

# Planning in a period of great uncertainty: The Dutch National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning (SVIR) of 2011

Paper for 47<sup>th</sup> ISOCARP Congress, Wuhan, China, October 2011

Arjen J. van der Burg, Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, The Hague, the Netherlands  
[arjen.vandenburg@minienm.nl](mailto:arjen.vandenburg@minienm.nl)

## 1. A tradition of 70 years: national spatial policy in the Netherlands

Municipal planning and development was and is the basis of spatial development in the Netherlands. In the 1930's the provinces followed as supra-local coordinators. Since 1941 we have had a separate institution for national spatial policy. Planning law has been in existence since 1965 and a substantive national policy strategy since 1966. The national policy strategy of 2011<sup>i</sup>, the amalgamation of the two ministries most directly concerned with national policy, and severe budget cuts represent important changes to this trend.

## National spatial planning pedigree

Organisation	Culture/policy	Instruments
<b>1941</b> Bureau for the National Plan inside Ministry of the Interior	Studies on demographics, industry, recreation; <b>1958</b> Strategy for the West: balancing the country	Planning decrees; Research; coordination; building permits for nature areas;
<b>1965</b> National Department for Spatial Planning inside Ministry of Housing; Interministerial Committee; Advisory group	<b>1966</b> (2nd) National Spatial Strategy: bundled urban deconcentration <b>1991</b> : (4th) Nat. Strategy: mainports and integrated urbanisation	<b>1965</b> Spatial Planning Law: local land use plan legally binding, provincial and national plans are strategies; Budget for bufferzones and for new towns <b>1995</b> Contracting with budget package for urbanisation; Law on Urban Regions
<b>2002</b> Directorate-general for Spatial Planning inside Ministry of Housing and Environment; Interministerial committee; Advisory Group; Spatial Research Bureau	<b>2006</b> (5th) Nat. Strategy: decentralisation, integrated area development projects <b>2008</b> Supplementary Strategy "Beautiful Netherlands"	<b>2008</b> Law on spatial planning, incl. land management law: provincial and national land use plans Budget for national area development projects
<b>2011</b> DG for Spatial Planning and Water Management inside Min. of Infra and the Environment; no other specialised planning organs	<b>2011</b> (6th) Nat. Strategy: decentralisation and simplification, 13 national interests, limited urban policy	<b>2011</b> MIRT integrated planning proces; no spatial development budgets after 2013, abolition of urban regions

Where do we stand now? The economic crisis is hitting us hard, spatial pressures have lessened because of the crisis but also because of long term demographic changes, the implementation of projects is terribly slow and complicated, and public opinion is changing. The new strategy has as a motto a radical need for "changing tack" in order "to make the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe". In this paper I analyse from a planning professional viewpoint what type of

response the Dutch government has formulated. The heart of the policy is to give lower tiers of government – municipalities and provinces - more leeway to stimulate the economy and to meet the individual spatial demands of the population and the private sector. Decentralization and simplification are the key concepts.

Motives for national spatial planning in the past were:

- prepare the Netherlands for the future (2000, 2015, 2028...);
- the prevention of unbalanced development of the country and of urban agglomerations;
- and the preservation of valuable nature areas and landscapes.

Alongside national spatial planning, robust but interrelated systems of transport planning, environmental planning etc. have also been developed. National spatial planning as such is not strongly contested. The role of state versus lower tiers of government, the role of planning in relation to spending departments, and substantive themes such as housing, nature and infrastructure are all, however, under discussion.

National spatial planning has on numerous occasions helped shape the idea of what sort of country “the Netherlands” wants to become. Examples are the concept of the liveable “Dutch metropolis” Randstad Holland and the Green Heart inside it, and flagship projects such as the Betuwe freight rail line as an icon for the goal of the country as a European gateway.

## A planning history of 70 years



Randstad + Green Heart



Urban renewal



Mainports: Port of Rotterdam  
+ Schiphol Airport

In this paper, which serves as a companion to a presentation during the ISOCARP congress, I elaborate on: the nature of national spatial policy; the “programme” behind the new policy strategy; the main contents of the new strategy; the promise of the combination of infrastructure planning and spatial planning; new instruments; new organizations; and finally a conclusion.

## 2. Spatial planning: an institutional “hub” for “environmental policy”

For my analysis I make use of an institutional perspective. The “institution” is called “spatial development”, and spatial planning is a part of that institution; national planning is a special part of the spatial planning sub-institution. National spatial planning acts as a broker between national interests and between state and local or regional interests, not as a direct investor. Three elements form the institution: actors and their organizations, culture/ideas, and instruments. I look back mainly over the last ten years, but where appropriate over a longer time scale. But first two questions must be answered: 1. What is the remit of “spatial policy”? and 2. Are the new policy documents enough to give guidance to project planners and lower tiers of government?

Re 1. “Spatial policy” I see as shorthand for a collection of more or less related policies with a direct spatial impact. It could also be called “environmental policy” (in Dutch: “*omgevingsbeleid*”), if one broadens the meaning of “environment” to the whole of the physical domain. The policy strategy, in the form of a public document, is about the spatial or physical *aspect* of all kinds of societal activities, and about investments and other instruments. It is a way of relating different space consuming activities (and the actors behind them) that compete for land use. In the Netherlands it is usual that, around the same time as a new spatial strategy is produced, the national government publishes strategies for the major physical sectors. Care is taken to ensure that there is sufficient coordination between the sectors and the spatial strategy via all kinds of political and professional mechanisms.

