

# WORLDS

# APART

Interactions between local initiatives  
and established policy

Marleen Buizer



ALTERRA  
WAGENINGEN UR



# Worlds Apart

## Interactions between Local Initiatives and Established Policy

MISSION: Alterra is the main centre of expertise on rural areas and water management in the Netherlands. It was founded 1 January 2000. Alterra combines a huge range of expertise on rural areas and their sustainable use, including aspects such as water, wildlife, forests, the environment, soils, landscape, climate and recreation, as well as various other aspects relevant to the development and management of the environment we live in. Alterra engages in strategic and applied research to support design processes, policymaking and management at the local, national and international level. This includes not only innovative, interdisciplinary research on complex problems relating to rural areas, but also the production of readily applicable knowledge and expertise enabling rapid and adequate solutions to practical problems. The many themes of Alterra's research effort include relations between cities and their surrounding countryside, multiple use of rural areas, economy and ecology, integrated water management, sustainable agricultural systems, planning for the future, expert systems and modelling, biodiversity, landscape planning and landscape perception, integrated forest management, geo-information and remote sensing, spatial planning of leisure activities, habitat creation in marine and estuarine waters, green belt development and ecological webs, and pollution risk assessment. Alterra is part of Wageningen University Research Centre (Wageningen UR) and includes two research sites, one in Wageningen and one on the island of Texel.

**Worlds Apart**  
**Interactions between Local Initiatives**  
**and Established Policy**

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## Abstract

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This thesis presents three case studies about private actors aspiring to realize their innovative ideas on land management and design in three different areas in the Netherlands. In appearance, these three areas are very different but they are all dynamic and are all located near cities. In size, the areas range from seventy to a few hundred hectares. Socially, they are highly dynamic as well, with various groups and organizations seeking either to make changes or to conserve what they value, and taking action to promote their ideas. However, it was clear from the start that the ways in which the initiators of these ideas gave meaning to the three areas differed from the ideas enshrined in existing policies. It is argued that the initiatives must be looked at in the context of various pleas for 'interactive policy making', since these generate expectations about the scope for initiatives to come from private actors. The question is whether these pleas really imply scope for two-way traffic, allowing 'space for policy innovation' through local initiatives which do not originate from government actors. Indeed, the three case studies show that there is ample innovative potential at the local level and that ideas do get implemented after considerable efforts. The fact that these initiatives were implemented was also due to other factors, such as the personal zeal and perseverance, trust and empathy that could develop among people involved 'in the field'. However, the cases also show that there is only limited politicized discussion about the possible wider policy implications of these local innovations.

This study revealed this asymmetry between local innovative potential and a seeming lack of responsiveness on the part of established policy by means of an analysis of 1) the relationships between discourses, actor coalitions, rules and resources at the level of day-to-day interactions between the initiatives and established policy, and 2) the influence of structural forces such as Europeanization, distantiation, juridification and sectoralization on these everyday practices. The study explored how these structural forces contributed to a form of depoliticization in the case study areas.

**Keywords:** local initiatives, policy arrangements, participation, sub-politicization, depoliticization, discourse, duality of agency and structure, space for policy innovation, interpretive analysis, urban-rural relationships

**For Pim**



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Alterra Top10smart 2006

*Map 1: Location of the three areas in the Netherlands*



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## *1.1 Three social spatial situations*

This thesis presents three case studies about private actors aspiring to realize their innovative ideas on land management and design in three different areas in the Netherlands. In appearance, these three areas are very different but they are all dynamic and are all located near cities. In size, the areas range from seventy to a few hundred hectares (see maps at the end of this section). Socially, they are highly dynamic as well, with various groups and organizations seeking either to make changes or to conserve what they think of value, and taking action to promote their ideas. However, it was clear from the start that the ways in which the initiators of these ideas gave meaning to the three areas differed from the ideas contained in policies. The emergence of three initiatives aiming 'to make a difference' to the appearance of the areas, as well as to change the ways in which people relate to the areas and to each other, was the starting point of my study. This is also the orientation of Social Spatial Analysis as a field of study:

"Social-spatial analysis is a field of expertise in Wageningen that is concerned with the knowledge of the use, valuation and experience of the living environment by individuals, groups and organizations. This knowledge is related to the question of how people perceive their environment, how they react to changes in it, and how this can be addressed in terms of design (Lengkeek 2002: 3, translation MB).

