

Research Paper

Thoughts for urban food: A social practice perspective on urban planning for agriculture in Almere, the Netherlands

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Social practice lens on the professional domain of urban planning.
- Hybrid planning practices of Almere (NL) integrate agriculture in new urbanisation.
- Integration of agriculture stretched the professional domain of urban planning.
- Clear vision, leadership and new expertise fostered hybrid planning practices.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Urban agriculture
Social practices
Urban planning
Peri-urban zone
Urban development

ABSTRACT

A growing group of cities feels responsible to feed urban populations sustainably. This has stimulated cities to embrace urban agriculture as an alternative in their food system orientation. However, while urban agriculture in all its diversity has arrived in the urban fabric and at planners' desks, it largely remains an outsider to urban planning practices of peri-urban zones. How could city's planning practices transform into practices that include urban agriculture in peri-urban zones? This paper reflects at this question with the analyses of the becoming of planning practices of the Dutch city of Almere that fully integrate urban agriculture in a new urban area: Oosterwold.

Using a social practice perspective, our study unpacks the shifting position of agriculture in the planning practices of Almere over a 55-year period. The paper describes the historical reconstruction by examining the meanings, materials and competences in four periods of the urban planning practices. Our analysis reveals that the integration of agriculture into the city's planning is not just a sign of the times. Agriculture has always been an element of planning from the city's inception. Nevertheless, it took 55 years to emerge as hybrid urban-rural planning practices that fully integrate agriculture in urbanisation. Furthermore, the case demonstrates how this integration of agriculture stretches the professional domain of urban planning as it required interdisciplinary and unconventional operation as well as leadership to organise.

1. Introduction

Today's reality of rapidly expanding conurbations, on the one hand, and concerns about the impact of the current - globally oriented - food system, on the other hand, prompts a global awareness about how to feed cities sustainably (e.g. Cabannes & Marocchino, 2018; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Morgan, 2015; Seto, Sánchez-Rodríguez, & Fragkias, 2010). Interests in feeding urban populations are increasingly stimulating local authorities to consider a city-regional orientation on food systems, as exemplified by the members of the Milan Urban Food Policy

Pact (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018; Ilieva, 2016; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Morgan, 2015; Opitz, Berges, Piore, & Krikser, 2016). Local authorities realise that agriculture within a city-region is generally overlooked by and disconnected from the urban domain and that a reconnection between city and local agriculture potentially contributes to a sustainable city-region food system (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018; Morgan, 2015; Opitz et al., 2016). The urgency to locally reconnect agriculture becomes explicit when the global food system is under pressure due to uncertainties that might affect local food supply, like geopolitical crisis, natural disasters, climate change or the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

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Received 16 February 2020; Received in revised form 18 October 2020; Accepted 26 October 2020

Available online 14 November 2020

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In the Global North, the focus of this paper, a growing group of cities considers urban agriculture as a promising avenue for improving both the sustainability and resilience of the city-region food system (Morgan, 2015; Opitz et al., 2016; Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014). Urban agriculture here is understood as “an industry located within (intra-urban) or on the fringe (peri-urban) of a town, a city or a metropolis, which grows or raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re-) using largely human and material resources, products, and services found in and around that urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products, and services largely to that urban area” (Mougeot, 2000:10). Urban agriculture thus depends on urban resources, competes for land with other urban functions, is influenced by urban policies, and uses and supplies urban products and services. The notion of ‘urban’ in urban agriculture defines not so much its features or its location but rather its connection to the adjacent city through markets, resources and services.

In early times urban agriculture was an integral part of the urban domain, but with the industrial revolution - specifically the development of fast and long-distance transport and food conservation - agriculture lost that position (Steel, 2008). In the Global North urban agriculture regained interest with Ebenezer Howard’s garden city design which revalued and integrated it in the urban and peri-urban planning (Cabannes & Ross, 2018). More recently, a renewed interest of urban planning in urban agriculture emerged with scholars like Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000), and Bohn and Viljoen (2012). Simultaneously urban agriculture initiatives, either with or without support of planning, like school- and community gardens and urban farms transpired into the urban fabric (Morgan, 2015; Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014).

However, urban agriculture largely remains an outsider in the planning of peri-urban zones (Opitz et al., 2016). The peri-urban zones, the focus of this paper, are understood as “spatially and structurally dynamic transition zones where land use, populations, and activities are neither fully urban nor rural” (Seto et al., 2010: 177). When planning for peri-urban zones, urban planners still leave agriculture out of their plans; farming is considered a rural business and farmland as just “awaiting development” (Ilieva, 2016: 79). Nevertheless, farmland in the peri-urban zones is gradually infiltrated with non-agricultural, urban usages, which fragments the farmland and consequently the remaining agriculture dwindles. Pressure at agriculture even occurs when the peri-urban farmland is legally protected by zoning and urban containment programs (Akimowicz, Harry Cummings, & Landman, 2016; Olsson et al., 2016; Ustaoglu & Williams, 2017). Urban planning practices require fundamental change when striving for inclusion of urban agriculture in peri-urban planning.

This paper analyses a change of planning practices that led to a hybrid urban-rural planning which integrated urban agriculture in a peri-urban development. The analysis is guided by the key question of how to include urban agriculture in peri-urban planning and by the sub-questions of who is engaged and what elements are instrumental. By reflecting on these questions, this paper considers the nature of (peri-) urban planning in the debate on how to feed cities sustainably.

In the next section the paper proceeds with the presentation of social practice theories, fundamental to our analytical framework. Next a description of the applied methodology is provided which includes an introduction of our case study, the Dutch city of Almere. Finally, we present and analyse our findings, followed by a discussion and the conclusions.

2. Analytical framework

In this study we conceptualise urban planning as a social practice. We apply a social practice approach because it takes the ‘middle ground’ between a focus on institutional structure and human agency. A social practice is understood as a reproductive activity enacted by knowledgeable and capable human agents, i.e. the practitioners - in our case urban planners - (Giddens, 1984; Schatzki, 2016; Spaargaren, Lamers, &

Weenink, 2016). Social practices are “a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoffective structure, and general understandings” (Schatzki, 2002: 87). They are not isolated activities but interconnected – bundled - with (and thus influenced by) other practices and contextual developments (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). The practice of urban planning, for example, is interwoven with practices, such as designing, economic planning, social housing, as well as impacted by larger societal developments including the economic climate, environmental concerns, and growth and composition of the population. All these aspects influence how planning practices are performed.

Social practices are inherently dynamic, they have their own life-cycle: practices emerge, solidify, transform and eventually fall apart over time. A social practice approach thus offers “untapped potential for understanding change” (Shove et al., 2012:1). Although predominantly applied in studies of consumption (like food, mobility and energy), the practice approach is increasingly trickling into the domain of professional studies (e.g. Loscher, Splitter, & Seidl, 2019; Gartner, Stam, Thompson, & Verduyn, 2016). This includes urban planning. Binder and Boldero (2012) used a practice approach to analyse the introduction of sustainable construction targets in urban development in Australia. Cohen and Ilieva (2015) applied a social practice approach to study change in NYC food planning. Lamond and Everett (2019) used it to understand the community preferences in the UK for Blue-Green Infrastructures (BGI). These studies highlighted that a social practice approach was supportive to obtain an understanding on how and why change occurred.

In this study we use a social practice approach to deconstruct the changing position of (urban) agriculture in the urban planning of Almere. Our analysis consists of three components (Fig. 1). Firstly, we zoom in on how planning practices are performed over time as the result of the dynamic interplay of three elements (Shove et al., 2012): (1) meanings (e.g. symbolic meanings, discourses), (2) competences (e.g. skills, know-how), and (3) materials (e.g. technology, material artefacts). That is, how and why links between these three elements arise, persist, disrupt and disappear. Secondly, we focus on the practitioners of the practice and more precisely the shifting composition of the practitioners performing the planning practices over time (Reckwitz, 2002). This is specifically relevant given the professional nature of urban planning practices. Thirdly, zooming out, we observe the shifting urban planning practices as embedded in the wider societal context of urban planning in the Netherlands (Nicolini, 2009).

