

Controlled decontrolling: a genealogy of power in Dutch rural planning

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Abstract

Dutch rural planning is often thought to become more democratic. A conventional technical mode of planning is substituted for collaborative planning in which power relations are equalised. In this paper we offer an alternative approach for the development of Dutch rural planning and the use of power with two case studies of rural planning in a Dutch region in 1959 and 1999. To come to grips with the dynamic of power in planning, we conceptualise power to incorporate both its restricting and enabling ability. For this purpose we integrate Foucault's power analytics with the concept of agency. We argue that the development of Dutch rural planning can be understood as a process of controlled decontrolling. Dutch rural planning is simultaneously being legislatively complicated and deregulated. This has important consequences for relations of power in planning.

Introduction

The Dutch rural landscape changed drastically in the past decades, physically as well as socially. Initially, a process of modernisation of agriculture mainly induced these changes. However, from the 1970s onwards, urban driven land use, environmental regulation and the preservation of nature and landscape also influenced rural development. At the same time, the economic feasibility and the social status of traditional agriculture decreased. As a consequence, new actors appeared in rural policymaking and planning, giving voice to new ideas about rural land use.

Until then, conventional planning in rural areas implied setting socially accepted public goals for agricultural, environmental and natural values of the landscape. Policy and planning were considered instruments to both physically and socially change rural regions according to these public goals. It was believed that careful planning could de-politicise, i.e. that it could end or prevent social conflict. Planning should be based on objective knowledge obtained from science. It was considered a technical activity.

With the growing importance of non-agricultural rural land use, rural planning also changed. Dutch rural society became too complex and too dynamic to allow conventional planning to be effective. As a consequence new forms of rural planning were developed and used. This new rural planning acknowledged that individuals have self-governing capacities and that rural stakeholders were interdependent. As a consequence, the role of government in controlling spatial developments changed into a less autonomous and less absolute one. This resulted in different forms of collaboration between governments and private actors. In literature this change is often referred to as a shift from technical-rational planning towards collaborative planning.

The above account of the differentiation of rural land use and the simultaneous democratisation of rural planning in the Netherlands is described in literature and in policy documents. It creates an image of the ongoing development of more democratic Dutch rural planning practices, i.e. more rural stakeholders have access to planning and they also have more influence. It also suggests a redistribution of power from the government to more and different rural stakeholders. Consequently, the expectations concerning collaboration, interactivity, inclusion and consensus-building are usually high. Despite this positive picture, Dutch practices of collaborative planning are often disappointing. Power relations between the participants play an important role in the planning



process, which cannot be neutralised despite intensive collaboration. Participants use power to realise their own interests and prevent other participants from realising theirs. Moreover, the decision-making power ultimately still lies with the government. As a result, consensus between actors in the planning process cannot be taken for granted, and conflicts over rural land use repeatedly occur.

In this paper we offer an alternative analysis of the development of Dutch rural planning. We argue that Dutch rural planning has developed through a process of *controlled decontrolling*¹. Planning is 'decontrolled' by assigning and dispensing autonomy to individuals via deregulation and democratisation. However, at the same time planning is 'controlled' due to an increasing complication of regulation and policy. This argument is based on a comparison between two conflicts over rural land use in a Dutch region, the Southeast of the province of Friesland in the North of the country. The first case concerns an agricultural land consolidation project at the end of the 1950s. The second describes the struggle between agriculture and nature, focusing on environmental regulations, in the middle of the 1990s. We believe that such a comparison provides valuable opportunities to understand the dynamics of power over a longer period of time. It can contribute to a better insight in the exercise of power in the practice of Dutch rural planning and how power relations between planning actors influence the outcome of collaborative Dutch rural planning.

Before we present these case studies we need to elaborate on the conceptualisation of power. This concept should take account both the enabling and the restricting ability of power. We outline such an inclusive concept of power using the debate between proponents of Collaborative Planning Theory and their critics. Despite their different beliefs concerning the possibility of consensus in planning practices, both sides consider power to be ubiquitous. As several authors have pointed out, the ubiquity of power is difficult to harmonise with the objective of a democratisation of planning institutions. To solve this dilemma we turn to Foucault's power analytics and integrate his definition of power with the concept of agency.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, we outline the debate on power in planning between Collaborative Planning Theory and their critics. This debate together with Foucault's power analytics is used to formulate an inclusive definition of power. Second, two case studies are presented and analysed on the use of power in Dutch rural planning. Third, on the basis of our analysis we argue that the development of Dutch rural planning can be understood as a process of controlled decontrolling. We end this paper with a discussion on the consequences of our analysis for consensus-building in rural planning practices and for the development of planning theory.

Power in Planning

In recent years planning scholars debate on how power influences the outcome of planning practices. Collaborative Planning Theory (CPT) in particular gained much prominence in planning theory and practice. It originated as a critique aimed at instrumental rationality, i.e. the problem-solving paradigm of planning (Alexander, 2001), underlying planning practices in the 1970s and 1980s. CPT aims to replace instrumental rationality with communicative rationality through a process of intersubjective rational deliberation and argumentation (Healy, 1990), which is able to generate new consensual systems of meaning and equalise power relations between stakeholders.

