Participation in strategic green planning in the Netherlands

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1. Introduction

In this paper we will relate the question *why participation* with the question *why planning*. We will not re-open the fundamental debate on democracy and planning if planning threatens democracy or contributes to democracy (Manheim, 1935, Popper, 1944/1945). The central theme of the paper is the relation between participation and the communicative use of plans as a feature of the quality of decisions.

In essence all notes on the meaning of participation for planning are based on specific approaches of planning. In planning literature arguments are given that participation contributes to the rational aspect of planning. As Smit (1973) states: '*participation simply provides a broader basis and potentially more comprehensive framework for analysis and evaluation. Community members can quickly identify certain kinds of consequences implicit in the adoption of different alternatives, saving the planning process the energy devoted to the preparation and elimination of useless alternatives* (Smit, 1973). The advocacy of alternative plans by interest groups outside of government would serve as a means of better informing the public of the alternative choices open. This consideration of alternative courses of action is were 'rational' theories of planning call for (Davidoff, 1965).

Here we take as the principle of rationality the assessment afterwards if the decision maker took a considered decision. In this line Popper's characterises rationalism as 'an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experiences'. Faludi stresses rationality as a methodological principle (1986). Communicative planners, inspired by Habermas, argue that need more civic consciousness, motivation, formation of political will and emancipation without which rational government is impossible (Van Gunsteren, 1976)

The basic hypothesis in this paper is that participation in the planning process will stimulate the communicative use of the plan. This means that third parties will coordinate their own decisions and actions to the intended government policy in the plan because of the this consultation in the planning process. The Dutch targetgroup policy can be considered an exponent of this idea of co-ordinative decision making after plan approval. The reason for participation lies in a specific form of planning.

The answer on the question *why planning* is based on a view on planning as a special form of policy. Planning distinguishes itself from normal policy in that it is more focused on the connection between decisions and is more oriented toward the future. The *raison d'être* of planning lies in the advantage of planning, in the opinion of policymakers, as compared to ad-hoc decision-making. The aim of the planning is to improve (the quality) of everyday decision-making. This aim concerns the features which decision-making should have after planning.

What makes (the quality of) decisions better? We base the idea of what are better decision on features of which should distinguishes planned decisions from `day-to-day' decision making. In this paper we see decisions as better when they take future effects more into account, provide more insight into the future effects of the decision and are better is co-ordinated with other decisions of the planning subject . Further decisions are better when they provide other actors with more opportunity to influence a decision, provides information on the actions of the planning subject and provide better arguments for decision making.

This difference between planning and "ordinary" decision-making is based on the decision-centred view of planning which goes back to the work by Friend and Jessop (1968). What distinguishes planning from "ordinary" decision-making, according to Friend and Jessop, is the perception of the uncertainties regarding choices or decisions which can be taken in future by the subject itself. Decision-making becomes planning if the problems of choice which arise are connected with other choices which are related to them. The importance of planning is that it provides *'a guideline for future decisions' (Friend and Jessop, 1968, p. 111)*. Here, a plan is *'a statement of future intent'*.

What is crucial in this approach is that it places the decisions central and not the quality of the plan or the solving of problems.

2. Empirical work

The empirical discussion will be based on Dutch green planning. The Netherlands present an interesting case for three reasons. Firstly because the first Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP), published on May 25, 1989, is world-wide seen as successful forerunner for similar documents published in other countries. Dutch municipalities were also early involved in green planning exercises. Secondly because in the Dutch planning framework there are two separate tracks of environmental and physical planning. And thirdly the environmental planning system has an interesting philosophy on the relation between participation and the communicative, external function of plans.

The Dutch government's central objective with regard to environmental policy planning reads that planning has to result in a higher quality of decision-making. This is the central argument to plan; planning has advantages over day-to-day decision making. The advantages of Dutch environmental planning are contained in a number of objectives that policy-makers at the government level aim to achieve through environmental policy planning.. The objectives concern the features which decision-making should have after planning The arguments for environmental policy planning are the national government's official policy objectives with regard to environmental policy planning, indicated as planning system targets.

Through contents analysis all relevant sources (parliamentary documents, memoranda, plans and circular letters, advice given by advisory bodies, and literature both from policy practice (consulting firms and municipalities) and from scientific sources). were analysed in chronological order from the mid-seventies (Coenen, 1996). This motives analysis reveals the following objectives of environmental policy planning, as features of planned decision-making:

- taking future effects more into account in decision-making (future orientation-anticipation);
- in decision-making, providing more insight into the future effects of decision-making (future orientation-clarity);

- in decision-making, co-ordinating a decision better with other decisions of the planning subject (coherence);
- in decision-making, providing other actors with more opportunity to influence a decision (participation);
- in decision-making, providing information on the actions of the planning subject (motivation-clarity) and provide better arguments for decisions (motivation-justification).