In 2004, a national spatial strategy (“*Nota Ruimte*”) was published alongside national policy strategies for the countryside, the economy, transport, and culture. Water and housing policies followed later. Those sector strategies did not contain separate ideas about spatial arrangements or procedures. All policies referred to common spatial concepts such as “national urban networks” and “mainports”.<sup>ii</sup> In 2011, the national strategy itself contains not only spatial but also transport policy. This is a major innovation. Following closely on the spatial strategy, sector policies with a spatial impact have appeared or will appear: for economic policy, sustainability, cultural heritage, architecture, nature conservation, housing, and about the structure of lower tier governments (including urban regions).

So coordination of all relevant policies from the viewpoint of land use seems to be now a firmly established practice. A corollary to this is that central government has begun to formulate one new “environmental and planning law” covering the same spatially relevant domains.

Re 2. The strategy document is a “hub” of policies: In the first place as the spatial representation of other policies (see above); and in the second place because it is unusual that with respect to all the relevant subjects new ideas and instruments are coming to fruition at the same time - the saying goes “plans produce other plans”. A national spatial strategy is in practice a “hub” of policies in time, more a programme than a detailed policy that can be implemented in the short term.

So we witnessed after the policy strategy of the 1990’s (*Vierde Nota Extra* = *VINEX*) first a coherent series of “more detailed strategies” for regions that would undergo significant spatial development; and also a series of strategies for “regions of integrated spatial and environmental development”, such as the region around the growing national airport of Amsterdam Schiphol; and an avalanche of pilot projects to stimulate local experiments. As for urbanization, *VINEX* led to a range of urbanization contracts between central government and all provinces and major regions for the period 1995-2005 (afterwards extended to 2010). There has been less follow-up to the *Nota Ruimte*, but important ones were a strategy for the Randstad Holland region in 2008, the programme called “Beautiful Netherlands” and the stimulation of “areal development” as an general approach to integrated (regional) development.

More than its predecessors, the present SVIR strategy has to rely on new planning products for its objectives to be realised. Time was simply too short – 9 months – to produce a document with complete and integrated new policies, and there was no solid stock of well-developed professional new ideas and instruments<sup>iii</sup>.

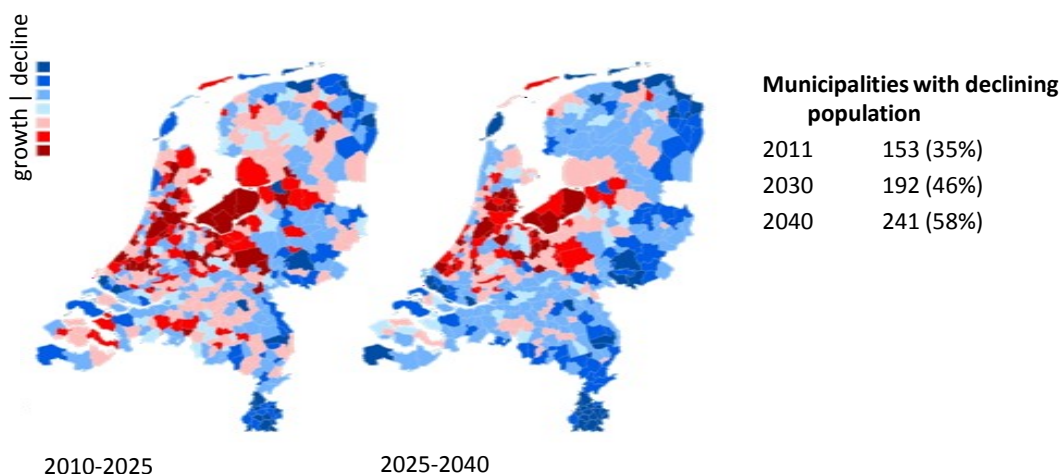
What has been announced as follow-up are:

- a completely new and simplified legal system for all physical planning (“environmental law”), and a new law for nature conservation
- strategies for investment projects, e.g. wind energy
- strategies for policy sectors, e.g. subsurface, climate change, water management, logistics networks
- (integrated) regional strategies for (parts of) the priority regions Randstad Holland (North Wing and South Wing)
- several monitoring systems
- support for provinces and municipalities, e.g. knowledge transfer, common research, disposing of state land, investment agreements, pilots, best practices, use of national architects, stimulus for application of urban and landscape design.

## 2. What spatial “programme” lies behind the strategy?

It is a traditional approach to start planning with land use demands of the future. In the end, this is what planning amounts to: future land use. In the Netherlands, there is a sound tradition in spatial planning to start with a programme. Scenarios and forecasts are regularly drawn up. Population, housing and traffic developments and forecasts gave in the past a boost to planning.

# Regional differences: growth and decline



Retrospectively, during the whole post-Second World War period national spatial planning was driven by the politically recognized needs for (urban) development over the whole country, in turn driven by strong demographic growth and economic goals. It started with post-war reconstruction until around 1960 (reconstruction of polder landscapes, bombed cities and damaged infrastructure), then building up a strong industrial base, then modernizing the agricultural landscape, later re-creating nature, and during this whole period meeting rising housing demand and seemingly insatiable transport needs. Demand seemed to be everywhere in the country, with some limited differences, e.g. larger cities having to carry out more urban reconstruction and having fewer opportunities to expand. With identified spatial programmes came policies and central government funding.

Four things have changed since around the year 2000:

1. The omnipresence of demand for development has drastically given way to a strong differentiation inside the country, one that will in the future be even stronger. Regions will differ more and more with respect to their development opportunities and characteristics. This is also the case for transport demand. (See illustration previous page.)
2. Uncertainty about future developments is considerable. Demography is one source of uncertainty, but also changes in the real estate market. One example is the development of office space, where 25 square metres per person seemed to be the norm. Now, norms for commercial office space are continuously being revised downwards.
3. The number of needs that led to direct central government investment have since the 1960's been diminishing, such as electricity (privatised production, state power lines), housing (from building subsidies to rent subsidies) and heavy industry (privatised).
4. Demand is becoming more diversified, and the political response is that development must be brought closer to the end user and to the lowest government levels.