In the next section we present our case study, the planning of Almere, and our social practice informed research methods.

3. Research methods

3.1. Case study – the planning of Almere

This study is based on the history of planning the city of Almere, the Netherlands. Almere was founded about 45 years ago and is located on the outskirts of the Amsterdam Metropole (Fig. 2). Almere is planned and developed on the reclaimed land of the Southern Flevo Polder (Fig. 4). The city is a typical exponent of the Dutch spatial planning after WWII: a top-down and meticulously planned and developed city strictly segregated from its agricultural hinterland. In contrast, Almere’s newly planned area, Oosterwold (Fig. 2), marks a watershed in the Dutch spatial planning. Oosterwold planning integrates agriculture into urbanisation; the Oosterwold Master Plan dedicates 50% of Oosterwold’s 4,300 ha to urban agriculture (Almere, 2012). In this respect, Almere provides a unique opportunity to analyse the elements that were instrumental to the emergence of urban agriculture in the urban planning practices.

This paper focuses on the period from 1958 to 2013 to deconstruct the changing planning practices of Almere. The year 1958 is significant because the Dutch government launched a national spatial planning

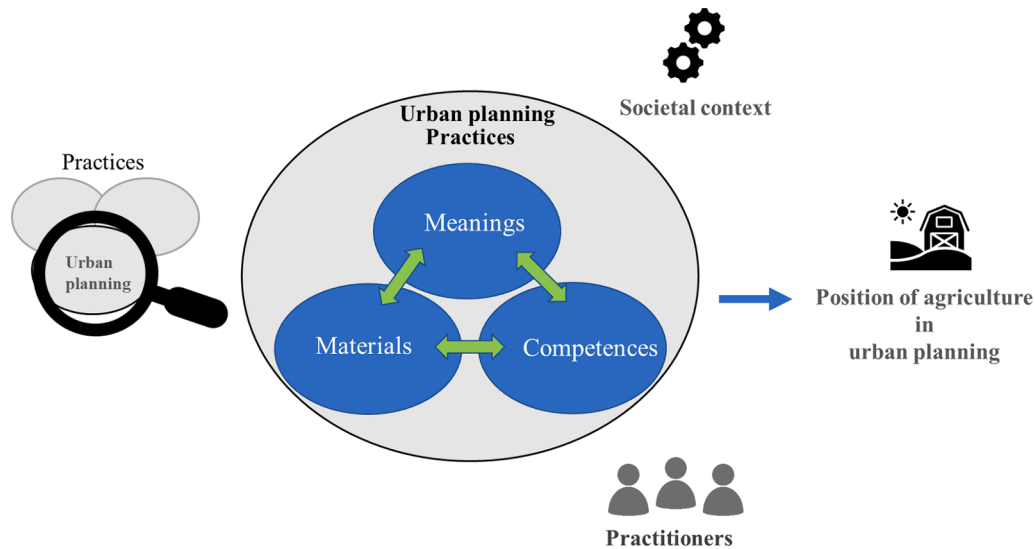


Fig. 1. Analytical framework of this paper.



Fig. 2. The Dutch city of Almere (208,000 residents in 2019) with its new district Oosterwold. (Source: [Almere, 2012](#)).

document that - for the first time - emphasised the need for urbanisation in both the Eastern (reclaimed in 1957) and Southern part of the Flevo Polder (reclaimed in 1968) (OWL, 1958). The planning of substantial urbanisation in both Flevo Polders marked a new era as the Flevo Polders were originally dedicated to agriculture. The analysis ends in 2013 with the regional and national approval of the Master Plan of Oosterwold ([Almere, 2012](#)).

3.2. Methods

Social practices as a methodological approach captures the actual performed activities of practices while observing 'sayings' and 'doings' ([Schatzki, 2002](#); [Shove et al., 2012](#)). Given the historical reconstruction approach of this study, the possibilities for a direct capture of performed activities are limited. To analyse the pathway of change in the planning practices of Almere, we used qualitative research methods, consisting of historical document analysis and in-depth stakeholder interviews, capturing 'sayings' about 'doings' in past and present times.

Our study started with the analysis of 31 planning documents (both official and non-official; [Appendix A](#)) issued by the local authorities between 1958 and 2013, of which some are cited in this paper. As a reference, we consulted national spatial planning policy documents published between 1958 and 2013 ($n = 7$). In addition, we drew upon a broader range of documents and accounts reporting about the planning of Almere and Oosterwold, including published historical accounts from involved actors as well as media communications, personal notes of

exchanges with planners, and summaries of meetings and workshops of the first author. From 2006 to 2013, the first author carried out projects and participated in workshops and design sessions commissioned by the Oosterwold planning team as well as its precursors.

The document analysis was synthesized with semi-structured interviews ($n = 17$) with planners, (landscape) architects, (social) geographers, economists and policymakers connected to Almere planning. The interviewees were selected based on their role and function as well as on the period they were active in the planning process. The group of interviewees bridged the Almere planning between 1971 and 2013, each decade was represented by at least four interviewees (notice that some interviewees spanned more than one decade). The interviews were carried out during summer and autumn 2018. They lasted about one hour each, were recorded and transcribed, except for one interview that took place through e-mail. All interviewees gave their consent to use the material in this research. The interviews and documents were analysed to identify the practice elements (e.g. meanings, competences and material), the practitioners engaged with the Almere planning practices, and the societal context in which the planning took shape. Within this analysis our focus was on agriculture in more general terms, rather than on the specific notion of urban agriculture, because the explicit reference to urban agriculture emerged in Almere planning only after the year 2000.

4. Findings

Spatial planning in the Netherlands after WWII was guided by a strict spatial segregation between cities, seen as residential zones, and rural areas, predominately seen as agricultural zones. The strict segregation aimed to keep the scarce rural landscape open in a densely populated country, and it developed an extensive set of rules, blueprint development plans and a highly institutionalised approach to spatial planning ([Gerrits, Rauws, & De Roo, 2012](#); [Roodbol-Mekkes, van der Valk, & Altes, 2012](#)). National spatial planning was guided by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Spatial Planning and is generally considered successful because urbanisation remained limited and concentrated even in areas with high urban pressure ([Koomen, Dekkers, & van Dijk, 2008](#)). Rural areas, in contrast, were the domain of Dutch Agriculture, which ascended to become a competitive player in the global food system. It is against this background that the planning of Almere evolved.

Within the timespan of our analysis (1958–2013), we distinguish four periods in which we uncover the shifts in urban planning practices and simultaneously analyse why, how and to what extent agriculture co-

constituted these practices. Fig. 3(a-d) presents the planning practices as well as the resulting plan of each of the four periods.

4.1. Period 1: 1958–1971

This period starts with the first national spatial planning document (1958) in which the construction of a city is projected in the Southern Flevo Polder and ends with the formal approval in 1971 to develop

Almere. The foundations of Almere were laid in the 1960s atmosphere of optimism in modernisation (Van Der Wal, 1997).