The ideas that I studied came into being in a world full of existing policies and practices. Although in fact 'existing policy' is not static and constantly alters or reproduces itself, the initiators to some extent needed to challenge a fairly stable status quo. The people behind the three initiatives had been operating on the policy-making 'scene' for what I consider relatively long periods of time. These initiators had to work hard to penetrate domains with a much longer history and a stable institutional environment. My study focused on the dynamics of what happened in the interaction between local initiatives and existing policy. I wanted to know what their ability to become 'stayers' delivered after a few years, what position they acquired in relation to existing policy, how the latter changed or did not change, and in what way the initiatives themselves changed in the process. I was involved in all three situations and followed what happened at close range.

In the case of Biesland, I was directly involved as a researcher and project leader of the research project connected to it, and as a 'process facilitator', for a period of five years. My direct involvement with the other two cases as a project leader was intensive too, but shorter-term and restricted to specific phases of the process.

The Biesland case focuses on an agricultural enclave in a heavily urbanized area in the West of the Netherlands. When a farmer and a nature conservationist met up with some researchers, they decided to team up to try to realize their vision of a far-reaching integration of nature values into agricultural activities at farm level. The coalition that emerged in relation to the idea gradually grew, gained support and input from city dwellers, and became institutionalized in various local arenas. The initiative entailed ideas that diverge from 'business as usual' in farm and nature management practices, and also incorporated ideas on how to organize implementation. A local 'foundation' was to govern implementation. The case also shows how a search for "new" area-oriented (territorial) governance has to deal with 'European' discourse and practices. The researchers, of whom I was one, had access to research budgets which made it possible to invest considerable time and energy in the project. The money went into research and "process costs" for facilitating the complex process of linking the many decision-making levels involved. The project was largely financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Food Quality (ANF): the Ministry that is most sceptical about the project's feasibility, but which has also provided it with a status, research capacity and the financial means for implementation.

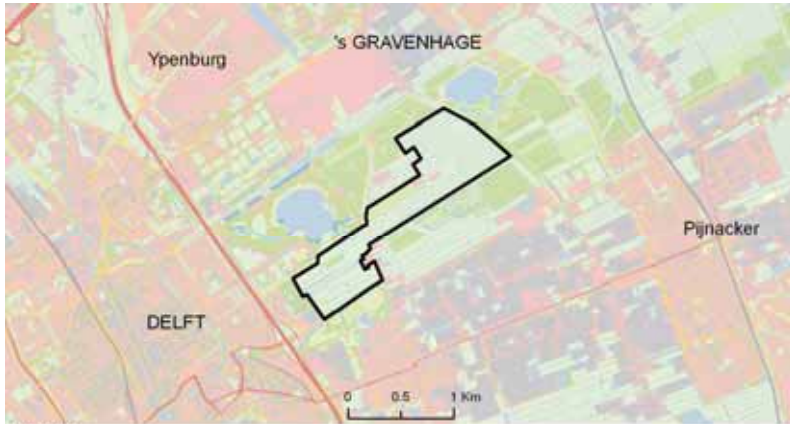
My second case focuses on a group of Belgian and Dutch citizens and municipal officials who organized themselves in the 'Grensschap', and who meet at an interactive event organized by researchers at the request of the municipality of Maastricht and officials of the Ministry of ANF. The Grensschap's mission is to collaborate with municipalities to protect and enhance the "values of the unique historic landscape between Maastricht and the Kempen in the border area of the Netherlands and Belgium" (their website). The citizens connected to the Grensschap wished to give the area a stronger identity, for example by giving it a name, by organizing various activities in the area and by acquiring the means to realize various art installations which invite people to look at the area in a new way. Collaboration with the authorities was an important feature of the group's strategy, and it applied a degree of self-censorship to its own ideas in order to make realization feasible. At times when 'win-win' outcomes seemed unattainable, the group faced difficult choices and wrestled with its position and role in relation to the formal representative bodies. Nevertheless, due to its successes, members of the group stayed motivated

to invest time and energy in activities. The group was sometimes even in danger of collapsing under the many activities it was involved in.