One specific point is that in the recent past in the Netherlands most municipalities have bought and planned enough land for development for roughly the next 10 years. Private developers also own large stocks of prospective land to be developed. The economic crisis is causing actual market demand to contract. So the "classic" driver for spatial (urban) planning, that is demand for *new* land for housing, work and leisure, has almost come to a standstill.

#### *4. Culture: back and forward to essential national interests*

The heart of the policy is to give the lower tiers of government more responsibility, in order to stimulate the economy and to meet the individual spatial demands of the population and the private sector. Decentralization and simplification are the key concepts. One way to do this is to reduce the number of "national interests" in the national strategy.

What are national interests? The term "national interest" was introduced in the Spatial Planning Act of 2008. The background was that in the past all levels of government not only drew up policies for each piece of land in the country, but they often made conflicting choices. The new legislation distinguishes between local, provincial and national (spatial) interests and says in essence that every tier of administration should primarily look after its own level of interest. This line of thinking is continued in the SVIR.

If one asks to see the official list of local, provincial and national interests, the answer is that national

government has only defined its interests as the present government sees them in a separate strategy, not in the legislation. And the same goes for provinces and municipalities. So, “interests” are politically defined.

### (3) National Interests

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Outstanding business climate in urban regions | 8. Improving environmental quality             |
| 2. Energy network and transition                 | 9. Adaptation to climate change                |
| 3. Pipeline network                              | 10. Preservation of unique cultural heritage   |
| 4. Use of subsurface                             | 11. Network for wildlife habitats              |
| 5. Robust rail, road and waterway network        | 12. Military sites                             |
| 6. Better use of existing network capacity       | 13. Careful and transparent planning decisions |
| 7. Maintenance of existing transport networks    |  |

The most important programmatic themes that are deemed national interests in the SVIR are about essential ‘hardware’ and its functioning, i.e. water infrastructure and water management, transport infrastructure including pipelines (as transport demand will keep growing), energy infrastructure, military defence infrastructure, nature infrastructure (Natura 2000 wildlife network) and major nodes in those networks, i.e. the urban regions of Amsterdam-Utrecht, Rotterdam-The Hague and South East

Brabant (the Eindhoven region) wrapped around the economic clusters called mainports, brainport, and greenports<sup>iv</sup>. On top of these, heritage as the guardian of regional identity is a national interest, and this encompasses UNESCO World Heritage Sites, urban conservation sites, designated national monuments and historic buildings, and maritime heritage.

Urbanization and the urban-rural interface has been the traditional main theme of national spatial planning. This interest has now become the priority of others. Against the background of less housing demand and lower demand for offices the “new” urban question is one of transformation of existing cities, more than expansion, and this question will be addressed by the Minister for Housing (without the prospect of new funding). As a reminder of stronger guidelines in the past a “ladder for sustainable urbanization” is prescribed.

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The “sustainable urbanisation ladder” is:

Rung 1: Is there *regional* demand for housing, offices, amenities etc.?

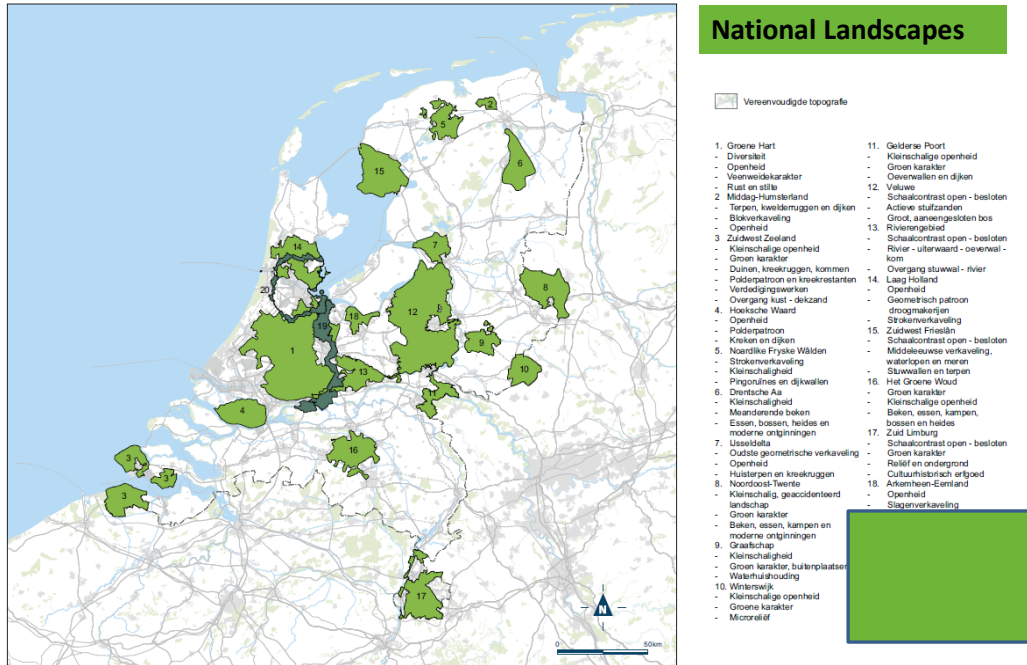
Rung 2: Can demand be met with by restructuring or transforming existing locations?

Rung 3: New locations should be accessible by multiple modes of transport.

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At the same time urban greening, recreation, and landscape conservation and development will no longer be of national interest, except for the two UNESCO heritage sites, both military heritage areas (green shading in the next map).