4.1.1. Societal context

The Flevo Polder is the final piece of what started in 1918 as the so-called law on reclaiming the ‘Zuiderzee’. This law was initiated to protect the shoreline, combat salinization and improve the water management of the northern part of the Netherlands (Goverde, 1987). New

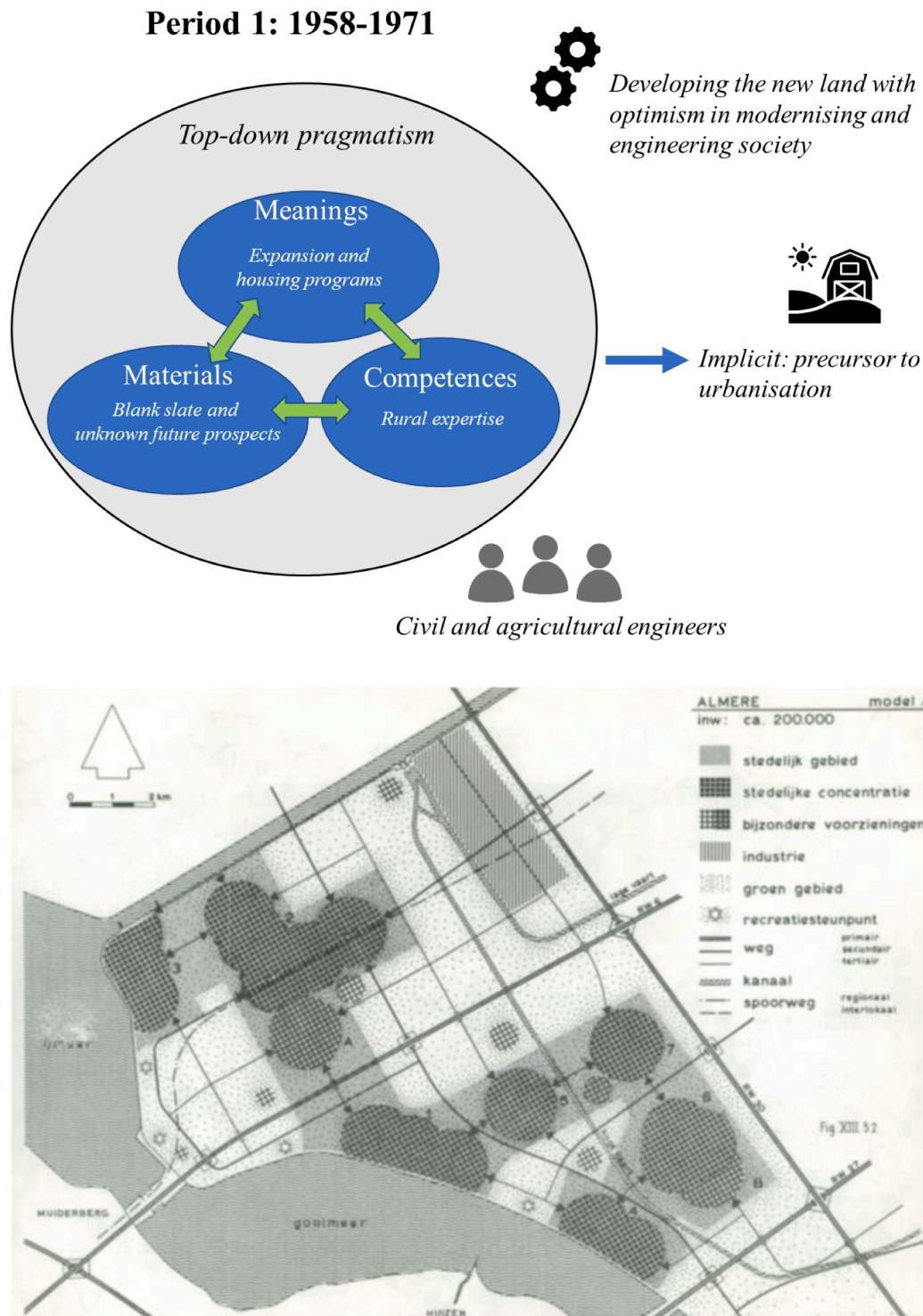


Fig. 3a. Planning practices of period 1 (upper) leading to the first 1970s plans to accommodate 125,000 to 250,000 residents within 25 years in Almere (lower). The plan suggested a poly-nuclear layout of 5–8 built-up nuclei consisting of homes, shops and other urban functions and surrounded by green intra-nuclear areas (Source: Verkenningen, 1970).

polders formed a key element in the law. These new polders would eventually provide the Netherlands with good agricultural land in the years of austerity after World War I and notably after World War II. The Dutch government established a dedicated project organisation, the Flevo Polders Development Authority (FPDA), to engineer the newly reclaimed land to accommodate an 'elite' agricultural society (Goverde, 1987; Van Der Wal, 1997).

Until the mid-1950s, small scale urbanisation in the polder was aimed at benefitting the agricultural community. However, in the late 1950s this changed when urbanisation was reconsidered as a strategy to mitigate the expected expansion of the northern wing of the Randstad, a megalopolis in the central-western Netherlands primarily consisting of the four largest Dutch cities and their satellites. Although the need for new cities was already mentioned in the planning document of 1958, only the Second National Spatial Plan of 1966 effectively and officially announced urbanisation in the Southern Flevo Polder (Tweede Nota, 1966). Two years later this new urbanisation plan was officially ratified by the national government and its realisation was allocated to the south-western part of the newly reclaimed Southern Flevo Polder (Berg et al., 2001). The national government mandated FPDA to carry out a reconnaissance study of this new urbanisation, although both the city of Amsterdam and the city of Utrecht eagerly applied for this role as well. Launched in 1970, the reconnaissance document proposed that the new urbanisation - Almere - would consist of a poly-nuclear layout (Fig. 3a). This poly-nuclear layout was criticised by the national planning institutions because it was considered anti-urban (Van Der Wal, 1997). However, criticism did not gain the upper hand and a pragmatic attitude dominated, leading in 1971 to the formal approval by the national government to develop Almere (Nawijn, 1988).

4.1.2. The practitioners

The FPDA consisted of agricultural and civil engineers who had little experience with urbanisation. Although they had developed some polder villages and had started to develop the city of Lelystad in the Eastern Flevo Polder, their main task was to prepare both Flevo Polders for agriculture. One of the former Almere planners (Interviewee 7) recalled the FPDA organisation with the phrase "... the FPDA created its polders and also Almere purely top-down, neatly calculated ... One of the first things planned in Almere was the cemetery. It was the director of the FPDA who said, we are not going to let people live here if they cannot be buried here as well". Placing the reconnaissance of Almere under the auspices of FPDA meant that it resorted under the Ministry of Public Affairs instead of the customary Ministry of Home Affairs and Spatial Planning. This unusual position and background gave the FPDA the opportunity to operate relatively independently in its own realm -the Flevo Polder-, unencumbered by traditional institutions, conventions, and programs of urban planning.

4.1.3. Planning practices

The FPDA started the planning of Almere with a blank slate, that is, a desolate, muddy, flat and open polder landscape. Its only physical features at the time were a dyke in the southwest and a large scale agricultural grid of ditches and fields to the northeast (Fig. 4). As mentioned before, the FPDA proposed a poly-nuclear layout for the future city. They wanted to remain flexible in Almere's development in the light of its yet unknown future dimensions, preferences and needs. Specifically, the experiences with the rather rigid, centric and unrealistic design of Lelystad informed the need for more flexible design approaches. In addition, Lelystad's development taught the FPDA that creating a new city revolves around future residents and how they like to live and not around symbolic architecture (Van Der Wal, 1997). A high level of urbanisation in Almere was rejected. Within the FPDA the common ethos prevailed that residents prefer to live in a pastoral-like (rural) setting in one-family homes with a garden and with all urban functions (leisure, work, shops, and green) within walking distance and integrated into an urban environment (Berg et al., 2001). The experience that the FPDA

had with integrating nature, agriculture and leisure in other parts of the polder directed the desire to integrate multiple functions in the planning. As a FDPA planner mentioned in Berg et al., (2001: 19): "My involvement in the integration of agriculture, nature, recreation and forestry [in the Flevo Polder] constituted the idea of the poly-nuclear layout. Such a structure would also allow us to integrate these elements into urban areas".