CPT is criticised for having an idealistic belief in the possibility of constructing consensus between stakeholders within planning practices. The critics argue that the focus on consensus-building neglects power, conflicts and the contexts of planning practices. Using case studies, they show how planning practices often end up in conflict, despite rational deliberation. They stipulate that actors will not suspend the use of power in a process of consensus-building using intersubjective rational deliberation (Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). Moreover, they conclude that the faith CPT places in rational deliberation as a procedure to ameliorate unequal power relations is idealistic (Hillier, 2003; Connely and Richardson, 2004) and universalistic, i.e. it abstracts planning from context (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Instead, they propose to explicate conflicts. In doing so, they aim to emancipate actors by stimulating their 'desire to gain some sort of control over the self, others and their environment' (Hillier, 2003: 50).

Proponents of CPT, on the other hand, reply that they do not presume that power can be neutralised. In fact, their case studies emphasise how communication and deliberation are distorted by power. The use of CPT with its emphasis on consensus-building helps to critically evaluate planning practices (Healey, 2003). As such, CPT should never be regarded as a practical planning guide. Whether consensus in planning practices can be reached is highly dependent of specific contexts and power relations (Innes, 2004). CPT is useful as a normative tool from which to criticise unequal power relations (Fischler, 2000; Healey, 2003). Used in this way, consensus-building and collaboration between stakeholders can equalise power relations and build societal and institutional capacity through which participants can control their own processes (Innes, 2004).

¹ This term is derived from Elias' civilisation theory and previously used by Mastenbroek (1999) to analyse the sociogenesis of negotiation.



This well-rehearsed debate shows that despite their different approaches, proponents of CPT and their critics agree that power cannot be ameliorated through intersubjective rational deliberation (Fischler, 2000; Alexander, 2001). Most authors understand power as ubiquitous, i.e. as a network of social relations (Booher and Innes, 2002), which produces social practice. Both approaches also aim at transforming institutional design to empower people. Here we have come upon a dilemma, because a democratisation of planning which aims to equalise power between stakeholders fits uneasily with a definition of power as ubiquitous and a necessary feature of social context. For this reason several authors conclude that a ubiquitous definition of power paralyses any attempt to democratise planning (Saarikoski, 2002; Stein and Harper, 2003; Forester, 2004). It seems to exclude a prospect of liberation, because it does not allow a position beyond or outside power relations from which people can change, criticise or resist power. To solve this dilemma we need a definition of power that accounts for the restricting as well as the enabling effects of power on social action. A lucid - but also controversial conceptualisation sensitive of these dimensions of power is offered by Foucault.

Foucault, power and agency

On the basis of his historical studies on criminality, sexuality and madness, Foucault rejects a negative repressive definition of power. He defines power as a contextual ubiquitous relational concept, 'a productive network that runs through the whole social body' (Foucault, 2000a: 120). This means that actors can only come into being or define themselves in relation to a particular network of power. In this way power is productive, because it produces society. It also implicates that individuals cannot become autonomous, i.e. stand outside social context. The advantage of this definition is that it raises our awareness of the ways in which power not only disciplines but also produces social identities, institutions, norms, etc. In other words, how power not only constrains but also enables social action. As Allen (1999: 57) makes clear his definition of power 'offers a crucial insight into the interplay between constraint and enablement'.

Despite his lucid concept of 'the double bind of power' (Foucault 2001c: 336), he fails to give an account how these two dimensions of power function in society simultaneously. In his early work he showed that the way in which we understand ourselves, our own identity, is historically and culturally specific and contingent. We are products of power relations. In his later work he focused on how power 'works', i.e. how we necessarily invoke power relations when we act.

Critics of his early work object to his definition of power because, according to them, it is deterministic. It is unable to account for changes within networks of power (Taylor, 1984) and does not leave any room for the interpretations and agency of individuals (Layder, 1998). In this definition an actor is 'nothing but the effect of power relations under the pressure of observation, judgement, control, and discipline' (McCarthy, 1990: 450). Critics of his later work object because here Foucault's definition is too voluntaristic. It fails to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power (Fraser, 1989; Stein and Harper, 2003).

Despite these objections we believe that Foucault's double-edged definition of power is too important for planning to leave aside. However, we also acknowledge the above-mentioned criticisms and therefore aim to account for both the constraining as well as the enabling abilities of power in order to avoid a deterministic or voluntaristic analysis. To do so we argue that the use of power crucially depends on how it is mediated through routinised forms of social action in institutions, networks, traditions or rituals. We consider planning policies as such a form of routinised behaviour of all actors involved and analyse how this behaviour has developed in the past decades. The focus on how planning policies function as 'intermediates between the agency of subjects and the power that subjects them' (Allen 1999: 56) allows to take account of both the enabling as well as the restricting dimension of power.