# National Interest 10: Preservation of unique cultural heritage



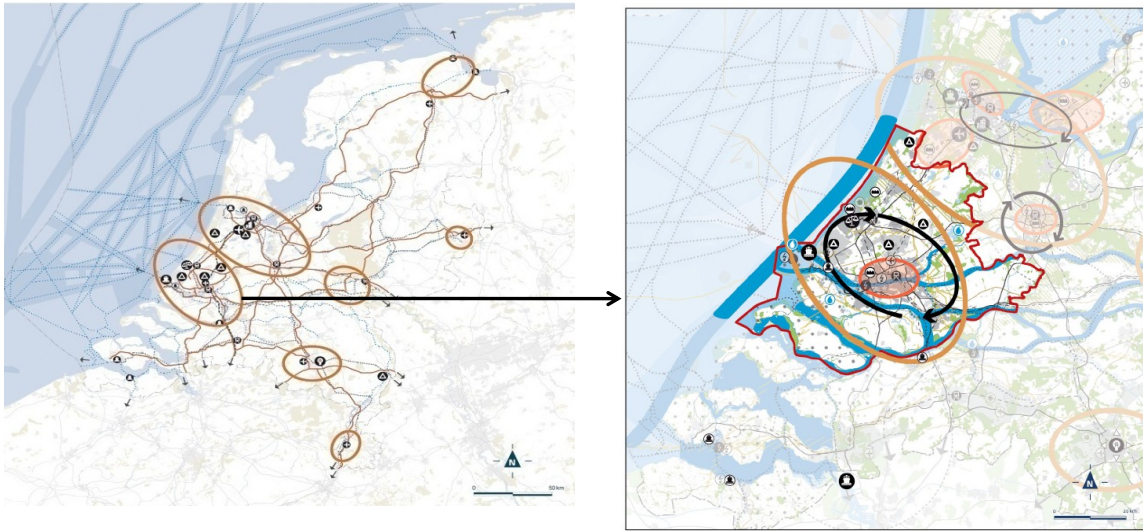
Nature development in the sense of championing biodiversity is still a national interest (European Natura2000 areas and National Ecological Structure), but at a more modest level: 100.000 of the 700.000 planned hectares of the NES have been scrapped (mainly for financial reasons), the available budget will be reduced, and the projected “robust ecological corridors” will not be developed. Provinces will be responsible for the implementation of nature conservation policy.

After 2013 almost all state funding will stop, and the national strategy contains no guidelines about urbanization and the urban-rural interface at all. The mainstream 1966 concept of “bundled urbanization” (also known as “concentrated deconcentration”) has been departed from. This means literally that it is up to provinces and municipalities what they want to do in this respect. For most Dutch planners, this comes as an unexpected and shocking realization.

What remains prominent on the national agenda are the announcement of urbanization and mobility programmes on the initiative of the state, for two of the three main economic regions. Also the development of an important sub-programme of the national Delta programme concerning effects of climate change on built-up areas is an important item on the national agenda.



# National Interest 1: Business Climate



- Better business climate in **urban regions** with economic top-sectors around mainports, brainport and greenports
- Support for infrastructure and development projects

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## On urbanization and landscape

Central to the concept of bundled urbanization was that the (re-)development of areas in and adjacent to existing cities should be encouraged, and that the complement should be the containment of the surrounding (open or agricultural) countryside<sup>v</sup>. The containment of the countryside took in the last 10 years the form of:

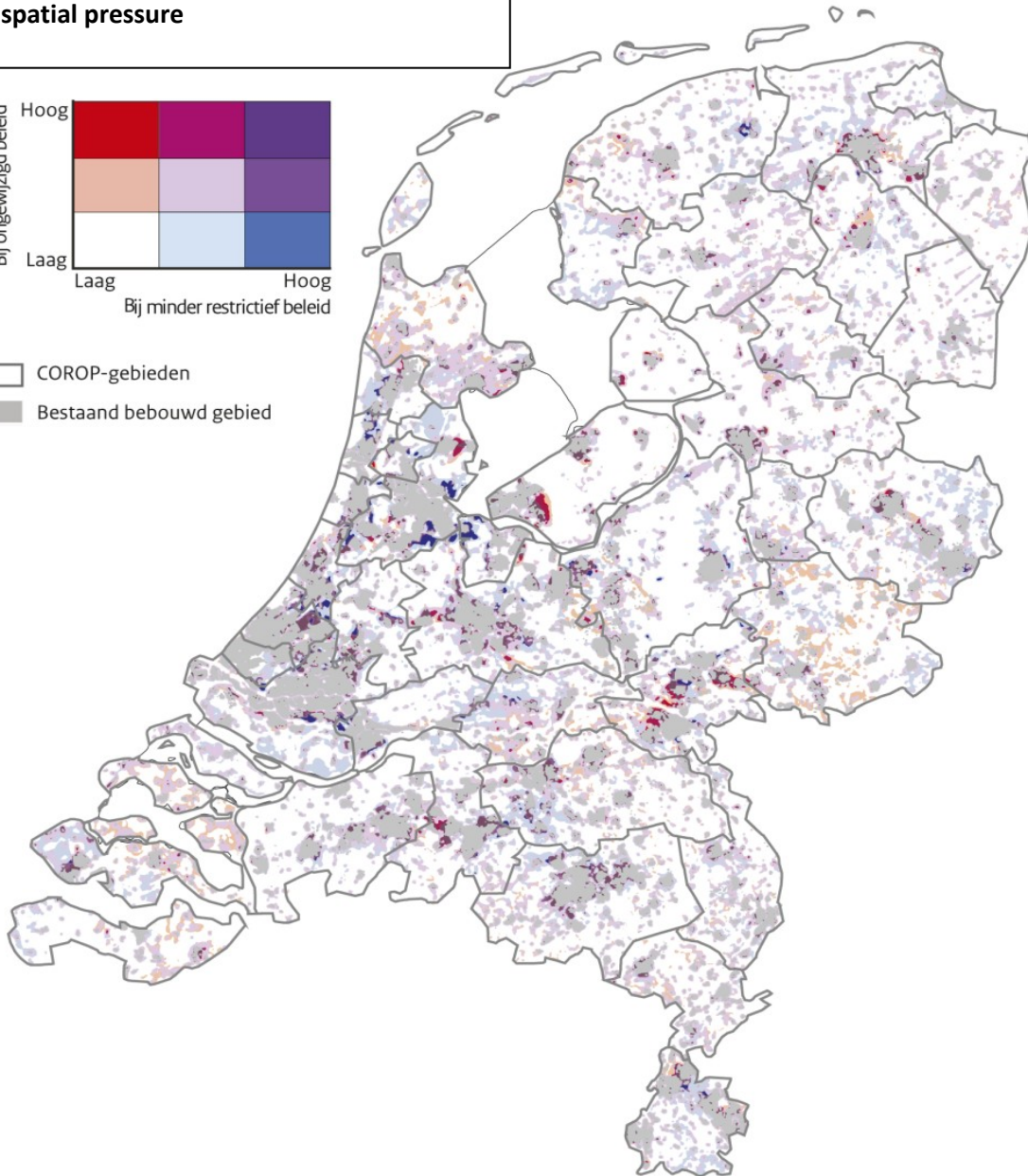
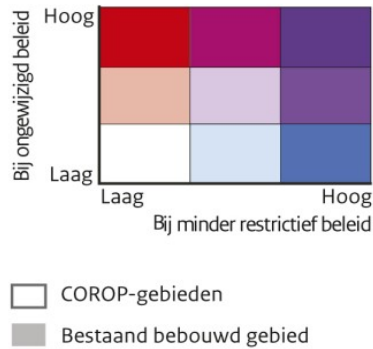
1. Nature conservation areas (Ecological Structure, with Natura2000 as backbone), where almost no development was possible; this accounts for about 17% of the total land area.
2. Buffer zones between the larger cities, where recreation was the prime function and developments were to be exceptional; these amount to about 2% of the total land area.
3. National landscapes, where the “perception value” of our diversified landscapes would be maximized, and where development would be restricted to natural growth of the population; they cover 20% of the land area of the Netherlands.