The FPDA underlined the importance of the green intra-nuclear areas between the built-up areas as the city's basic structure (Fig. 3a). They recognised these areas as the backbone to the new urbanisation as well as a functional part of the future city. The reconnaissance document provisionally dedicated at least one third of the future city's spatial room to green intra-nuclear areas. In addition, it provided for undefined intra-nuclear areas for unanticipated future functions. Although agriculture was not specifically mentioned as a user of these green intra-nuclear areas, the reconnaissance report suggested that agriculture had at least a precursor - place making - function to urbanisation. This spatial function was most prominent at the city's east side. In the FPDA's perception, agriculture and urbanisation formed communicating vessels within the projected urban development: two to four urban nucleus were projected, whereby the number and size were contingent on the expected number of future residents.

4.2. Period 2: 1972–1983

This period starts in 1972 with the national approval of Almere's foundation and ends in 1983 with Almere's formal structure plan although Almere had already housed its first residents by 1976. Almere is planned, designed and developed in a period that echoed anti-establishment sentiments and social and environmental pessimism.

4.2.1. Societal context

In 1972, the FPDA was tasked to develop a city for 125,000 to 250,000 residents by 2000. It had to be an independent city and not a suburb of Amsterdam or Utrecht. For this specific urbanisation task, the FPDA appointed the task force Project Office Almere (POA) to implement the urbanisation, and in doing so, it bypassed the criticism that the FPDA organisation could not develop a city. The POA formally resided under the FPDA, but in practice, the POA operated practically independently. The FPDA was too preoccupied with the further development of the Flevo Polder and the city of Lelystad, in particular, to closely monitor the POA's activities.

In 1977, the national government ratified its Third National Spatial Plan (Derde Nota, 1977). Key to this plan was a controlled and concentrated urbanisation within a selective group of 10 Dutch cities; Almere was earmarked as one of them. The Third National Spatial Plan positioned Almere at the core of urban development of the northern wing of the Dutch Randstad. Almere had to accommodate about 24,000 of the needed 100,000 homes in the period 1980–1990.

A concept version of Almere's structure plan was released early 1978, and after adjustments the official plan was approved in 1983 (Fig. 3b).

4.2.2. The practitioners

In 1971, the FPDA started to recruit POA employees, and within a few years, the organisation had evolved into a project office of about 80 people, predominantly young, urban academics from various disciplines: social scientists, geographers, planners, economists, designers, constructionists, architects and landscape architects. Stirred by the early 1970s atmosphere of anti-establishment sentiments, POA's young academics contradicted and contrasted with the traditionally and hierarchically organised FPDA. As one POA planner (Interviewee 16) memorised: "We were a kind of Fremdkörper [odd man out] in the FPDA". Another former POA planner (Interviewee 10) mentioned: "It was the time of flower power, we were super democratic, so everything was voted on. It was one big chaos and at a certain moment [late 1972]

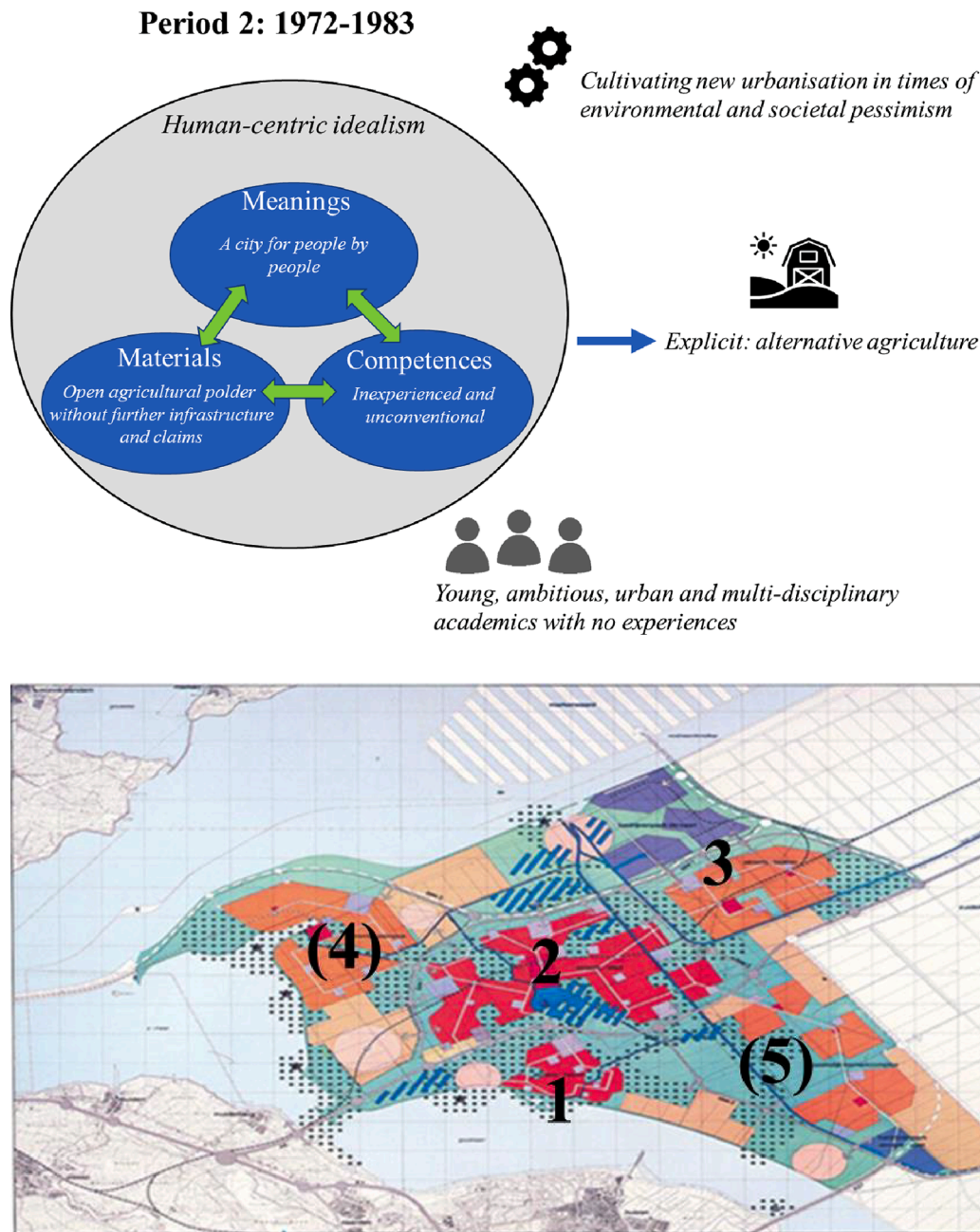


Fig. 3b. Planning practices of period 2 (upper) leading to the 1983 poly-nuclear plan of Almere (lower). Numbered (1–3) are the initial urban nuclei to be developed by the year 2000. The preliminary West (4) and East (5) were to be fully developed only after 2000. On the city’s eastside, a complex of villages was planned to cumulatively accommodate 35,000 to 45,000 inhabitants in the future (Source: [Almere, 1983](#)).

they [FPDA] hired a project manager to improve the effectivity of the [POA] organisation”. The new project manager transformed the rather chaotic group into a coherent project organisation. Under this organisational leadership, the POA methodically designed, devised and developed the city in every detail.

4.2.3. Planning practices

Despite intense debates about the future city’s layout, it was not questioned that Almere should become the opposite of its predecessor Lelystad. Lelystad was planned in an atmosphere of modernisation with the car as the design’s pivotal element ([Van Der Wal, 1997](#)). In contrast, the POA, influenced by the environmental and societal pessimism of the 1970s, positioned people and a healthy environment as central to the new city’s design; Almere should be a city for people by people ([Nawijn,](#)

[1988](#)). The POA formulated six societal goals as fundamental guidelines to the new city’s design ([Table 1](#)).