Case 1: The Land Consolidation Project Koningsdiep

The Southeast of Friesland is a slope of the higher grounds in the neighbouring province of Drenthe. The subsoil exists mainly from glacial clay topped off with sand deposits from affluent water. This process created a landscape that consists of brook valleys (with the Koningsdiep being one of the brooks) which run in a southwest direction. Furthermore, peat deposits developed here, varying from low moor peat in the eastern part to fen peat in the western part. People settled on the higher sand ridges on the sides of the brooks. They used the lower lands close to the brooks as hay land. It could not be used more intensively due to frequent flooding of the brooks in autumn and winter and a water shortage in summer. During the 16th, 17th and 18th century companies started to extract the peat for fuel. These were large-scale ventures, which caused a large group of peat workers to migrate into the region. Part of them settled there. They lived as small-scale farmers on cultivated heather areas or on the lower grounds. The Southeast of Friesland was considered a poor area during the 19th century because of a population increase and the low employment opportunities outside agriculture. The area at that time was characterised by a large number of small peasants who worked part-time mostly as agricultural labourers. This situated continued into the 20th century. For this reason the Dutch government declared Southeast Friesland as a



'development area' in the 1950s and allocated budget for the implementation of special development policies. The government expected that a land consolidation project together with regional industrialisation could solve both the 'employment problem' and the 'peasant problem'. The land consolidation would stimulate farmers to increase, mechanise and rationalise their farms. This would increase agricultural production and, consequently, result in higher incomes for farmers. The farmers who stopped farming were to find new jobs in regional industry.

Usually the preparation and implementation of a land consolidation project took many years, sometimes more than twenty years in total. The procedures were legally based. In the 1950s the Land Consolidation Act provided a firm framework for measures such as the reallocation of land, the construction and improvement of roads and watercourses, soil melioration, the improvement of the farm layout, and landscape preservation. Land consolidation was combined with agricultural and social extension to stimulate farmers to make optimal use of the new opportunities. Tasks and responsibilities were divided between authorities on the national and regional level, but the dominant actors were the Rural Engineering Service of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Central Land Consolidation Commission. This Central Commission had to adopt draft project plans before the government of the province in which the project was executed could approve them. It mainly consisted of representatives of several ministries and of the farmer unions. In this respect land consolidation can be considered as a form of public private partnership. The Rural Engineering Service, the director of which was secretary of the Central Commission, was responsible for plan preparation. It had a staff of technical engineers in all provinces to do the job. After the provincial government had approved a plan, a final decision had to be taken by the landowners in the project area. To that end, a public balloting meeting was organised. An undemocratic rule, however, was that absentees were regarded as 'yes'-voters. Land consolidation was by far the most important instrument in the national government's policy to modernise agriculture and lower food production costs. In the 1950s the land consolidation program increased from 17.000 to 30.000 hectares a year in average.

The land consolidation project Koningsdiep, encompassing an area of more than 11.000 hectare, was one of the largest single projects ever. Plan preparation started in 1952 when the municipality of Opsterland (one of the two municipalities in the area) applied for land consolidation with the Minister of Agriculture. In the following years technical engineers of the Rural Engineering Service in the province of Friesland investigated the farm structure, the quality of soils, the infrastructure, etc. Then they drafted a land consolidation plan, which was ready at the beginning of 1958. In newspaper articles they and representatives of the authorities stressed that regional stakeholders collectively and individually needed to become active in the land consolidation, because they were 'responsible for their own (and their children's) future and risk lagging behind progressive areas if they do not establish the devised improvements'. At that time, however, it became obvious that there was a lot of resistance in the region against land consolidation. In March 1958 a meeting was organised between representatives of the Rural Engineering Service, the farmer unions and the municipalities to discuss the time schedule and technicalities of the upcoming land consolidation.² Those present emphasised that the participation of regional farmers and inhabitants in the preparation of the land consolidation plan needed full attention. They proposed to install a 'Commission for Regional Development Koningsdiep' (CRDK), which should be composed of representatives of all the involved regional stakeholder groups. The task of this commission should be to prepare the regional inhabitants for land consolidation. In the words of the Deputy director-engineer of the Rural Engineering Service in the province of Friesland:

'It is of importance that the whole region, that all the inhabitants together will make a choice concerning their future, including industrialisation and the [agricultural] drain off. All of you will have to decide what needs to be done. It is essential that every regional inhabitant understands what is at stake and decides how we need to operate [...]. What we need to do is to arrive at a harmonious whole, via deliberation. [...]. The choice, which the region as a whole has to make, becomes clear: should one use the available land to give everybody maybe half a hectare, or should we use that land to establish economically sound farms?'

Another participant thought that the CRDK was able to stimulate 'a more rational attitude' and a 'collective conversation'. He stressed that the community needed to be involved in the land consolidation 'to design their own future'. Nevertheless, the CRDK was not installed until April 1959 as a response to growing turmoil in the region concerning the land consolidation. The CRDK was charged with the following objectives:

- To prepare the population and to induce them towards a possible positive attitude towards co-operation
 with the planned land consolidation activities and to analyse what is needed, in this respect, concerning
 education, extension and training;
- To be an institute that will function as an intermediary between the population, based on organisations and social bonds, and the diverse authorities.

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² The information about this and following meetings and debates is obtained from literature (Bouma, 1961; Bouma and Nijboer, 1963), from the TRESOAR archive in the city of Leeuwarden, and from articles in the local newspapers *Friese Koerier* and *Drachtster Courant*.