The third case deals with plans by one of the Netherlands' oldest and most-visited theme parks, the Efteling, to build accommodation for its visitors. Initially nature organizations resisted these building plans. After years of strife and legal procedures however, the erstwhile opponents signed a covenant for the realization of a common plan. For the first time in many years, nature and building activities did not seem to conflict. In the plan, which our research institute was commissioned to develop and of which I became project leader, the construction of new accommodation was combined with measures to enhance natural and historical values over a larger area. Both the Efteling and nature organizations have committed themselves to the plan and provided input into it, taking joint steps to get it endorsed by policy-making bodies at municipal, provincial and national level (the Ministry of ANF is involved here too). Established rules about 'nature compensation' have complicated the process of getting it further, however, due to the continued dominance of mainstream policy ideas about building activities in nature areas and the rules of the game attached to this discourse. In spite of the various hurdles, the plan was carried forward. Due to the persistence of the brand new collaboration and with the help of officials who were looking for openings in the rules, the plan did not disappear into the proverbial bottom drawer. It remains to be seen, however, whether and to what extent mainstream policy-making principles will be evaluated in the light of a success like this.

A common characteristic of all three situations is that the areas concerned were subject to multiple policies and policy interpretations from various actors. Albeit in different ways and to different extents, municipal, provincial, the water authority, Ministerial and EU legislation all played a role in the planning, design and management of the areas. To the policy analyst, the most interesting aspect of this is the way coalitions were formed that attempted to achieve a divergence from established policy, in terms of both contents and organization.

The three areas cannot easily be categorized as 'urban', 'rural', 'nature' or 'recreational'. And, as the three stories reveal, such categorization is subjective and depends on the observer's own orientation and outlook. In this respect, the most striking common feature of the three cases is the territorial outlook of the initiators behind the ideas.



Biesland



Grensland



Loonsche Land

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**Map 2: The three areas**

## *1.2 Involving private actors*

This book describes interactions between policy makers and coalitions of private actors such as citizens, enterprises and researchers. Even though 'policy makers' are generally associated with formal government bodies, all of the above-mentioned actors are, in fact, policy makers. Indeed, the policy development process is shaped by these actors together. I have chosen not to take various government policies as the starting point of my analysis, but rather the local initiatives which primarily originate outside the traditional government 'sources' of policy development. In policy-dense countries such as the Netherlands, such local initiatives often cannot simply go their own way. They need to link up effectively with operative policy, to conform to certain rules, to get access to resources, and to obtain support from politicians. The search for 'contact' is not a one-way quest by the private initiators, however; state actors are also looking for ways to relate to these local ideas originating outside the institutions of government. I wondered whether and how these interactions could shed light on the conditions under which such local initiatives could succeed, not just locally, but also by feeding their ideas and experience into the 'broader' policy-making process, so that they do not remain isolated local initiatives.

I wish to place the subject in the context of two phenomena: firstly, the practices that come under the label 'interactive policy making', and secondly, the manifestations of processes of 'sub-politicization'. 'Interactive policy making' refers to the attempts of governments to involve citizens and other private actors at an early stage of the policy decision-making process. I do not consider these efforts to be truly 'interaction'-oriented if they can only be organized by governments on their terms. In my opinion, a focus on local initiatives, and on what happens once these challenge established policy, provides insight into the real extent to which governments are seeking to establish 'interactive' policy making.

Interactive policy making is a way for government bodies in the Netherlands to substantiate their pleas for a greater role for private actors in the policy-making process (see for instance [www.andereoverheid.nl](http://www.andereoverheid.nl)). This applies to the domain of spatial policy as much as to any other ([www.gebiedsgerichtbeleid.nl](http://www.gebiedsgerichtbeleid.nl)). Interactive policy making should be understood in its historical context. For a long time, the political administrative system of the Netherlands was in the grip of irreconcilable differences between various socio-political 'zuilen' or blocks. The resulting stalemates were breached in the second half of the last century by means of a 'consensus democracy', or 'pacification democracy' (Lijphart 1968).