The emphasis on liveability and the green intra-nuclear area meant that an integrated planning approach was needed. The design of Almere

| Table 1 | |
|--|--|
| The six societal goals that constituted Almere planning (Source: Almere, 1974). | |
| Goal | |
| 1 | Almere has to contribute to regional overflow of citizens |
| 2 | Almere keeps perspectives open for future needs |
| 3 | Almere has room for everyone |
| 4 | Almere supports individual development |
| 5 | Almere contributes to the maintenance of a healthy natural environment |
| 6 | Almere contributes to the development of an urban culture and identity |

started from a clear hierarchy in which the green intra-nuclear space was central in shaping the framework of the urban areas. This design hierarchy was inspired by Ebenezer Howard's concept of the garden city in which the green intra-nuclear areas are an inseparable and coherent part of the urban layout (Cabannes & Ross, 2018). The green intra-nuclear space, including agriculture, had an explicit function in the future city. Agriculture fulfilled a dual role in Almere's planning practices, first as the temporary user of land preceding the construction of infrastructure and housing, and second, as part of a rural-urban living environment. Concerning the second role of agriculture, the POA was inspired by the emergent alternative agriculture movement as one of the pillars of Almere's outdoor space. In the early 1970s this movement strived for an alternative to conventional agriculture, therein it was the precursor of the later organic agriculture. Alternative agriculture could develop between the east side complex of villages and the polder (Fig. 3b), which would, in the ideas of the planners, contrast with the strict mono-functional character of agriculture in the rest of the polder. Agriculture in the urban fringe could support the city with several new functions, such as outdoor activities, recreation, attractive landscapes and natural elements. One of the documents of POA about the position of agriculture in future Almere noted: "Agriculture has a clear meaning for city dwellers as their food provider and should therefore not be treated as a residual function. Moreover, agriculture can have a very positive contribution to the city of Almere and therefore deserves the necessary attention" (Almere, 1978: 1).

In the POA's view, the city and its intra-nuclear areas were complementary. To emphasize the importance of this concept, a special team was appointed to coherently design and plan the intra-nuclear areas. However, their final plan (Almere, 1979) was never ratified because the FPDA considered it too complicated and too innovative in the context of the already complex debates about Almere's future development. Nevertheless, the 1983 Structure Plan of Almere adopted many of its elements. For example, about 2,500 ha of Almere's total of 14,000 ha were earmarked as permanent agricultural land.

4.3. Period 3: 1984–2003

A new period for Almere started in 1984 when the city became an ordinary municipality with a council, politicians and a civil administration. The launch of the Structure Plan Almere 2010 in 2003 marked the end of this period (Almere, 2003). Between 1984 and 2003, the city expanded to more than 150,000 inhabitants (Fig. 5).

4.3.1. Societal context

While Almere became an established municipality, the national government handed over the land rights to the city at a low cost, expecting that the municipality would be able to use the land to invest in real estate and thus generate revenues. These revenues should enable the municipality to establish public facilities, such as a hospital, a library, parks and schools. This construction thus encouraged the new municipality to invest in residential construction projects; the more new homes the better for the municipality's treasury. Moreover, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, national spatial policies urged Almere to increase the speed of urbanisation to accommodate the overspill of the Amsterdam Metropolitan area (Vinex, 1993; Vino, 1988). The city's growth climbed to 2,000 to 3,000 new homes per year. This growth took place in a neoliberal atmosphere in which public-private co-operations in real estate development dominated urban planning in the Netherlands.

The Structure Plan Almere 2010 anticipated the city's further expansion and suggested condensed urbanisation on its western side and a rural-urban development on its eastern side. It was thought that the eastside development should integrate urbanisation with an already devised nature zone across the Flevo Polder. The document marked the end of the expansion period within the municipality's borders (Almere, 2003).

4.3.2. The practitioners

The creation of Almere municipality implied that the responsibility for the further planning and development of Almere was transferred from the POA to the new municipality's departments. Some POA staff were transferred to the new municipality, while others stayed with the FPDA. As former POA staff members gradually integrated into the new municipality's organisation, their leading position in Almere's planning diminished. By 2000, most former POA staff had left the municipality.

The young municipality was now fully focused on urban expansion and the overall view on the city's planning disappeared. A POA planner (interviewee 10) who was repositioned at the new municipality explained: "In 1984 the power of the POA was transferred to the new municipality. A city council was established with rather inexperienced policymakers, like a bus driver and a kindergarten teacher, ... they were given the responsibility for one of the largest constructing fronts of NL, which meant that those councillors were completely occupied by urban development. They didn't care at all about the green intra-nuclear areas". Building houses provided the municipality with an increasing cash flow and the key roles within the municipality planning shifted from the former POA members to the department of land exploitation, project development and economic affairs. Departments in charge of the urban landscape and overall planning were manoeuvred out of decision-making. A planner (Interviewee 4) who was hired by Almere in the 1990s, portrayed: "Almere became a cash machine. So, if you were the manager of the municipal land office you were in a position to hand out a lot of 'cakes' every year. You hand out cakes to real estate developers. And you hand out cakes to the city council... Well, that's... then you are the king. Moreover, land management, project management and economic affairs were combined in one department. It was all about the money. The discussion about the quality of the city went to the background".

4.3.3. Planning practices

The establishment of the municipality and the creation of the department responsible for the urban development 'normalised' the planning practices of Almere. The establishment of Almere municipality fragmented the functional spatial integration in urban planning that the POA had introduced (Wezenaar, 1994). The young municipality focused on delivering new houses and infrastructure to fulfil the national government's policy targets. According to the custom of this period, public-private cooperation with commercial real estate organisations prevailed. The city's poly-nuclear layout started to be questioned and the explicit function of green intra-nuclear space gradually disappeared in urban spatial planning. These changes also eroded the position of agriculture (Fig. 5). Although the municipality's development plans from the 1980s still confirmed that agriculture was considered an inseparable part of the city's intra-nuclear space, in reality this position slowly evaporated in the planning. Areas initially earmarked for agriculture were eventually sacrificed to urban expansion. The Structure Plan Almere 2010 expected that after 2010, the municipality would hardly have any room for agriculture (Fig. 3c).

4.4. Period 4: 2004–2013

In 2006, the Dutch parliament approved a new national program to improve international competitiveness of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region (Ruimte, 2006). This program assigned Almere and its regional partners the task of expanding Almere with another 60,000 houses over the next 30 years. In 2006, the parliament also approved the law on Spatial Planning, which legally shifted planning tasks from national to regional authorities and municipalities (Gerrits et al., 2012). This decentralisation of spatial planning created room for a regional organisation and execution of planning. This period ended in 2013 with the regional and national approval of the Master Plan of Oosterveld.

The 2004–2013 period has two contrasting sides: an economically optimistic side before and a pessimistic side after the 2008 financial and

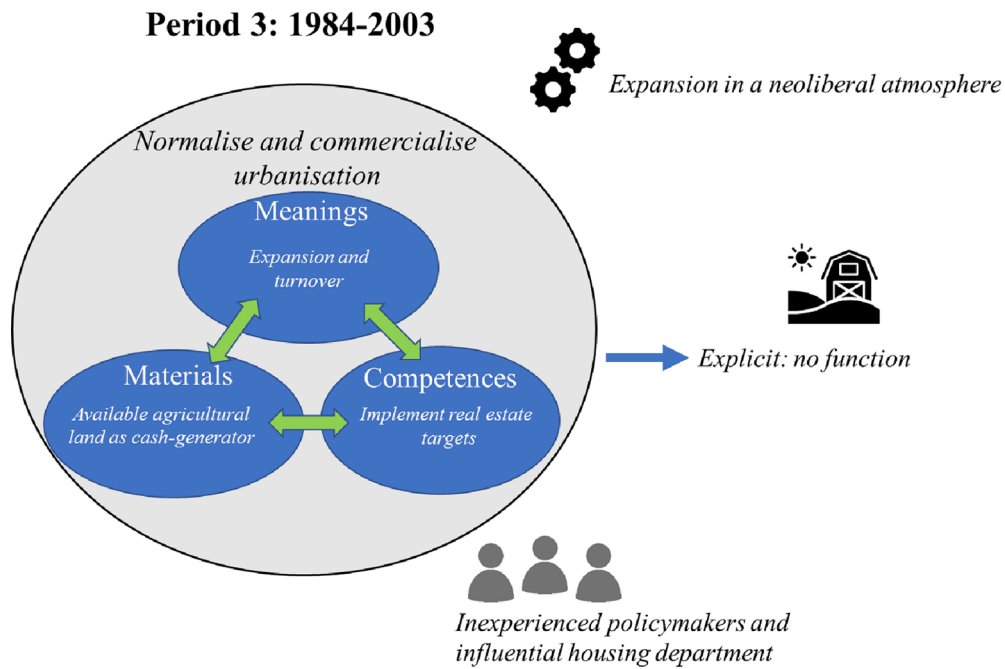


Fig. 3c. Planning practices of period 3 (upper) leading to the Structure Plan Almere 2010 (lower). The remainder agricultural land at the west- and eastside (red shading in pale green) is predominately designated to urbanise after 2010 (Source: [Almere, 2003](#)).