Urbanisation inside those types of open areas was not zero but more limited than elsewhere. Recreational values were appreciated. The share of building production (i.e. concentration of urbanization) in or near cities and towns was higher than in regions without these open landscapes. One side effect was that in the larger agglomerations housing shortage never came to an end, that housing prices were very high and that the qualitative demand for homes with a garden was never satisfactorily met.

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**Probability of urbanisation, in case of high spatial pressure**



Simulations with respect to the possible effects of removing the buffer zones and the national landscapes from national policy, while assuming that municipalities and provinces will also abandon these restrictions, show that the effects on urbanization probably will be limited (see blue dots). New locations will be found more in the former protected areas close to the cities, while the Randstad urban regions will profit from their agglomeration advantages and attract relatively more development, which is a disadvantage for the regions elsewhere. Infrastructure will be used more intensively (more congestion). There will be more space for housing. On the whole, some 10% more hectares will be used for urbanization than under the former restrictive policies: 60.000 ha of new land versus 55.000 ha.

There is some logic behind the SVIR that these thirteen themes are all singled out as national interests, and that urbanization and landscape development are off the list of national interests.

- Part of this logic is that these themes in themselves are more than regional and provincial in their effects and characteristics. Some require huge new investments whose spatial effects are as yet unknown e.g. energy and climate change. Another way of seeing is that they belong to the fundamental “layers” of space that lay the foundations for economic development, for urbanization, for agriculture and for landscape development, and that they require government action more than private action. (See Annex for a short explanation of the layers approach.) SVIR can be read as the state retreating from the “occupation layer” and focusing on the fundamental sub-surface and infrastructure layers, as was usual before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Another aspect of this logic is that national policy can only survive in tackling urgent national problems (or urgent objectives as they existed before 1992, when the European Single Market was introduced), and in the field of urbanization this urgency has been absent for some time. As for landscape and nature, in economic crises these themes usually lose out in the national priority stakes to economic themes.
- There are also changes in political preferences: earlier preference for the renewal of the larger cities, for nature development and for landscape protection (or for “perception values”) can no longer rely on a national political majority. This may appear as a contradiction to the acceptance in SVIR of urban regions - not necessarily the central cities themselves - as the most important locations for future prosperity because they concentrate for a large part on the identified economic “top sectors”. There are no initiatives to go back to the 1950’s, when the redistribution of the population and economic activity over the country and away from the “large” cities in the west was central to national spatial and economic policies, as has been the case in many countries. The acceptance of (the modest) regional disparities has been firmly rooted in economic and spatial policy since the 1990’s, irrespective of the political colour of the government.
- The continuation until 2028 of huge and well-funded infrastructure construction programmes (road, rail, inland waterways, coastal defences, river management) also gives a clear idea of the political preferences.

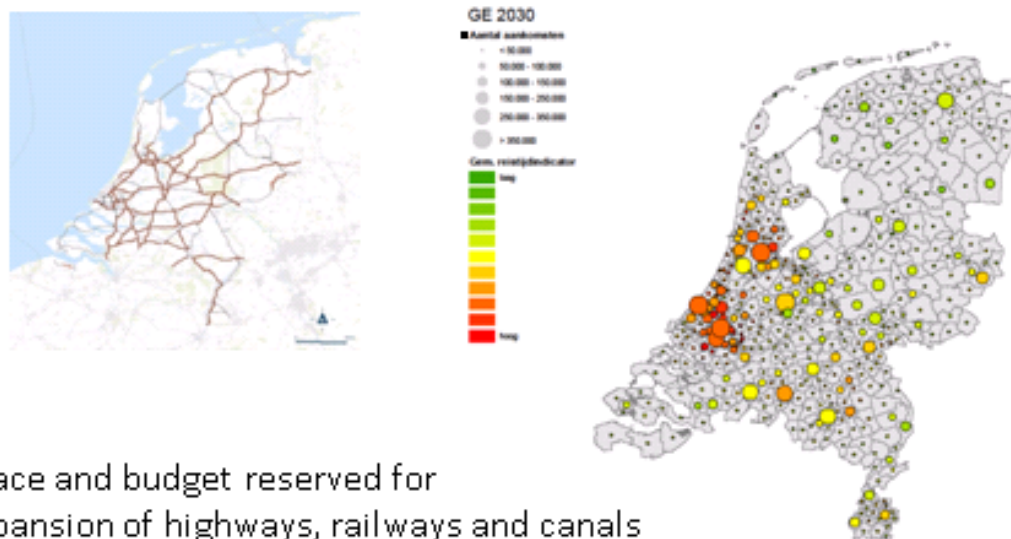
### *5. Infrastructure and space, a promising combination*