Pacification was arranged by the political elite, at a distance from 'ordinary' citizens and preferably without interference by the media. From the mid 1960s onwards, citizens loosened their 'chains' to these socio-political blocks and became politically aware and active. This gave rise to a more open attitude on the part of the political elite: they introduced participatory practices such as 'de inspraak', which is a form of consultation about pre-developed plans. Participation appeared to be largely symbolic, taking place only at the end of decision-making processes and leaving little space for input by anyone but the elite (for a historical overview, see Duijvendak and Krouwel 2001). In fact, the practices of the pacification-era continued. The question Duijvendak and Krouwel posed was whether recent activities labelled 'interactive policy making' were 'just' a continuation of this history of pacification by the elite, or whether they represented a historical breakthrough. They conclude that interactive policy making is just a "minor innovation of pacification democracy". Duijvendak and Krouwel:

"(...) at first sight, greater political activity by citizens *and* a more responsive administration seem to run counter to the traditions of pacification democracy. Whoever looks further sees something different: the underlying principles of pacification democracy are still in place; this is possible because participation by citizens is limited and the administration more dictatorial than it looks.

Interactive policy making heralds a new phase of pacification democracy, and is popular because it matches Dutch traditions" (Duijvendak and Krouwel in Edelenbos and Monnikhof 2001: 21).

So far, two 'generations' of participation policy have been identified. The first, summarized as 'consultation', was related to increased political activity by citizens in the sixties. Consultation processes placed citizens in a 'reactive' role. The second generation of 'interactive policy making' was a reaction to the reactive character of the first generation. It emerged in the nineties and is still going strong. The widespread current support for 'interactive' approaches in politics and administration is reflected in the variety of labels attached to them. 'Interactive policy making', 'open planning processes' or 'co-decision-making' are just a few examples. In the past few years, government has made various efforts to get citizens and societal organizations participating in decision making about, for instance, major infrastructural works, water-related projects, and plans for rural areas or environmental policies in cities. Akkerman et al. emphasize that most efforts to promote and support new forms of public participation come from 'above' (Akkerman in Engelen et al. 2004a: 297 and Akkerman et al. 2004b). There is an impressive amount of literature on these efforts, mainly in the fields of public administration, political and policy science (Koppenjan in Edelenbos en Monnikhof 2001, Edelenbos and Monnikhof 2001, Van Woerkum and Aarts 2003, ROB 2002, Pröpper en Steenbeek 1999, Soeterbroek 2002, Van Woerkum 2000, Van Stokkom 2002,

Edelenbos 2005). Most authors agree however that the 'state of the art' in interactive policy making is still generally poor in terms of concrete influence on outcomes (Duijvendak and Krouwel 2001, Goverde and Lako 2005, Edelenbos and Klijn 2005, Cornips 2006<sup>a</sup>, 2006<sup>b</sup>). In an investigation of the innovative potential of interactive policy, Van Tatenhove emphasizes that it can only be fairly evaluated if the institutional context of interactive policy is taken into consideration and that policy experiments need to be reflective in order to achieve innovation. An experiment is reflective, he says, when actors can change the constellation of relevant rules and resources and thereby question the foundations of existing policy (Van Tatenhove in Grin et al., (eds) 2006: 161).

These ideas are part of a third generation of thinking about political participation in which politics is increasingly seen as being conducted at a variety of places besides parliaments and elected councils. This trend is often referred to as the dispersion and displacement of politics (Engelen and Sie Dhian Ho (eds) 2004). In this line of argument, active citizenship can be expressed in a wide variety of participatory practices: empowered participatory governance (Fung and Wright 2001). A number of different names are used for these practices, including collaborative dialogues, deliberative policy practices and argumentative planning. The essential idea is that the variety of new practices "leads to a reinvention of politics" (Hajer 2003: 98). Thus, while the second generation of participation policy does not question the traditional institutions, the third generation explicitly considers alternative options.

Ulrich Beck can be considered to belong to the same intellectual family. His main argument is that society finds itself in a phase of 'reflexive modernization', meaning that the very by-products of industrial society lead to its own 'self-destruction' (Beck 1994: 2). I will come back to this idea in chapter two. For now, it is important to note that Beck's account of contemporary society contains a concept that is of special interest in the context of this study: 'sub-politics'. According to Beck, the sub-politicization of society means that society is increasingly being shaped *from below*.