real estate crisis. In addition, in the same period environmental awareness energetically hit policy agendas due to the climate crisis.

4.4.1. Societal context

In this period Almere not only considered the conditions needed to accommodate the 60,000 new homes but also critically reflected on its first 30 years of development. The reflection brought to light that the national focus on real estate development had left Almere with little

variation in its type of housing, an insufficient infrastructure and limited amenities to create an attractive living and working environment. The city had become too much subjected to the national housing program objectives. A policymaker (interviewee 15) expressed the local feeling: “It accumulated in the years after 2000. The city council had something like ... We are stuck with traffic jams, and the national authorities only dump more houses over here”. This feeling ignited the political awareness that an expansion of the city could work only if it went hand in hand

with improving the city's quality.

As a consequence, the council representatives who were elected in 2006 opted for a radically different approach. All existing structure plans, formalised or not, were abrogated. A newly appointed chief councillor, who left the national parliament for Almere, started the Almere 2.0 program. The program allowed for a renewed interest in the city's quality: its poly-nuclear layout. The chief councillor underlined in the Almere 2.0 Master Plan: "Continuation according to the [concept] structure plan of 1978 forms the basis of our [Almere 2.0] plans... Precisely by building on the old plan, past and future are consistently intertwined" (Almere, 2009: 10). The Almere 2.0 program identified the emergent urban agriculture as one of the means to achieve its ambitions. Urban agriculture could provide the city with more functions than just food production as noted in the Almere 2.0 Master Plan: "City and agriculture form a contemporary combination. They reinforce each other. Urban agriculture makes the city greener and more sustainable" (Almere, 2009: 90).

During the elaboration of the Almere 2.0 program, the 2008 financial and real estate crisis badly affected the perspectives to further develop Almere's real estate. The annual production of new houses quickly dropped from over 2,000 new houses in 2000 to around 500 in 2013. The crisis plunged the city into financial debt and forced it to economize. Nevertheless, the Almere 2.0 Master Plan was launched in 2009 and subsequently approved in 2010. In 2012, the city launched the Master Plan of Oosterwold in cooperation with national authorities and the adjacent municipality of Zeewolde (Almere, 2012).

4.4.2. The practitioners

The Almere 2.0 program was developed by a multidisciplinary team of insiders and outsiders with a significant contribution from urban planners and architects of MVRDV, an internationally renowned Dutch architecture and urban design company. The freshly formed Almere 2.0 team worked predominately outside of the municipality's planning organisation. The chief councillor directed the Almere 2.0 team, gave the team freedom to explore options, excluded commercial real estate developers from the team, informally took decisions and directly negotiated with the regional or national administration when needed. Interviewee 1, who was part of the Almere 2.0 team, portrayed the role of the chief councillor: "...in the end [the chief councillor] played an important role in shaping the planning of Almere 2.0 ... We really had to embrace the poly-nuclear layout and stick to it, albeit there was [at the national level] the urge to adopt condensed urbanisation".

Within the same context, a small project team of planners, predominantly recruited from outside the municipality staff and with diverse backgrounds (urban and rural) and expertise (amongst others urban agriculture), along with MVRDV, started to plan Oosterwold in 2010. The Oosterwold planners could work in relative freedom, although they needed to keep the pre-investment costs of the new area as low as possible. In addition, the city's attention was on its westside. Although originating from different organisations and with different backgrounds and expertise, the Oosterwold planners were united in their aversion to large-scale commercial real estate development. They aimed to build on the residents' self-organisation capacity.

4.4.3. Planning practices

The city introduced the seven Almere Principles to guide the city towards a sustainable future and to retrieve the city's identity as a people's city (Table 2). These principles gave the planning practices of Almere 2.0 program a new and clear direction, or as interviewee 15 explained it: "We just had a very powerful and clear vision [Almere Principles] of how we could make that city unique". Pre-existing plans, some of which had already been approved, were pushed aside. The planning practices opened up for new actors and expertise by deliberately moving away from the standard approach that was guided by experts from the responsible departments within the municipality and its allies. 'Empower people to make the city' - the overarching seventh

Table 2

The seven Almere principles (Source: Almere, 2008).

| | Principle |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Cultivate diversity |
| 2 | Connect place and context |
| 3 | Combine city and nature |
| 4 | Anticipate change |
| 5 | Continue innovation |
| 6 | Design healthy systems |
| 7 | Empower people to make the city |

principle - was the rationale that buoyed the planners. The city started to experiment with the programming of self-organisation of private housing development in another part of the city. Here self-organisation implied that the future home-owners as much as possible are responsible for the design and construction of their homes. Even in this time of financial crisis, the self-organisation of private homes attracted a wide variety of new residents. This gave the planners the confidence to further develop self-organisation programs.

While the first 30 years of Almere followed a south-north axis of expansion, Almere 2.0 focused on planning the space that was still available at the east-west axis. Almere 2.0 aimed at high urbanisation on the city's westside and at a low density urban-rural development at the city's eastside (Fig. 3d). The new area east of the city, Oosterwold, was meant to reflect the ideas fostered in the Almere 2.0 program, namely self-organisation and multi-functional landscape. The self-organisation in Oosterwold implies that besides the design and construction of their homes, the new residents also have to self-organise (whether individually or cooperatively) all kinds of infrastructures and facilities, ranging from roads, electricity, waste and sewage systems, to shops and schools. In the Netherlands these are normally organised and provided for by the municipality. In Oosterwold the role of the municipality officials is limited to supervision land-owners' compliance with the Oosterwold development rules.

Oosterwold was regarded to offer the city a multi-functional landscape: combining urban agriculture with homes, scenery, leisure and biodiversity. As noted in the Almere 2.0 Master Plan: "It [Oosterwold] offers a development strategy for a transformation of the large-scale polder landscape into a small-scale landscape with room for living, urban agriculture and recreation" (Almere, 2009: 248). Initially agriculture was not part of the Oosterwold practices, however as interviewee 1 mentioned: "We had plans and ideas to work with nature on a large scale [in Oosterwold]... I can still remember that the conversation altered... to use the existing landscape, a polder with very good agricultural land". The Master Plan of Oosterwold eventually aspired to agriculturally produce 10% of Almere future food needs in Oosterwold. In the planned transformation process of Oosterwold, urban agriculture was pivotal in place-making as well as in the area's future geography. This was confirmed with the Master Plan's requirement for each residential parcel of land to dedicate 50% of the parcel to urban agriculture. The requirement was incorporated in a so-called 'parcel passport', a kind of contract which binds the new land-owner to all the development rules of his/her specific parcel of land. Each new land-owner has to agree on this parcel passport before being allowed to purchase (and develop) their parcel. Creating this rule, the planners rendered the creation and maintenance of Oosterwold's landscape to its residents. Urban agriculture, thus, neatly fitted the overall frame of the Oosterwold planners, who positioned it as an experiment in self-organisation of a multi-functional landscape with few opportunity and organisational costs, making the area a unique hybrid of urban-rural planning practices. One of the Oosterwold planners (interviewee 2) confirmed: "We saw the development of urban agriculture in the Netherlands and abroad as an inspiring trend. We had a lot of open space and there were no financial risks [for implementation].... It all came together [in Oosterwold planning]. The crises also created opportunities ... we got a fairly open assignment". Fig. 6 gives a first impression of