3. Green plans and participation

Green plans are plans which address the escalating environmental problems (Dalal-Clayton, 1996) Many municipalities all over the world have adopted environmental declarations, strategies and action plans.. The relation between local physical, land-use or spatial planning and these forms of environmental or green planning varies between countries. In some countries the planning functions are combined while in other countries they are quit separate (Sustainable Cities project, 1994).
In recent years there have been several cross-national reviews of experiences with green planning (OECD, 1995; Lampietti & Subramanian, 1995; World Bank, 1995, REC,1995, Johnson, 1995, Dalal-Clayton, 1996). From this comparative research a new type of plan emerges. These new type of plans have a more communicative approach towards other actors in society. To reach this communicative, external function participation in planning processes is stressed. Agenda 21 explicitly takes up the concept of participation in green planning. National strategies should be developed through the widest possible participation. A Local Agenda 21 is based on a communicative dialogue with the population (UNCED, 1992). The 5th Environmental Action Programme of the EU also asks for a new approach. A transition towards sustainable development needs in environmental policy an emphasis on long-term goal-setting on a broad political and societal basis and a co-operative target group policy for the mobilisation of additional decentralised societal capacities (Janicke, 1996; Dalal-Clayton, 1996).

The underlying assumption of this new Agenda 21 type of plans is that they are essentially communicative instruments. Apart from the consequences through regulatory and economic instruments, all plans contain a `plan message' which is meant to have a direct impact. With these messages the planning government tries to change the perceptions of other governmental departments and societal actors by sketching the problems, the targets and it's motivation for future decision making .
In `centralist' or 'hierarchic' approaches to planning one supposes that reaching the target group and implementation by the target group is just a matter of power and regulation. These are forms of blueprint planning which don't take the uncertainty of future developments into account. Planning is just seen as the making and carrying out of these blueprints. The concept of blue print planning derives essentially from architecture and engineering. In green planning we cannot expect that, even with a massive application of force, plan statements can be considered as orders addressing other government agencies and societal actors.

Figure 1 The hierarchical model of planning (Faludi, 1990)

In other planning approaches which incorporated the idea of uncertainty into decision making the central problem is no longer simply how to get the actors addressed by the plan to act in accordance with the plan, but to get the message through to the addressed actor.

Figure 2 The communicative model of planning

A plan statement is no longer an order to implement but a message that if it reaches the addressed actor will lead to the acceptance of the message as relevant for a decision to react. The message is open for communication with the sender of the message, the planning subject. The implication for a communicative plan is that, to make an impact, three conditions have to be met:
- the actor who is addressed has to have knowledge of the existence and content of the planning message;
- the actor has to find the message relevant;
- the actor has to do something with the message, he has to use it, be it only to decide to neglect it.

Furthermore, language theory (Austin, 1962, Searle, 1969) stipulates five basic conditions a communicative message has to meet to succeed. Both the target groups and the relevant non-environmental policies have to find the planning message:
- understandable;
- appropriate;
- legitimate;
- sincere;
- acceptable.

In the next sections we will see in how far the Dutch planning system meets this conditions of knowledge and the condition of relevance.

4. Environmental policy planning in the Netherlands

Sectoral plans

Policy planning was not a new phenomenon in environmental planning in the Netherlands. Various environmental laws contained planning obligations for both the national government and the provinces. The planning system as it was developed in the seventies had the nature of a response to

urgent problems and focuses mainly on the individual sectors, where these problems showed most clearly. The sector planning system consisted of various environmental compartment or sector plans for solid waste, water quality, soil conservation, etc. A former high official of the Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment stated that the inclusion of planning regulations in the new environmental laws in the seventies was not based on a dear and balanced view of the function of planning in environmental policy as much as on the idea that a new, still developing policy area would not be able to do without (Biezeveld, 1989).

Due to the obscurity and complexity of the system, the lack of coherence between plans and the unclear relation between the plans and other instruments, the system of sectoral plans was criticised from various sides. In response to the problems of the sector system, nearly all reports and proposals proposed a so-called comprehensive environmental policy plan. In his Explanatory Memorandum with the 1982 budget, the Minister mentions such a comprehensive environmental policy plan for the first time as being 'an integration framework for all of environmental policy'[1].