'There are even opportunities for courageous individuals to 'move mountains' in the nerve centres of development. Politicization thus implies a decrease of the central rule approach' (Beck 1994: 23).

And elsewhere Beck states:

'It is decisive that (...) sub-politics liberates politics by shifting, opening and connecting the rules and laws of the political, as well as by making these negotiable and make-able' (Beck 1997: 97, translation MB).

This situation needs to be acknowledged, because if politics continues to be equated with the formal political system and the state, then opportunities to politicize society in other ways than through these established systems will be missed. As Hajer phrases this:

“ (...) one might even argue that the failure to recognize the significance of these processes of policy-induced deliberation will erode the legitimacy of politics, whereas the active attempt to seek to incorporate these processes might precisely enhance the legitimacy of politics” (Hajer in Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 99).

In this study, I wish to approach the issue from the angle of initiatives that were organized by local, mainly private actors from specific territories<sup>1</sup>. Obviously, these initiatives did not come about in an institutional void, and I find it especially interesting to analyse what happened when they confronted established policy. But first I would like to know why those initiatives came about. Apparently the initiators wished to do things differently. Is it realistic to expect that the ambition of participation can also be two-way traffic? If so, it means that established policy does not dictate what is possible, but that such initiatives are also able to generate wider policy implications.

### ***1.3 Positioning the researcher***

Various experiences preceded this study, including for example my active membership of societal organizations, my work on earlier research projects and my previous studies and employment. Undoubtedly, these experiences coloured my choice of focus and expectations, just as my positionality as a contract researcher influenced what I was able to see (see also Allen 2005). Moreover, the contracted projects themselves influenced what happened in the three cases. In the conclusion of each case-oriented chapter, I will reflect on these influences; I will also say more about this in chapter three. In the following I summarize some other personal experiences that I think influenced my outlook and my positionality (see also Ateljevic 2005).

Ever since my studies in public administration more than ten years ago, I have been interested in the peculiarities of the interface between governments and civil society, particularly in relation to environmental issues and developing countries. At Leiden University, I got acquainted with implementation studies such as that of Pressman and Wildavsky, and with the dilemmas of ‘street-level bureaucrats’, as Lipsky called them: the

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<sup>1</sup> The Grensschap case to an extent is an exception, as it *started* from a public participation event that had been organized by the municipality, the Ministry of LNV and contracted researchers.



conflict between having to implement a predetermined policy and acknowledging that real situations require a considerable degree of freedom to interpret and in fact create that policy. These dilemmas interested me more than the 'tools' and instruments of government that we were also taught. In my MSc studies, I therefore chose to do research on the interaction between government officials and forest-dwellers in the North-East of the Philippines. I learned that the cultures of these two groups were so different that there was often no face-to-face interaction at all (Buizer 1994). I have always been driven to try to understand people's motivations and points of view. One of the papers I wrote in the context of communication studies was on the role of 'empathy' in scientific research. My first job concerned the training of Philippine government officials in a specific participatory method called Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems - RAAKS (Engel 1995). Again, I was struck by the sharp contrast between, on the one hand, the officials' strong preference for office work and quantitative data and, on the other hand, the efforts by development organizations to persuade the same officials to establish intensive contact and face-to-face dialogue with the people in the rural areas. In this period I was particularly inspired by the work of the political scientist Scott about "the weapons of the weak, everyday forms of silent resistance' (Scott 1985), because his detailed anthropological work focusing on individuals in their particular contexts showed the subtleties of resistance in an unorthodox way. My next job as a policy advisor to the European Parliament on nature, environment and development issues put me in touch with a completely different variation on government-civil society interaction, much of which also took place 'behind the scenes'. The various lobbying efforts by environmental and development organizations to get their issues higher on the European policy agenda were often successful. These organizations were also able to prevent developments that they thought undesirable by referring to European legislation, such as the Habitats or Birds directives, which they themselves had co-authored.

In my next job as a contract researcher, in which I deal once again with 'local people and their organizations', it has often struck me that the way power and participation had been theorized about, analysed and methodologically elaborated in various social sciences oriented towards developing countries could be of greater use for situations in the Netherlands. Although this interest did not in itself become the topic of my research, it reflects my concern about the 'how' of participation and power.