Transport infrastructure is seen as one of the main instruments of national government to facilitate the economy. In this paper, written for a spatial planners’ congress, this subject will be dealt with only briefly.

The existing transport strategy will largely remain in force. Policies for traffic safety, air quality and noise will be continued. Existing investment programmes will be implemented between 2011 and 2028. Funding for regional transport and infrastructure has been decentralized to provinces and some municipalities.

Some policies have been changed in a qualitative way: an extra effort will be made to maximize the use of existing infrastructure through maintenance programmes and traffic management.

## National Interest 5: Robust rail, road and waterway network



- Space and budget reserved for expansion of highways, railways and canals
- Putting users first: new multimodal Accessibility Indicator

Multimodal connections and multimodal traffic nodes will give direction to future infrastructure planning, in order to enhance the choices for users and creating opportunities for more sustainable transport. The end user, be he citizen or businessman, must be put first. This is reflected in an innovative concept, the “mobility indicator”, building on the accessibility of geographical destinations (at the level of municipalities) and the economic value of those destinations, and not only on traditional transport criteria. The indicator concerns all modalities and all network scales (not only national networks), and includes freight transport. Its main aim is to help prioritize infrastructure investments.

The interesting question is whether the new combination of ministries into a super ministry that covers both spatial development and transport, with a policy strategy combining both national interests, creates new opportunities long dreamed of by spatial planners. Of course, we don’t start completely anew. In the history of national spatial policy in the Netherlands spatial planners often had some say in transport matters. The love for rail transport that planners often exhibit materialized in package deals in the 1990’s around housing and regional infrastructure, and in two new and expensive railway lines, the Betuwe freight line from Rotterdam into Germany, and the high speed line from Amsterdam to Belgium/Paris. (At the local and provincial levels there is a more “natural” integration of spatial and transport planning.) Since 2007, the development of infrastructure projects has been coordinated with other physical investments by the state and the provinces in the so-called “MIRT” process<sup>vi</sup>.

It could well be that the new mobility indicator (under construction) creates a bridge in the intellectual but also in the practical sense between the two separate worlds. The shrinking state budget may also help to stimulate optimization strategies that look further than transport issues, or, the other way round, may help to make planners recognize that public transport is not the universal and cheap medicine that it is often regarded as.

## 6. Instruments

We start with the legislation, but one should bear in mind that legislation is part of a larger package of instruments (funding, coordination, research, design...).

The (general) Spatial Planning Act came into force in 2008. This act put land use plan firmly in the centre of things, and introduced also strong coordinating powers for integrated (building) permits. But the upshot is that the traditional division of policy domains is still paid too much respect. Following on earlier rounds of simplification, of which the current act is the most recent, a new major round of simplification has been announced concerning all laws relevant to spatial development i.e. environment, archeology, transport, nature, water, construction.... A strong reason for this drive is that most development projects, including infrastructure projects, are complex and this complexity produces not only delays but also (legal) conflicts and very high costs. Lawyers and consultants are the big winners of the game, not the quality of the plans. Examples are the requirements that environmental laws make for air quality and noise, and the uncertainty that environmental models generate.

A recent innovation has been the introduction of national (and provincial) land use plans. This means that in the Netherlands not only municipalities have the authority to make binding land use plans (in German: "Planungshoheit"). This new possibility has been enthusiastically put into practice by the state and some provinces. (For the state, there were already since the 1990's comparable powers under transport and water laws.) These land use plans are expected to speed up the implementation of projects considerably.

Funding is a new problem area. Local development is hampered by a stagnation in all major land use markets. The traditional model of land development in the Netherlands is that municipalities buy pristine land, develop it, and sell or lease it to developers or other owners according to the land use plan. Usually, this would create a surplus for special purposes (more green space, better roads..) and the finances in general, except for industrial sites that nevertheless remained extremely popular development objects for municipalities. This system practically came to a halt, through the combined forces of overproduction of developed land, market failure and demographic changes. No clear alternative is available. The local tax base in the Netherlands is very small (around 13% of local income) and there are no concrete proposals to bring that up to a more European average level<sup>vii</sup>, one of the reasons being the strict EMU-criteria the state has to adhere to.

On top of this, as part of general budget cuts in the order of € 18 billion in 4 years, central government will be cutting back to zero all major development subsidies for lower government tiers as of 2014 (except for soil decontamination, nature conservation and regional transport). This is in stark contrast with the past, when for example in 2006 € 1 billion could be reserved for "national spatial development projects" of an integrated nature. What remains is funding for national infrastructure ('wet' and 'dry').

## 7. Organization

Planning is a production process of plans and their implementation, of following up on reality and controlling or coordinating other actors. Currently, a general reduction of the national government's policy making staff of around 30% is a reality. For the first time in 70 years spatial planning has no separate entity at the level of a Directorate-General (the standard unit for large but coherent policy domains). Spatial planning is now part of a Directorate-General for Spatial Planning and Water Management.

