we reflect on the assumptions behind these policies from different theoretical perspectives, and we investigate the use of regional contracts in planning practice. Our findings lead to the conclusion that a shift in perspective is needed. The introduction of contracts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public policy is embedded in a misconception of capitalist management strategies within a neo-Marxist framework, reflected in the belief in the central rule approach. Dutch planning authorities need to adjust their traditional view on planning and planning instruments. The dominating instrumental view of Dutch government, embodied and renewed by 'theories' such as New Public Management, needs to be replaced by a relational view in which the relational aspects of planning and planning instruments are acknowledged. An instrumental view on planning does not create opportunities for mutual learning and trust. A juridical approach of contracts lacks flexibility and can easily lead to distrust. We point out that social co-ordination mechanisms, such as trust and reputation, need further attention in designing efficient and effective governance structures for spatial planning. To understand the role of social co-ordination mechanisms, we develop theory about trust as a concept in collaborative planning. We theoretically and empirically show that trust is an important aspect of inter-organisational co-operation in general and of collaborative planning in particular. Planning authorities (not only in the Netherlands) need to be aware of the importance of social mechanisms in inter-organisational planning. Only by improving insights into these social mechanisms, collaborative planning approaches can become more effective and efficient. However, as we will show, this can require a fundamental change in planning thought among planners and politicians.

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