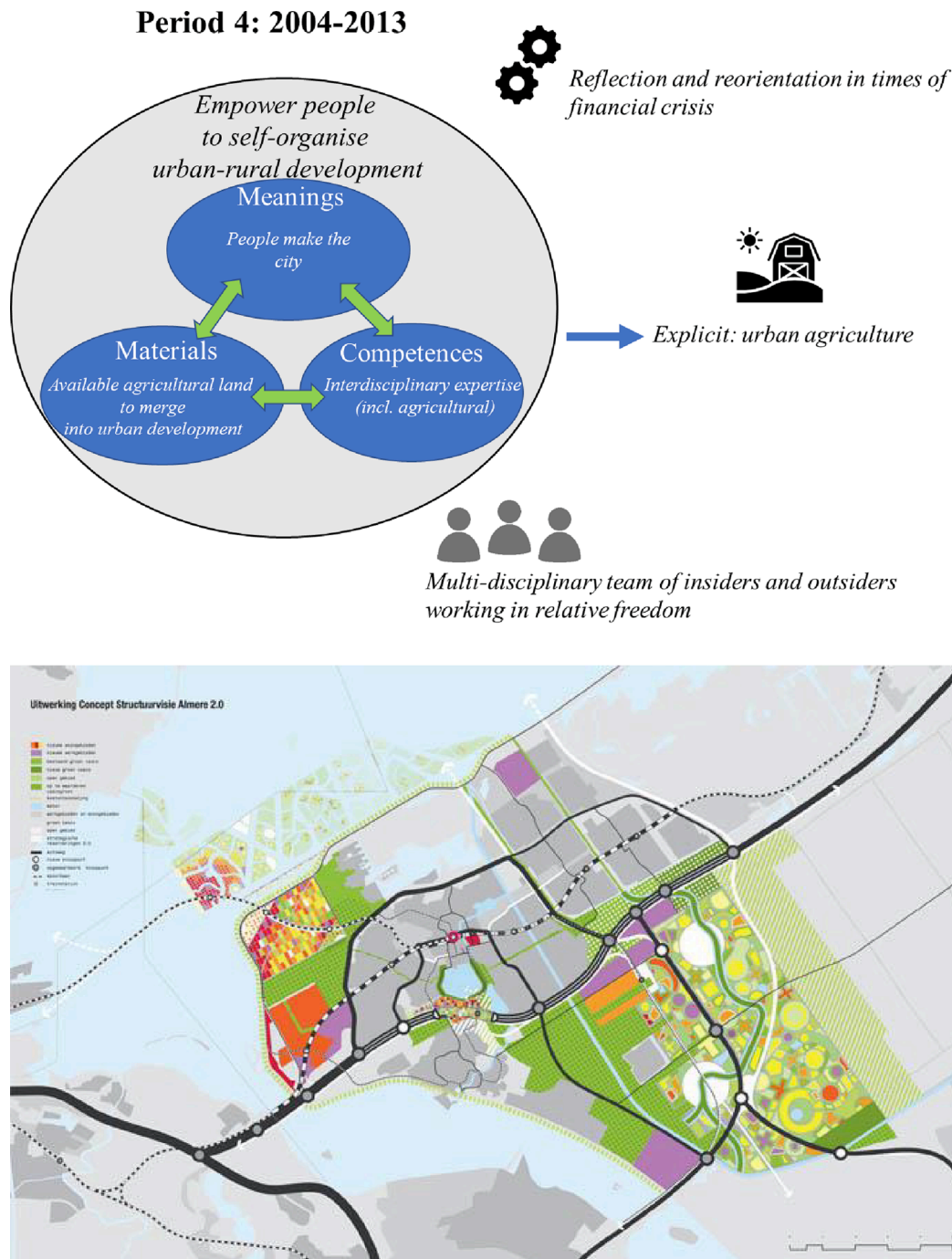


Fig. 3d. Planning practices of period 4 (upper) leading to the Structure Plan Almere 2.0 (lower) aiming at high urbanisation on the city's westside and at a hybrid urban-rural development at the city's eastside -Oosterwold-. Oosterwold stretches into adjacent municipality of Zeewolde (Source: [Almere, 2009](#)). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

Oosterwold anno 2020.

5. Discussion

This paper deconstructs the shifting position of agriculture in the urban planning practices of the city of Almere over a 55-year period. It uncovered the planning practices of Almere by concomitantly zooming in - in terms of 'who was performing the planning practices' and 'what was the interplay between the three practice elements' - and zooming out - in terms of 'the societal context in which the planning practices were performed in a given period' - ([Nicolini, 2009](#); [Shove et al., 2012](#)). [Table 3](#) summarises the zooming in and out and reveals that the

integration of agriculture in Almere's urban planning practices is not just a sign of the times. From the start, agriculture was an integral element of the city's planning practices, albeit the performance was influenced by a dichotomy between urban and rural routines. Initially, the planning practices were carried out by the FPDA engineers, who considered the new polder's rural (agricultural) development as their daily routine. Their successors, the young and inexperienced urbanists from the POA, introduced urban elements into Almere's planning practices, such as putting the urban dweller at the centre of the planning, as well as introducing the utopian garden city design. In the 1980s and 1990s, the practitioners became increasingly embedded in traditional political processes and institutional contexts guided by local as well as



Fig. 4. Southern Flevo Polder, Almere region, 1961 -before- (left) and 1973 -after- reclaiming (right). A polder is an artificial unit of land reclaimed from sea, lake, river or moor and enclosed by dikes (embankments). In 1968, the Southern Flevo Polder is reclaimed from the lake IJsselmeer, which was an inland see before the 1930s. In 1973 the agricultural grid of ditches and fields (white arrow) was already visible, as well as the first arrangements for the development of Almere (red arrow) (Pictures: ©neo.nl, Amersfoort, 2020). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

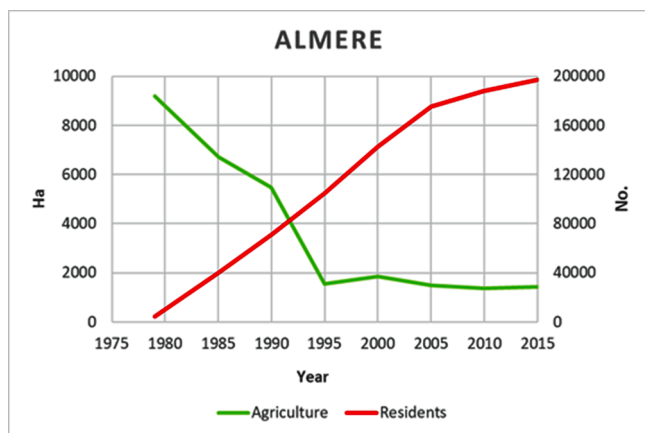


Fig. 5. Number of residents (right axis) and ha of agriculture (left axis) of municipality of Almere from 1976 to 2015 (Source residents: <https://www.almere.nl/over-almere/feiten-en-cijfers/sociale-atlas-almere/>. Source agriculture year 1979 (Almere, 1979). Source agriculture (years 1984–2015): <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline>).

national market-driven housing and spatial planning programs. However, from the early 2000s onwards, rural elements re-entered Almere's planning practices. It was the emergent urban agriculture that could balance the dichotomy between the urban and rural elements in the hybrid planning practices of Almere as executed in Oosterwold.