New planning system

In the Memorandum 'More than the Sum of its Parts' from 1984 by the then Minister of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment, Winsemius, the foundations for a new system of environmental policy planning are sketched. The new system integrates all sector plans in a single strategic environmental policy plan in relation to a single operational implementation plan. In this Memorandum planning was defined as: `*the development and maintenance of Statements of Future Intent in the form of plans to be able to take future decisions rationally and in their mutual context, and to convince third parties (other authorities, enterprises, citizens) to take this into account in their actions and decisions.*

This definition gives plans two major functions. The *internal function* concerns the guiding of future decisions taken by the planning subject itself. This internal function places the planning system within the so-called decision-centred view of planning (Faludi, 1982, 1987).The *external function* is the consequence of publicising the plan. By publicising policy intentions, actors in the environment such as citizens, firms, social organisations and other authorities gain an insight into the type of behaviour which is to be expected from the municipalities, so that they can adjust their own decision-making to this. The ideas from this Memorandum were converted into legislation in the chapter 'Plans' of the General Environmental Conservation Act.

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[1] Lower house, 1981-1982, 17000., nr. 2, pp. 129 and 162/163

Table 1 gives a simplified presentation of the Dutch environmental and spatial planning framework. It shows two different tracks of policy planning at three levels of government which are historically related to the environment, but based on different planning law namely a law on physical planning (Wet op de Ruimtelijke ordening) and a law on environmental protection (Wet Milieubeheer) which contains a Planning Chapter since march 1993. At all three levels some form of environmental and spatial plans have to be made, although the environmental plan on the municipal level is facultative. In the environmental track there is no formal hierarchical co-ordination mechanism.

Table 1 The Dutch environmental and physical planning system

Level of government	Environmental planning	Spatial planning
National	National Environmental Plan	National Spatial Plan
Provincial	Environmental Policy Plan	`Streekplan' (provincial land use plan)
Municipal level	Environmental policy plan	Structural plan `Bestemmingsplan'(local housing and landscape plan)

The table is simplistic because it leaves out :
- the specific operational programs that have to be made at the all three level. On the municipal level the environmental program is obliged;
- other sector plans (like water and nature conservation plans on the national and provincial level and municipal sewage plans) that contain parts of the environmental planning track.

5. The external function of plans and open planning

The new planning system proposed the concept of 'open planning'. `Open' means involving others such as citizens, enterprises, environmental organisations and other authorities in planning at an early stage. This is supposed to increase the scope and recruiting power of planning which in turn is related to the interiorization of environmental responsibility by the plan's target groups. Such interiorization also depends on the way in which the plan is accomplished. The *external function* is the consequence of publicising the plan. By doing so actors in the environment such as citizens, firms, social organisations and other authorities gain an insight into the type of behaviour which is to be expected from the government, so that they can adjust their own decision-making.

Dutch environmental policy is well know for it's so called target-group approach. This policy focus means that, after the national environmental objectives have been formulated in the National Environmental Policy Plans, target groups and their representatives have a strong say in all further stages of the policy process. In creating a consultative structure between the government and the industry organisations acting on behalf of the polluters (i.e. the target groups) and attempt is being made to internalise environmental responsibility in individual companies. One of the main aims of this consultations is to define the tasks for a specific sector of industry within the framework of the overall national environmental objectives. Usually these arrangements are laid down in covenants

and other forms of guidelines, incorporating targets to be realised by the various sectors of industry within a certain time limit.

Starting point for the consultative process is the environmental policy plan. The adjustment of the decision making of actors from society to the plan can be considered as an communicative process based on the plan. In the next section we will discuss the relation between participation and the external, communicative function of plans.

6. Participation in municipal Dutch green planning

In this section we will elaborate on the basic hypothesis that participation in the planning process will stimulate the communicative use of the plan and that this means that third parties will co-ordinate their own decisions and actions to the intended government policy in the plan because of the this consultation, on the basis of evaluation research in to local green planning in the Netherlands. To look into this hypotheses we have to answer two questions:

- Who participates in local green planning and how?
- Does participation in planning contribute to the basic conditions for a communicative plan?

The conditions for communicative use of a plan stated in section 3 were:

- the actor who is addressed has to have knowledge of the existence and content of the planning message;
- the actor has to find the message relevant;
- the actor has to do something with the message, he has to use it, be it only to decide to neglect it.

Who participates in local green planning and how?

To study the participation processes on the municipal level a survey was conducted directed on the 110 municipalities above 30.000 inhabitants. According to their own statements, a large majority of the municipalities with more than 30,000 inhabitants (82 percent) drew up a strategic environmental policy plan or a combination of a strategic and operational plan. In addition municipal documents were collected and analysed. In 7 case-municipalities the planning process was studied more in depth.