From April until October 1959 the CRDK met four times. In this period, its members were informed by engineers of the Rural Engineering Service about the objectives and procedures of the project. The reason for this was to make sure that the CRDK should inform the population in 'the right way' at public meetings. In October the land consolidation plan was officially published and presented in two public meetings. Also the CRDK organised eight public meetings to inform the region about the land consolidation. In November several CRDK members mentioned that there was a lot of distrust and incomprehension among regional inhabitants. At public information meetings, they said, there is a 'wrong atmosphere'. Furthermore, negative and incorrect documented articles appeared in the local newspapers and, most alarming of all, opponents of the land consolidation project had organised themselves in a so-called 'Committee of Resistance'. The members of this Committee aimed at supporting the rights of landowners and tenants in the area. Their arguments can be summarised as follows:

- The costs of land consolidation will turn out higher as prospected. The difference will be recouped from the individual landowners;
- Landowners who rent out land will not be able to increase the rent with the costs of the land consolidation;
- With the land consolidation landowners will have to pay for infrastructure that should be financed by the national government;
- With the land consolidation the peasants will be pushed out in favour of bigger farms.

As an alternative, they proposed to implement a plan only targeting the water management of the Koningsdiep in order to improve agricultural production circumstances by decreasing the risk of flooding and reduce costs for individual landowners. The next citations are derived from letters of opponents of the land consolidation project, which were published in one of the local newspapers in December 1959 and which contain elements of the above arguments.

'He [Chairman of the Committee of Resistance] argued that nobody could guarantee that the costs will not be more than 30 guilders [the rent to be paid for the land consolidation project for every hectare of land]. He was convinced that the costs would turn out higher. "Only in the next 10 years we will know what the real costs are. And how will the prices develop in the meantime? Landowners will have to pay 10 million guilders at least, but more likely the double, and that is something, which this poor sand soil cannot come up with"."

'The authorities are just waiting: a new bridge needs to be build in road 43, the canal needs to be filled up and Ureterp [village] has got a sewage system which is useless without the land consolidation scheme. Is this something for which peasants should sacrifice themselves? [...]. The whole plan is aimed at the removal of the independent peasant, lest he will resort to the industry?'

'When farms are expanded to a minimal size of 15 hectares – which is the aspiration of the gentlemen [the authorities] – all firm farmhands and -labourers are deprived of the possibility to develop an independent farm eventually. When small farms are non-existent, this development trajectory has been cut-off.'

The objections and agitations of the Committee of Resistance were a stimulus for the CRDK to intensify its extension activities. Engineers of the Rural Engineering Service advised to start a public discussion about the land consolidation, to inform individual farmers, to organise living-room conversations and to invite people from other already finalised land consolidation projects to talk about the benefits. At a meeting in November they asked the members of the CRDK to voice 'the right opinion' at every occasion, by sending letters to newspapers, engaging in debates at public meetings, etc. They were supported by a group of 60 proponents who in December wrote a letter to every individual landowner, contradicting the arguments of the Committee of Resistance. Furthermore, the CRDK decided to openly confront the Committee during public debates. The Committee responded by organising four information meetings. At all of these meetings proponents of the land consolidation argued against the Committee of Resistance. The CRDK also organised several excursions for inhabitants to successful land consolidation projects. In the meantime a fierce discussion was held between the adversaries in the local newspapers. In an effort to reach a compromise, the farmers' unions and the union of tenants and mortgage farmers published a statement in which they promised to co-operate concerning a raise of the rent on land. It was not of much avail. Although the Committee of Resistance for a moment considered to stop its actions, it publicly stated to maintain its objections against the land consolidation project.

The plan was put to the vote at December 23, 1959. Of a total of 2680 landowners qualified to the vote, 1684 of them (59%, representing 5814 hectares) voted in favour, while the other 1176 (41%, representing 5224 hectares) voted against the project. This positive result marked the start of the implementation of the land consolidation plan, which eventually took more than ten years. Of the group that voted in favour of the project, only 215



actually showed up at voting day. The remaining 1469 of the 'yes'-voters were not present at the ballot, but were counted as voters in favour of the land consolidation plan.

We have not found any moment in this power struggle where actors besides the Dutch government were able to shape planning policies. How the planning instruments had to be used was not open for discussion. The landowners could only vote for or against the land consolidation. This meant that the only option 'to have things differently' was non-participation. It is interesting to note that the Dutch government was very explicit about the way people should conduct themselves. Still, the authorities realised that for a successful implementation of the land consolidation they needed the support of the regional inhabitants. This notion was constitutive for the room for manoeuvre (Tait, 2002) of the Committee of Resistance to argue against the land consolidation. These were moments of agency during the power struggle in 1959.

Case 2: The ROM Project Southeast Friesland

At the beginning of the 1990s rural planning was considered to become too complex. The planning policies and regulations overlapped and contradicted to a large extent. Also it was difficult to involve efficiently the many diverse stakeholders, e.g. policymakers, farmers, nature conservationists, entrepreneurs, rural dwellers, etc. To integrate the different rural planning policies and to stimulate a broad inclusive development of the Dutch countryside several projects were developed, which could be termed as Area-Based Policies. These projects were organised on a regional basis and aimed to bring together all the relevant stakeholders. One of the first Area-Based Policy projects were the so-called ROM-projects³.