Generally speaking, the government – civil society interface with respect to spatial and environmental issues continued to be an important thread through my learning experience as a practitioner. This accounts for both the topic of the present study and my sympathy for the 'actors in the field'

and their efforts to make a difference to 'their areas'. It was and still is my ambition to contribute to a democratization of research, meaning that research activities become less a 'remote' affair which ignores the importance of local actors' knowledge, and more a democratic undertaking which grants citizens agency by inviting them to participate in deliberations. I was inspired by Yanow:

"When the problem is seen as differences in the bases of knowledge – technical-rational-university-based expertise versus lived-experience-based expertise – the terms of engagement change. Citizens are, in this view, no longer denied agency, linguistically-conceptually at least, as so many 'targets' of policy missiles (a metaphor common, still, in policy language). This enlarges the range of action not only for policy analysis not only for policy analysis as a deliberative practice, in which non-traditionally expert citizens are nonetheless accorded respect for having expertise in their own lives and, hence. Invited to participate in deliberations as partners; but it also recasts the role of policy analyst, from technical expert to expert in deliberative processes (Yanow in Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 245).

I think my learning curve as regards being an 'expert in deliberative processes' is still steep.

Fortunately, a number of scientists are currently emphasizing the importance of reflecting upon one's own role and position as a researcher. And as this book will show, I was not always happy with my own role. Ignoring one's positionality will not reduce its influence, while making it explicit will at least make it a possible topic of debate. What is more, a growing number of scientists stress the advantages of being involved in the situation that one investigates, since it provides direct information which is not filtered through respondents' personal versions of what has happened in the past.

### ***1.4 Initial questions***

My research questions evolved, then, from the above-mentioned experiences. Against the background of policy developments such as interactive policy making and macro-sociological theories about the involvement of private actors in politics and policy-making, I am interested in looking at specific cases in which more or less 'bottom-up' initiatives for innovation have challenged existing policies. As I have mentioned, I was involved in three such situations as a contract-researcher. The ideas that came up in these situations did not automatically fit into existing policy. These are the questions that I consider relevant:

1. What is the origin and general background of the various local initiatives and how do these relate to existing policies?

2. What happened in the interactions between initiatives and existing policy in the three cases?
3. If policy change came about, how did that happen and what conditions 'helped' or 'hindered' the initiatives?

The overall objective of the study is to gain in-depth insight into the finer details of the social-spatial dynamics involved in efforts to realize change in relation to specific areas, especially when these local changes necessitate policy change on a larger scale. The insights gained into the conditions which facilitate or hinder such change should be useful for a wide variety of 'policy makers' ('official' ones as well as local actors). Of course, it is not possible to be exhaustive, nor are the conditions found in the three cases universal. Nevertheless, they can sensitize as to what mechanisms policy makers have to reckon with in situations in which ideas for policy change do not (only) come from the traditional policy-making bodies.

### ***1.5 Reading this book***

The next chapter is an exploration of some theoretical perspectives that could serve my purposes. The analytical framework should enable me to take into account the dynamics of how policy is changed, shaped or reproduced when private actors attempt to realize their divergent ideas. As the foregoing short introduction to the three cases revealed, these ideas may focus either on an innovation in the contents of the policy domain or on organizational aspects. The framework should also establish a connection between sociological theory about structural forces and everyday experiences in a specific policy situation.

The theoretical chapter ends with a reformulated set of research questions. I then go on to discuss the methodological approach in chapter three, which provides the link between the theory in chapter two and the case studies in chapters four, five and six. In chapter seven I will compare and contrast the cases in terms of the research questions, and in chapter eight I will draw conclusions about theoretical lessons, my positionality and the broader implications of the research.



## Chapter 2: Conceptual framework

### *2.1 Introduction*

In chapter one I explained my main research aim: to expand our understanding of innovative, local territorial initiatives by (mainly) private actors, and their interactions with existing policies. I placed this aim in the context of three generations of thinking about participation. Roughly, ‘consultation’ processes emerged in the nineteen sixties and seventies, but had little impact on the power of the political elites. Then in the nineties, ‘interactive policy-making’ became popular. The term ‘interactive policy-making’ referred to the attempts of governments (‘from above’) to involve citizens and other private actors at an early stage of the policy-making process. Interactive policy making is still popular among politicians and policy makers. However, interactive practices are often criticized as ‘old wine in new bottles’ and as failing to lead to any real influence of private actors on decision-making. The third generation of participatory approaches was ‘sub-politics’, a term which refers to new forms of politics outside conventional bodies of representation. Although they stem from different backgrounds, and the last refers to a much more radical transformation than the first two, these concepts were all born of an ambition to revitalize democracy.