Participation in local green planning processes could be either reaction on the basis of a concept plan drawn up by the administration without the involvement of target-groups or real participation in the preparatory stage of the plan. A telephone survey in June 1992 (Buil, 1992) showed that only 1/3 out of 60 municipalities (over 25000 inhabitants) actually involved the target groups in the preparatory stage of the planning process. Usually the approach would be to interview the target groups or have face-to-face consultation talks. A written survey held in the beginning of 1993 (Coenen and Lulofs, 1993) showed that 29.8% only had participation in the preparatory stage, 35.1% merely as a reaction on the concept and 21,1% in both stages. Of the local planning processes 14% didn't involve any form of participation.

If we place municipalities that had real participation on a participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969) 9.8% had a citizen consultation group as the highest form of participation and 43 % had at least hearings and information meetings, apart from other forms of participation. Direct interviewing of target groups occurred in 33.3% as the highest step on the ladder, apart from other forms of participation. These numbers show that it was not un-

usual to involve target groups when drawing up of environmental strategies, but it happened in a minority of the municipalities and the methods were quite limited. But the majority of the municipalities relied on consultation after drawing a concept-plan. Problem in participation processes was often to get business involved. Especially during hearings all kinds of groups would show up, except business.

Knowledge
In a survey industrial firms were asked if they know if the municipality were they resident had a green plan and if they were familiar with the content of the plan (De Bruijn and Lulofs, 1994). 65% (out of 134) could not answer the first question, only one third (32,4%) knew of the existence of a plan. Of this group 52,5 % said that they-were also familiar with the content of the plan.

Relevance
According to the national planning framework, local authorities should involve target groups in their planning. In the survey mentioned before industrial firms stated local governement as the most important layer of government concerning their environemental policy.
In practice the relevance of local green plans and local target group policy seems limited. The main guidelines of environmental policy are largely determined by the state. The policy is executed mainly by the provinces and municipalities. At municipal level there will be less need to arrive at a common policy formulation. Usually there will be a consensus by the time the municipality is confronted with the problem. At municipal level, the tension between what has already been decided between the central government and a particular branch of industry, always plays a part. For instance both the municipality and the local garage dealer may be confronted with agreements made between the central government and the Association of garages (BOVAG). In practise, a local target group policy can be shaped by including representatives from the target group in a guidance or feedback group, organising an informative meeting with the target group or explicitly consulting target groups through interviews with representatives or requesting a (written) response to planning drafts. But only a small minority of the municipalities set up more permanent consultation forums, especially with local environmental movement groups.

Use of the message
Does participation of target groups in decision making increase after plan approval? Part of the evaluation research on local green planning was aimed at the decision making after plan approval linked with the plans. This research looked into the features this decision making had after plan approval in relation to the aims of the planning system. The research on participation as a feature of decision making linked with the plan is based on two different data collection methods, indicated as quantitative and qualitative decision-making studies. The quantitative decision-making study consisted of a contents analysis of decision-making documents of the mayor and aldermen of the case-municipalities before and after the plan was approved. The qualitative decision-making study consisted of reconstruction interviews with officials in the seven case municipalities. The interviews were supplemented with the contents analysis of the decision-making documents.

Participation involved a higher quality of decision-making, as more other actors were capable of influencing decision-making linked with the plan after the plan was approved. In the quantitative study we could only state whether decision-making that was relevant to other actors took place more often. Nothing could really be said about their actual involvement on the basis of the quantitative study.

On the basis of the qualitative study we can say that in decision-making where participation procedures were also present already in the initial situation, such as in civil engineering and traffic plans, such participation did not increase. Within the other policy fields no general differences in the level of participation could be seen between the municipalities on the basis of the examples we found. Participation appears to have increased particularly where the interests of policy target groups are affected, particularly when the municipality itself possessed few instruments in the policy field in question.

Concluding remarks

The basic hypothesis is that participation in the planning process will stimulate the communicative use of the plan. This means that third parties will co-ordinate their own decisions and actions to the intended government policy in the plan because of the this consultation. The Dutch targetgroup policy can be considered an exponent of this idea of co-ordinative decision making after plan approval. The planning system operates a very specific external function of plans which concerns the appeal to third parties to co-ordinate their own decisions and actions to the intended government policy in the plan.

For such a external, communicative function to work we stipulated three conditions knowledge of the plan, relevance of the content and eventually use of the message.

On the national level the Dutch target group policy is characterised as very successful (Bressers, 1996). But the planning process of the National Environmental Policy Plan can be characterised as internally orientated, closed process (Dalal-Clayton, 1996, Ringeling, 199.)

On the local level their is more participation in the planning processes. But important target groups do not participate in the planning. The knowledge among this target groups is than very restricted and the relevance of local policy is doubtful to these target groups. Participation does not increase after plan approval. Given the fact that these basic conditions for a communicative use of local plans are not met, the influence of local green plans on the co-ordination of decision making between local government and target groups will be very limited.

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