A ROM-project was started in Southeast Friesland for several reasons. Over the subsequent decades Southeast Friesland developed towards a livestock-based agricultural production area. Despite the modernisation of agriculture several important nature areas still exist today, which makes the area attractive for recreational use. The area around the brook Koningsdiep is characterised by large modern farms, which have been developed during the land consolidation project in the 1960s. The area was characterised by a interweaving landscape of valuable nature and modern agriculture. In the late 1980s the area was targeted in several national planning schemes which all aimed to strengthen one particular dimension of the Dutch countryside, e.g. the development of sustainable agriculture; the preservation of cultural heritage; the conservation of nature; the stimulation of recreational use. It was meant to integrate all the different planning schemes and to implement them via a bottom-up procedure in which regional stakeholders would be able to participate. The stakeholders were organised into a Steering Committee, which would eventually direct five local commissions to reach the ROM objectives. Just as 40 years before, this project can also be described as a power struggle. However, this power struggle was fought differently.⁵

From May 1991 until July 1992 the authorities and the prospected participants discussed the set-up of the ROM-project. The participants of the project were the associations of regional stakeholders (the Friesian Water Board, the Northern Farmers' Union and the Friesian Environmental Federation) and municipal, provincial and national governments. They had to be organised together in a so-called Steering Group, to co-ordinate and control the execution of the ROM-project Southeast Friesland. There were three main tasks for the Steering Group: to allocate 2000 hectares which needed to be conversed for the EHS⁶ from agricultural land into nature reserves; to maintain the agricultural production capacity; and to recover the natural hydrological situation within the brook basin of the three brooks.

At first the farmers in Southeast Friesland, represented by the farmers' union, were reluctant to cooperate with the ROM-project for one main reason. They did not want to turn in 2000 hectares of land (450 hectares in the area around the brook Koningsdiep). Despite its reluctance the farmers' union finally agreed to join the Steering Committee on two conditions. They demanded a regional adaptation of the generic national ammonia (from manure) policy and they wanted to maintain their current regional production capacity. The farmers argued that an area-based implementation of the national ammonia policy was essential to be able to maintain the regional

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³ The abbreviation ROM stands for Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieu, meaning 'spatial development and environment'.

⁴ The Nature Policy Plan (*Natuurbeleidsplan*), the Fourth Memorandum on Spatial Planning (*Vierde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening*), the Structure Scheme on Green Spaces (*Structuurschema Groene Ruimte*), the Nature and Environment Policy Plan (*Natuur- en Milieubeleidsplan*) and the Nature Protection Act (*Natuurbeschermingswet*).

⁵ The information on this struggle is derived from interviews with the main participants, newspaper articles from *De Leeuwarder Courant*, *Het Friesch Dagblad*, *Het Agrarisch Dagblad*, *Intermediar* and project documentation. ⁶ EHS stands for *Ecologische Hoofd Structuur* (National Ecological Network), which is a network of connected nature reserves in the Netherlands, with a total of 730.000 ha. Through the conversion of agricultural land into nature reserve already existing nature reserves are linked into a ecological network to be finished in 2018.



agricultural production capacity. The national legislation indicated that the ammonia levels on individual farms depended on both the *emission* of ammonia (from stables) and the *deposition* of ammonia on so-called acid-sensitive elements in the vicinity of the farm. Acid-sensitive elements could be trees, bushes or shrubbery. If a farm was located close to such elements, it could not expand its production, because it would violate the law. An intensification or enlargement of the farms would automatically raise the ammonia levels beyond the critical juridical measures. Due to the typical landscape in Southeast Friesland - meadows enclosed by wooden banks (see Van der Ploeg, 2003: 132-136) - many farms were located in the vicinity of acid-sensitive elements. As a result, the ammonia policy restricted about 1000 farmers, of a total of 1300, to modernise their farm. The farmers in Southeast Friesland felt they were relatively disadvantaged by this policy:

'The way how the ammonia policy measures damage of ammonia to the bushes is not well grounded. Besides, farmers close to nature areas are restricted disproportionately. The reduction [of the ammonia emission] via a different style of farming is fairer, because it would apply to all farmers.' (spokesperson of the farmers' union)

This statement contains the dimensions of the power struggle we aim to highlight. It questions the generic ammonia policy on scientific grounds and on its fairness in the context of Southeast Friesland.

In July 1992, regional, provincial and national stakeholders in Southeast Friesland agreed to start a ROM-project and to pool financial resources. The main objectives of the project were to design a plan to reduce the ammonia levels on farms, to agree on the number and allocation of the 2000 hectares for new nature reserves and to propose measures to guarantee the preservation of the regional agricultural production capacity. In the following years the farmers' union tried to change the generic ammonia policy in order to make it fit their context. One way of doing this was by questioning the scientific facts on which the ammonia policy was based. We need to look at this more closely. First, we will present the struggle over the specific set-up of the generic ammonia policy and how the ROM participants tried to change it. Second, we will look at the ways in which knowledge was used to discredit the generic ammonia policy.