Also other organizations are changing character. Four think tanks will be combined into one for the environment, transport, water and spatial issues. Policy research institutions for the environment, nature and spatial issues already have been combined into one for the whole "living environment".

Great confidence is placed in lower tier governments. The role of the state inspectorate in the spatial domain will be reduced.

The organization of the government itself is another theme. One hotly debated subject in planning circles is the (functional) urban region. Since the 1920's in the Netherlands, just as in many other places in the world, planners have argued that cities have become too small for their functional urban areas, and that formal government structures at the regional level are needed. This seldom materializes, however, for several reasons, one of which is the preference that most democratic policies seem to have for municipalities as the nucleus of government. In the Netherlands, only in 1995 seven (later eight) urban regional governments were installed to implement urgent urban and transport development plans. They have so far functioned successfully, according to evaluations. The present government plans to abolish this form of government.

On the other hand, new forms have been proposed by the Minister of the Interior to make the economic core of the country, Randstad Holland, more competitive: first, one new large province around Amsterdam and Utrecht instead of three, and second, two public transport authorities for the so called North and South Wings of the Randstad. Reform of the formal government of Randstad Holland has been tried many times before without any success. What is presented now are strategic ideas without so far concrete legislative proposals.

## 8. Conclusions

Over the past decade, I see, not surprisingly, continuities and discontinuities. Planning as such, land use plans, simplification of regulations, active lower tiers of government, financial decentralization, policy coordination, national interests (mainly international by nature), ample resources for transport and water management and special attention for the Randstad Holland are continuous elements in the spatial planning universe of the Netherlands.

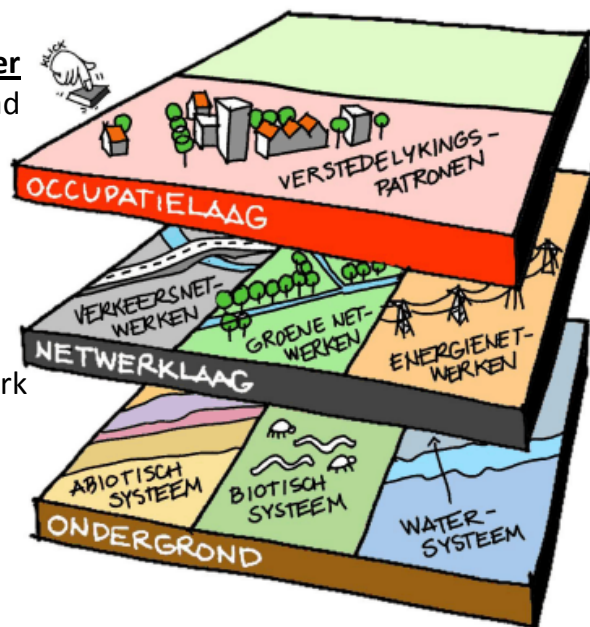
Marked discontinuities are: a prominent role for provinces vis à vis state and municipalities, interest in urban-rural relations and urbanization limited to three regions, leaving out landscape and other “green” and “perception” values<sup>viii</sup>, and severe budget cutbacks for regional and local spatial development; on the other hand many provinces have gained wealth by sale of energy shares.

On the whole, the reality of the need to reduce the state budget, the dwindling demand for real estate, the prospect of fundamental demographic changes in large parts of the country, and the large reserves of planned land for urbanization, combined with the general sound physical health of town and country in the Netherlands, at least by any European yardstick, makes a break of a number of years in the traditional urbanization agenda as a generic national interest very logical. Concentration on the three main urban (“metropolitan” is used as an aspirational term) regions is justified.

Concentrating the planning agenda on the literally *fundamental* subsurface and infrastructure layers, where government attention is irreplaceable, is a good way to be selective in difficult times.

## (5) Conclusion: National planning must revert to basics

- Reduction of national spatial planning for the **occupation layer** to major urban nodes in Randstad Holland
- Growing importance of **subsurface and network layers** creates new fields of action for national spatial planning in conjunction with national network planning



This new and more selective agenda, combined with the organizational reduction of the “house of spatial planning”, poses new challenges. One is to keep the need and the instruments for context-sensitive spatial interventions on the agenda (especially in case of large scale national infrastructure) in order for planning to be more than the procedural intermediary for infrastructure projects.



Another challenge is to in time produce or discover elsewhere new planning concepts and instruments for potentially “explosive” themes such as energy transition, climate change, biodiversity and urban transformation.

A unique opportunity seems to me the fusion of the spatial planning and the transport policy cultures and organizations that is now being implemented. Old dreams might unexpectedly come a little bit true.

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<sup>i</sup> For the text of the summary of the policy and the accompanying Environmental Assessment in English, French and German, see:

[http://centrumpp.nl/Images/11%23282%20lenM%20Samenvatting%20Structuurvisie\\_UK\\_def%20low%20res02\\_tcm318-305711.pdf](http://centrumpp.nl/Images/11%23282%20lenM%20Samenvatting%20Structuurvisie_UK_def%20low%20res02_tcm318-305711.pdf)

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<sup>ii</sup> A less optimistic reading of this situation is, however, that every policy sector had managed to put its own favourite concept on the national (“integrated”) spatial map. The effect was that we not only had six large national urban networks, but also twelve economic ‘heat islands’ (“peaks in the Delta”) that almost completely overlapped with the urban networks but nevertheless presented themselves as a separate policy category with its own organization and funding..

<sup>iii</sup> There were some policy evaluations available, and in 2010 the departing government had ordered the Ministry of Finance to prepare packages for the reduction of a budget that contained a large number of random ideas for policy change.