In Oosterwold, the meaning of the green (intra-nuclear) space in

liveable cities, a mixed bag of skills and competences, the absence of historical claims on the virgin territory, as well as the context of a crisis with plummeting budgets and a reduced pressure on real estate development allowed for the emergence of the area's hybrid urban-rural planning practices. It remains to be seen how these hybrid practices will evolve when the wider contextual dynamics, such as those in national housing programs, and elements, such as the economic profits of the real estate market gain weight in the future planning practices (Shove et al., 2012). Moreover, fundamentally new and influential to future practices are the roles of the laypersons in the planning practices of Oosterwold. In Oosterwold, the responsibility of the area's development has partly shifted from urban 'officials' - municipality officials and real estate developers - and rural 'officials' - farmers - to newcomers: Oosterwold's current and future citizens. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on the impact of this shift. Further research is required to assess the position of Oosterwold and specifically urban agriculture in planning practices of Almere.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to answer the question whether or not Almere's chosen path is an effective one to counterbalance the impact of the current global food system. Does a change of living rules as imposed in Oosterwold necessarily lead to changes in the daily practices of the residents? Oosterwold likely attracts a certain type of committed residents, maybe people who already have food production integrated into their routine. However, this probably does not apply for all future 15,000 households of Oosterwold. Will these households also integrate food production into their other daily practices? A change of practices is connected and influential to many other (bundles) of social practices (Shove et al., 2012), which might be significant to the outcome of Almere's imposed change in Oosterwold.



Fig. 6. One of the residents of Oosterwold practicing urban agriculture (2018) and an aerial impression of Oosterwold (2020). (Pictures: respectively Arjan Dekking and Gebiedsteam Oosterwold).

Table 3
Overview of the becoming of the hybrid urban-rural planning practice of Oosterwold.

| | P1 1958–1971 | P2 1972–1983 | P3 1984–2003 | P4 2004–2013 |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Contextual typology | Developing the new land with optimism in modernising and engineering society | Cultivating new urbanisation in times of environmental and societal pessimism | Expansion in a neoliberal atmosphere | Reflection and reorientation in times of financial crisis |
| Practitioners | Civil and agricultural engineers | Young, ambitious, urban and multi-disciplinary academics with no experiences | Inexperienced policymakers and influential housing department | Multi-disciplinary team of insiders and outsiders working in relative freedom |
| Practice typology | Top-down pragmatism | Human-centric idealism | Normalise and commercialise urbanisation | Empower people to self-organise urban-rural development |
| Meanings | Pastoral urbanisation | A city for people by people | Expansion and turnover | People make the city |
| Competences | Rural expertise and beginning experience with urban planning | Inexperienced and unconventional | Implement real estate targets | Interdisciplinary expertise (incl. agricultural) |
| Material | Blank slate and unknown future prospects | Open agricultural polder without further infrastructure and claims | Available agricultural land as cash-generator | Available agricultural land to merge into urban development |
| Function of agriculture | Implicit: precursor to urbanisation | Explicit: alternative agriculture | Explicit: no function | Explicit: urban agriculture |
| →Hybrid planning | | | | |

During the 55 years of planning practices in Almere, the context as well as the practices of agriculture dramatically changed in the Netherlands: from the modernisation and institutionalisation of agriculture during the 1960s and early 1970s; the rising environmental concerns and the rise of an alternative agriculture movement -the predecessor of the later organic agriculture- in the 1970s and 1980s; the environmental restrictions, market orientation and the decline of the position of agricultural institutions in the 1990s; to the emerging urban agriculture in the 2000s. We did not explicitly elaborate on these changed positions of agriculture in the Netherlands, although it is implicitly part of our study. Agriculture obviously has been the major spatial counterpart of urban planning in the Dutch open space.

Many cities around the world revalue urban agriculture, as conveyed by the harbingers of the Milan Food Policy pact (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018). A myriad of initiatives in food production emerged within the urban fabric, whether or not encouraged by urban planning (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018; Morgan, 2015; Prové, 2018; Vitiello & Wolf-Powers, 2014). However, the urban-rural dichotomy that we revealed in the Almere planning practises still manifests itself in many peri-urban zones. Urban expansion predominantly goes at the expense of the hinterland, which is generally agricultural land. In the current urban planning routine, bricks prevail over agriculture and thus agricultural land decreases at the expense of the expanding urban world, even under conditions in which farmland is legally protected with agricultural zoning and urban containment programs (Olsson et al., 2016; Ustaoglu & Williams, 2017). Oosterwold presents an alternative for peri-urban development, in which agriculture is functionally integrated with urbanisation. Although this integration isn't unique in itself - with examples ranging amongst others from ancient Angkor (Diamond, 2011) to today's Detroit (Giorda, 2012) -, the uniqueness of Oosterwold is in the scale of the ambition -4,300 ha and 15,000 new homes -, the 50% urban agriculture rule and the self-organising nature of the development. The 'urban farming dwellers' of Oosterwold create, as such, a genuine hybrid urban-rural landscape in the peri-urban zone of Almere.

6. Conclusion

Although the Almere case has its particular characteristics and change of routines is complex and unpredictable, we may draw three general conclusions from this case. First, the alleged large shift in Almere's planning practices after 2004 is not completely radical. Agriculture has been part of Almere's planning practices from the city's inception. Because agriculture was already part of Almere's identity, the Oosterwold planners described the introduction of urban agriculture as a logical intervention that hardly raised any criticism from either the planning practitioners or the local and regional policy makers. This resonates with Binder and Boldero (2012) and Shove et al. (2012), who

suggest that practitioners preferably stay close to established routines. Hence, if change is preferred modifying established routines could be more effective rather than radically breaking with them. Cities that strive for planning practices that integrate agriculture should search for the role of agriculture in their existing identity. However, an integration of agriculture stretches beyond the current professional domain of urban planning, thus requiring interdisciplinary and unconventional operation. Second, our case demonstrates that the agency of an enticing future vision - whether it is the six societal goals of the 1970s or the seven Almere Principles of the 2000s - helped to open up planning practices to the introduction of new practitioners and performances. Third, our case showed the importance of leadership. In Almere it was the leadership of the chief councillor (or that of the project manager of the 1970s POA) that encouraged and sheltered the changes in the planners' routines. Shielded by the chief councillor and inspired by an enticing vision, the planning practitioners could add urban agriculture to their daily routine.

Oosterwold continues with valuing the multi-functional contribution of agriculture to urban and peri-urban development which started with Howard's garden city. Almere's experiment with urban agriculture in Oosterwold stretches the domain of urban planning. It will certainly rouse many new debates about the character of urban planning. Hence, the attempt of this study to uncover the planning practices of Almere responds to the plea from Cabannes and Marocchino (2018: 20) that "although food is beginning to be integrated into planning in various cities and regions, local practices have not yet been made visible to a wider audience and, just as importantly, reflections on their limits and successes remain scarce".

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Jan Eelco Jansma: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Project administration. **Sigrid C.O. Wertheim-heck:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision.

Acknowledgement

This paper is part of a PhD research program that was carried out within and funded by the Flevo Campus of the city of Almere. Almere is one of the few cities where its founders can still share their experience of the city's conception and development. We appreciate that many of its founders were willing to share their knowledge with us. Notably, we are thankful to Dr Han Wezenaar for sharing his experiences with us. Han was one of the leading planners of Almere's green intra-nuclear areas in the period 1972-1997. We are also grateful to Theo Lagarde for sharing the planning documents of Almere's early years that he digitalised. Finally, the critical comments and suggestions to improve the

manuscript by Prof. Dr Ir Peter J.M. Oosterveer as well as the anonymous reviewers are thankfully acknowledged.

In the early stages of this paper's preparation, Prof. Dr Leonie B. Janssen-Jansen regretfully passed away. We will remember her as a vigorous and inspiring supervisor and colleague.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2020.103976>.

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