The farmers' union only wanted to continue in the ROM-project if the ammonia problem in Southeast Friesland would be solved via legislation based on the ammonia emission instead of ammonia deposition. They proposed a regional average emission-standard of 52,5 kg. per hectare per year, which would apply to all farmers in the region in order to reduce the negative environmental effects of ammonia. Over a period of 6 years the farmers' union together with the other ROM participants tried to convince the national government to accept their proposal. On several occasions the ROM participants negotiated with the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment. But on every occasion the Ministry rejected the proposal, because it could not be harmonised with the generic ammonia policy. The Ministry was not willing to either adapt the generic ammonia policy to fit the Friesian proposal or to attribute Southeast Friesland an exceptional status.

Only after an advice of an independent commission of 'wise men', installed by the Ministry and the Province of Friesland, an agreement was reached in February 1996. The 'wise men' proposed to use a covenant instead of a juridical solution to reach an agreement, because the former would give a moral binding between the different participants, while the latter could easily result in alienation between government and region. The covenant should include that the formal deposition-standards of the generic ammonia policy were considered to be unfit for Southeast Friesland. Instead a regional emission-ceiling (52,5 kg. NH₃ per hectare per year until 2000) should be applied. To comply with this norm farmers should be allowed to take various individual measures, such as fewer animals per hectare, emission-low fertilisation, emission-low stables, coverage of manure-deposits, etc.

'Better, more effective, incentives have to be found, which will appeal to the (individual) farmers' responsibilities. It is of essential importance that farmers are able to contribute to and are susceptible for solutions in their management of their farm.' (Advice of the Commission of 'wise men', 1996)

In return the nature areas in Southeast Friesland should not be allotted as acid-sensitive. In that way the generic ammonia policy should no longer be applicable and, as a consequence, the farmers should be obliged to cooperate with the ROM-project, including the allocation and development of 2000 hectares of EHS. That was the deal to be made.

In the following years, however, the Ministry and the ROM participants struggled over the specific content of the covenant. The farmers' union was confronted with a fragmented constituency. Several farmers welcomed the covenant, while others (intensive farmers and farmers not in the vicinity of environmentally sensitive nature areas) considered it as an obstacle. To comply with the demands of its constituency the farmers' union wanted a covenant about a reduction of the ammonia emission on a regional level instead of a farm level. They legitimised these new demands by stating that the 52,5 kilogram NH₃ per year had been almost accomplished by if one took

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⁷ We leave here aside the internal struggle between the farmers' union and the other ROM participants over this issue.



a regional mean as measure unit. In its reply the Ministry insisted that it wanted to tailor emission standards per individual farm. Eventually, they reached an agreement on a regional average ammonia emission in the year 2000 of 52,5 kg. per hectare. If the regional average emission was exceeded special measures would be taken against individual farms with a too high ammonia emission. Furthermore, special legislation would be developed for the group of intensive farms, in the form of an 'Ammonia Reduction Plan'. If these farmers would take measures to reduce the ammonia emission, they would be allowed to use half of the ammonia emission reduction to expand their farm.

In the subsequent months the authorities translated this agreement into legislation: a Provincial Environment Ordinance and the Ammonia Reduction Plan. During these next months it appeared that the combination of a covenant, which annuls the status of acid-sensitive elements, did not juridical fit together with an ammonia reduction plan, because in an ammonia reduction plan one is obliged to allocate acid-sensitive elements in order to make it work. The ROM-partners decided in a meeting in October 1997 that they would lobby the national parliament to have them adjust the successive generic ammonia policy in such a way that the Friesian proposal would be juridical possible. Furthermore, in February 1998, the Ministry wanted to construct a new experiment-law for Southeast Friesland in order to create a judicial possibility for the covenant to work.

During these years of struggle a fierce discussion developed between the pros and cons of the model used in generic ammonia policy to measure the negative effects of ammonia, the effects of ammonia in general and the effectiveness of the ammonia policy. The opponents, i.e. the farmers, contested the scientific arguments on which the policy was grounded. The struggle shows that access to (scientific) knowledge was no longer exclusively preserved for authorities. In this case, the farmers' union deliberately issued a research on the environmentally negative effects of ammonia. In this report (Hanekamp, 1995), the researchers came to the conclusion that the negative effects of ammonia were dependent on the specifics of the soil. In relation to this conclusion they considered the scientific assumptions of the Dutch manure policy to be very marginal. The report concluded that the methods for the calculation of ammonia emission were derived from a general model, which did not take into account the specific place, soil, wind direction and the capacity for nitrification or denitrification of the soil. One of the consequences of this report was that scientists from the Ministry, research institutes and universities together with several members of parliament met in a round-table discussion in April 1996. One of the conclusions of this meeting was that the generic ammonia policy needed to change, which happened after the elections for parliament later that year.