<sup>iv</sup> These terms are corruptions of Dutch-English. “Mainports” are the Port of Rotterdam and Amsterdam Schiphol airport, seen in their capacity as major European and world transport nodes. “Brainport” is the region of Eindhoven, the city where the multinational Philips Electronics Company started and expanded and that is the most prominent innovative high tech region of The Netherlands. The word “port” shouldn’t be taken literally in this case. “Greenports” are six clusters of internationally oriented horticulture production firms (bulbs, flowers, trees and vegetables), trade, transport and innovation, closely connected to both mainports.

<sup>v</sup> There were several motives for that, not always constant over time. Most common motives were: limit the expansion of the large cities to a maximum of 1 million inhabitants each, the absolute limit of liveability; keep cities compact in order to create a basis for urban services including public transport; limit the need to travel far and by (polluting) car, promote opportunities to walk and cycle; keep the countryside open for food production (the strongest motive just after the Second World War in which a famine struck the west of the country hard in the winter of 1944/1945); keep the countryside open in order to experience open space as a contrast to full cities; and keep the countryside open to answer the growing demand for outdoor recreation. As to the concentration of building in and near cities, the former policy strategy supposed a minimum goal of 25% development within existing urban boundaries,, asked for 40% as a rule (but could not find the funding to support this goal), while some regions such as the South Wing of Randstad Holland offered to accommodate 60% of additional housing and office demand in existing built up areas, especially around train and other major public transport stations (Transit Oriented Development). The state took these figures as a point of departure for its traffic projections.

<sup>vi</sup> MIRT = Multi Year Investment Programme for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning. The minister consults regional authorities twice a year about a rolling agenda, that starts with common visions for eight different regions, and that ends in the implementation of projects that are (partly) financed by the state.


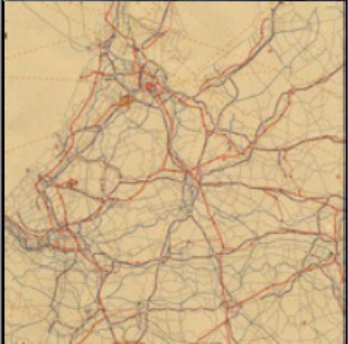
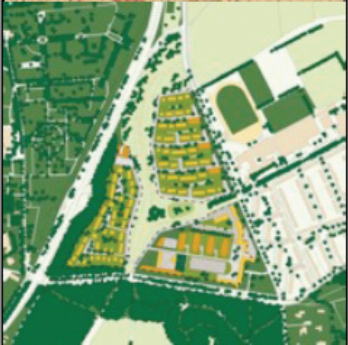
<sup>vii</sup> The influential Central Bureau for Economic Policy strongly advises to make especially large cities more responsible for local amenities (traffic, culture, green spaces, education...) as this would better reflect urban quality differences that essentially have local effects.

<sup>viii</sup> Until now “spatial quality” has been the catchword for the most general “aim” of spatial planning at all levels. Although vague, it gave some sense of identity and direction. What is left is enhanced attention and manpower for the application of “design” in planning processes.

## Annex: An explanation of the “layers approach”

Although we share only one “space”, or one “earth”, we have developed a finer approach for planning purposes. It is called the layers approach, developed by Professor Dirk Sijmons. Its essence is that for some forms of land use governments are more capable and responsible to act than for other forms of land use. The distinction lies in the time frame of land use changes, the cost of interventions and the extent to which the private sector can fruitfully operate. (Figure by Professor Dirk Sijmons.)

### Layer model

	Object	Planning Horizon
	<b>Layer 1</b> Hydraulics Sea-level rise Groundwater Subsidence	T=50-500
	<b>Layer 2</b> Networks Nodes	T=30-100
	<b>Layer 3</b> Occupation Living Working Recreation	T=10-30

The *surface layer* (layer 1) is formed by very slow processes based on the formation of the earth. Because of the large part of the country that lies under sea level, in the Netherlands the water system is seen as the central factor for safety, fresh water supply and water quality for nature. The surface layer should have a kind of “self-evident” priority in planning. The water system, formed by rivers and sea, is cross-border by nature. In general, only governments can be responsible for the long time frames and high costs involved in maintaining or remodelling the surface layer. At smaller scales private firms can be responsible for e.g. extraction sites or water reservoirs.

Layer 2 represents the networks for human traffic and their nodes: roads, canals, railways, cables, pipelines, air corridors. It is called the *network layer*. This is the space of human flows par excellence. Here, also governments are best suited to be responsible for the networks, although over the course of time

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responsibility shifts between government and the private sector (e.g. railways started as private companies, then were nationalized, and have now been partly privatized again). The time frames are shorter, but still considerable, the costs and risks are less than in the surface layer.

Layer 3 represents what is traditionally associated with “spatial planning”: the distribution of human land uses such as housing, industry and recreation, over space. It is called the (human) *occupation layer*. It is the heartland of the space of places. The time frame is rather short, costs and risks are such that private firms and individuals can take on most of the responsibilities. Developments in the occupation layer should primarily be a response to market demand.

Over the last twenty years the realization has dawned in the planning discipline that with the end of strong central government control over housing and economic activity, and with the liberalization of the EU internal market and the globalization of other markets, shaping regions according to a pre-determined policy model can only be effective in a limited number of cases at a small geographical scale. Spatial development in the occupation layer is determined primarily by the choices of inhabitants and entrepreneurs. As far as governments want to bear responsibility, local and regional governments are best suited to be responsible for the third layer. Not only the scale of costs and risks is suited to their capacities, it is also the need to make local fine tuning possible that gives these levels of governments a strong position. This includes fine tuning of the three layers. The “Functional Urban Region” or “Daily Urban System” define the geographical size of the territory in which the bulk of human activities take place that need to be interrelated for a smooth functioning of society. Most housing, office, retail or leisure projects have a limited market scope, seldom exceeding regional boundaries. Most traffic is also regional .