In August 1998 the new national government that came to power after the elections indicated stated that policies aiming at ammonia reduction should use emission standards as much as possible, instead of deposition standards. In the autumn of 1998 the parliament debated about this new policy. A majority of parliament voted for a generic ammonia policy based on emission standards. In this policy farmers were obliged to not exceed 2,5 GVE⁹ per hectare, they needed to adapt or construct stables with low ammonia emission and better manure application techniques. These new policy plans were discussed within the Steering Committee in January 1999. The Committee concluded that the need for a separate experiment-law had diminished due to the recent policy change and it was afraid that a complete experiment-law would require the adaptation of other generic policies. Due to the experiences with the adaptation of the generic ammonia policy the farmers' union was weary of continuing with the experiment-law.

'A farmer has to be able to choose between many different means (using and changing fodder, adaptation of the quality and amount of manure, etc.) in order to conform to legislation. Allowing this choice does not only require an adaptation of the generic ammonia policy (and by now we know how difficult that is), but also an adaptation of the Manure Components Act, the Soil Protection Act and the future legislation on the GVE-norm. All in all, this seems a mission impossible. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves if the ROM-approach, with distinct rules for the measurement of ammonia and a distinct treatment of intensive farming are extra benefits in the light of the recently changed ammonia policy. Now that we can assume with much certainty that the deposition policy will be changed into emission policy I believe that there are no extra benefits from an exclusive ROM-covenant. (From a farmers' union memo, January, 1999).

The farmers' union convinced the other ROM-partners to give up the demand for an experiment-law and instead settle with the new generic policies, which would be operative at the end of 1999. Now the ROM-partners did not have to wait any longer with official confirmation of the ROM-covenant. In July 1999 the ROM-partners eventually signed the covenant, which should realise the allocation of 2000 hectares of EHS. The main goal of

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⁸ This was done through papers and columns in newspapers. Compare the next titles: 'Ammonia, a blessing for ozone' (Leeuwarder Courant, 24-5-1993) and 'Ammonia from manure is an environmental problem' (Leeuwarder Courant, 26-3-1994).

⁹ GVE stands for cattle-unit. One GVE equals the total amount of phosphor production of one full-grown cow. With this entity the phosphor production of different animal species can be compared with each other.



the project was now described as 'to foster the socio-economic development, the liveability and the values of nature, environment and landscape in Southeast Friesland'.

The ability to change planning policies proved to be decisive in this power struggle. In their effort to revise the generic ammonia policy the ROM-participants were able to 'recode' to a certain degree this policy. For this purpose, they contested the rationale underlying the generic ammonia policy. The farmers' union was able to do this by calling in scientific research. It shows that the production of knowledge was not exclusively a domain of the authorities any longer. Due to the agency to change policy there were more options open besides non-participation. The benefits of participation with a possibility for change outweighed the drawbacks of non-participation. However, the case also shows that adapting policy to fit local contexts can be a long, difficult and uncertain trajectory due to the complex, overlapping and changing legislation on which Dutch rural planning is based.

Controlled Decontrolling

A comparison between the projects in the area of the Koningsdiep in 1959 and 1999 shows how power struggles over Dutch rural land use have changed through time and how planning policies mediate power relations. From the 1950s Dutch rural planning rationalised and modernised land use. A diverse, small-scale, labour-intensive landscape was transformed into an efficient, modernised production landscape. The instruments par excellence to complete this transformation were land consolidation projects, mainly used to modernise agriculture. Land consolidation can be viewed as a comprehensive project, which included extension services, scientific research and law. Besides a transformation of the landscape also a social change was targeted. Dutch planning used the metaphor of a 'malleable society' (Andela, 2000), which illustrated the belief that the state was able to change all aspects of society. This rationality dominated Dutch rural planning during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994; Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000). In this period the body of planning regulations targeting rural areas was intensified, enlarged and complicated. The agency of local actors to have an effect on planning regulations was very limited.

The case on the land consolidation project in 1959 highlights this development. It was one of the first projects in which authorities realised that regional support was a necessary condition for success. This was a reason to include local leaders in the CRDK and to engage in extension activities. Local inhabitants were informed on a large scale and in a relatively early stage, which created opportunities to influence the project. In this way, the project enlarged the room for manoeuvre for local actors and strengthened their agency. One result was the open, antagonistic power struggle between a pros and contras preceding the vote. At the same time, this room for manoeuvre was also considerably restricted for a number of reasons. Planning authorities had exclusive access to policymaking. The engineers dominated the discussions within the CRDK. They tried to influence the conduct of farmers through 'voicing the right opinion'. Documents show that they were very explicit concerning the rational way in which farmers should develop their farm. It seems that the local members of the CRDK did not have the capacity to change policies of the land consolidation, because we have not found any traces of their influence in the archive material. Furthermore, the Committee of resistance did not have contacts with the authorities and were thus not able to negotiate the set-up of the land consolidation project. Logically, the only option open for the Committee of resistance and other critics of the land consolidation was non-participation; to be against the land consolidation project. They were not able to influence the set-up of the land consolidation, which remained the domain of politicians and engineers.

In the years following the land consolidation project Koningsdiep rural planning was deregulated due to increased environmental awareness, processes of de-hierarchisation and actions of new social movements. Local groups achieved opportunities to participate in local and regional planning processes besides farmers. At the start of the 1990s rural planning became an important instrument again for the regional integration of different economical and environmental land-use functions. However, this did not minimise or simplify regulations. A whole new body of regulations was designed to ensure the collation of new land-use projects. Typical for this period was the construction of area-based policy, resembling the Local Strategic Partnerships in the United Kingdom (Wakeford, 2003), which was considered as a device to cope with spatial problems related to rural land use at regional levels (Boonstra and Frouws, 2004). An important effect of deregulation was that local actors obtained more opportunities to exercise power to shape planning policies.

The effects of this process on the use of the power in planning practices can be seen in the ROM-project during the 1990s. The major difference with the land consolidation project Koningsdiep is that local stakeholders were able to influence, albeit with much difficulty, the set-up of planning policies. They were able to have an effect upon the context in which the ROM-project takes place. For this reason non-participation became irrational because it would have denied them this power. Nevertheless, to have an effect on planning policies local stakeholders necessarily had to change the set-up of planning policies. The Farming Union successfully contests the scientific model on which the generic ammonia policy is based. This is a clear example of enabling power. The 'right opinion' is not as undisputed as it was in 1959. It is also interesting to see that knowledge on which



planning is based is not any longer directly about human conduct, i.e. the most rational way to farm, but instead on the environmental circumstances, i.e. the ammonia emissions. Of course, indirectly, this knowledge influences human conduct via environmental regulation. At the same time the increase in enabling power is matched with regulations to restrict and control social action. Due to their involvement in the ROM-project local and regional participants are obliged to go by its procedures, i.e. the legislation and regulation involved. These have become more complex and affect the context of the ROM-project. It proves to be very difficult and time-consuming to alter legislation to fit local circumstances.

Taken together, these case studies show how Dutch rural planning was 'decontrolled' by assigning and dispensing autonomy to individuals in a process of deregulation. On the other hand this decontrolling was 'controlled' via planning policies in a process of increasing legislative complexity. Taken together we characterise this process a controlled decontrolling of Dutch rural planning. It influences to considerable extent the way power is used. Power struggles in current Dutch rural planning typically evolve around the way in which actors are able to have an effect upon policies of rural planning. These policies mediate power relations between actors and in this way structure their possible fields of action. To understand the development of Dutch rural planning as a process of controlled decontrolling makes clear that democratisation and deregulation of Dutch rural policy should not solely be regarded as an empowerment of rural stakeholders. Collaborative planning projects stimulated unmistakably the agency of stakeholders to choose their personal conduct and influence the set-up of planning policies. However, collaborative Dutch rural planning is disciplining human behaviour in an indirect way, via the complication and routinisation of planning policies and regulations.

Critical Planning

Differentiation of rural land-use, environmental problems, urbanisation and a decrease in economical feasibility of traditional agriculture changed Dutch rural planning. Technical-rational planning was replaced with collaborative planning. Key objectives of current Dutch rural planning are: collaboration, consensus between stakeholders and multipurpose land-use. Often this change is described as an ongoing democratisation, which empowers stakeholders at the expense of centralised control of the Dutch state. In contrast, practices of Dutch collaborative planning show that empowerment and democratisation is only one side of the coin. Often collaborative planning is characterised by deep conflict, power struggles and distrust. In this paper we presented an alternative analysis to take account of these two sides of Dutch rural planning.

For this purpose we conceptualised power as a relational ability, which enables and restricts social action. This conceptualisation of power is used in two case studies to illustrate how the exercise of power in Dutch rural planning has changed over a period of 40 years. This comparison shows that the agency of local actors to influence planning policies changed considerably. Decentralisation and decontrolling of rural planning and policy enlarged the room for manoeuvre for rural stakeholders. However, this does not mean that government has ceased or that local actors are now empowered. The example of the ammonia regulation in the 1990s shows how rural planning is also complicated. Consequently, power in Dutch rural planning nowadays dependents much on the ability of actors to influence the complex planning policies operating at different political levels On the basis of this analysis we offer an alternative understanding of Dutch rural planning. Although Dutch rural planning definitely democratised, which increased possibilities for participation of rural stakeholders, it is also controlled via a complication of rural planning policies. This paradoxical process can be understood as a controlled decontrolling of Dutch rural planning.

How does our analysis contribute to planning theory and practice? The debate on power in planning underlined its ubiquity, i.e. power is understood as a network of social relations. As the debate on power in planning showed, the ubiquitous conception of power is difficult to integrate with objectives to democratise planning practices because it seems to exclude the possibility of agency. It is for this reason that several authors opt to discard ubiquitous definitions such as the one outlined by Foucault. We believe that his power analytics is to valuable for planning theory and practice to leave aside. To use Foucault's analytics we propose to pay special attention how power is mediated, through routinised forms of social action. In other words, how these routinised forms construct room for manoeuvre for actors. We used two case studies to show how Dutch planning policies mediate power relations in specific ways. This analysis used allowed us to analyse the genealogy of power in Dutch rural planning as a process of controlled decontrolling.

We believe that an understanding of planning policies as intermediates between the agency of subjects and the power that subjects them offers an analytical framework which can account for both the enabling as well as the restricting dimension of power. As such it can lead to nuanced and critical planning theory, which is practically informed because how planning policies constitute room for manoeuvre is always a matter of context.

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