Because of my interest in the question of whether policy change came about as a result of local initiatives, a useful tool for ranking the different types of participation I encountered in terms of their influence could be a ‘participation ladder’. Examples of such ladders include Arnstein’s and its successors, such as Pröpper’s version which grouped styles of governance into interactive policy making, symbolic interaction and non-interaction. I consider these ladders as useful tools for discussing the significance of the various participatory styles, especially when this is done in a dialogue with stakeholders (Arnstein 1969, Pröpper and Steenbeek 1999, Edelenbos and Monnikhof 1998, Pretty 1995). However, the categorizations are not particularly geared to reaching a better understanding of the ‘how’ of power *behind* the participatory processes and their outcomes – which is what I found most interesting. Moreover, while I did consider it important, it was not my main concern to assess the quality of the initiatives in terms of their internal democratic character. Instead, the focus here was on the interactions between local territorial initiatives and established policy.

The task of this chapter is to find an appropriate analytical framework for getting to grips with situations in which local initiatives challenge existing policy, which means that the ambition to participate comes mainly from local stakeholders. As was briefly indicated in the previous chapter, the framework should meet the following requirements:

- it should enable us to conceptualize local initiatives as well as existing policies and especially their interaction; it should therefore take into account processes of institutionalization (while staying alert to the possibility that some initiatives may only become institutionalized to a limited extent or may even 'die an early death', while others may get more firmly embedded in institutional structures);
- it should take into consideration the fact that interactions between existing policies and local initiatives are about both the contents of ideas *and* 'organization', including ways of cooperating, new partnerships, systems of control and finance, etc;
- it should acknowledge that the interactions take place in a context of structural processes, of which sub-politicization is especially relevant in the context of this research.

## ***2.2 Local initiatives and existing policy: dualities of agency and structure***

In view of the focus on the interaction between local initiatives and existing policy, in which neither of the two is static, Giddens' structuration theory seemed to offer an appropriate framework. In my view, both local initiatives and existing policy could be understood in terms of interaction between structure and agency. According to Giddens, institutions refer to practices which have the greatest time-space extension. "Institutions", he writes, "are by definition the more enduring features of social life" (Giddens 1984: 24). It is crucial according to Giddens that institutions are understood in terms of structuration theory. The theory evolved from his dissatisfaction with, on the one hand, structuralist thinking which attributed too much power to structures (rules and resources) and too little to the capacities of individuals, and, on the other hand, with voluntarist thinking which tended to attribute *too* much autonomy to individuals. So, applying their approach to the interaction between local initiatives and existing policy, structuralists (or determinists) would explain change or stability by referring to structural properties ("the rules are the cause of inertia"), while voluntarists would focus on the activities of individuals ("if they want, they can change the rules"). Structuration theory recognizes the enabling *and* constraining influence of both agency and structure and focuses on their interplay.

Thus, Giddens' structuration theory assumes that there is a duality of structure and agency, commonly referred to as 'duality of structure'. Agency refers to people's ability to act, and structure refers to rules and resources. Duality of structure means that there is a reciprocal relationship between actor and structure in which actors are neither powerless subjects of structure, nor powerful enough to change structure according to their wishes. Actors are knowledgeable about possibilities for acting at odds with those structures, but as they also function within those structures, they automatically reproduce them by taking them into account when they act.

In Giddens' own words, duality of structure means:

"Structure as the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes; the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in its production and reproduction" (1984: 374).

When the perspective of a duality of structure is used as the lens through which to look at the interactions between local initiatives and existing policy, they do not respectively represent actor and structure. Rather, duality of structure is present on both sides of the interaction. Local initiatives can be depicted as attempts to exert agency power. They emerge however in a context of rules and resources (structure), which may be both enabling and constraining. Local initiators may draw upon those structural properties or, on the contrary, may be constrained by them. And there is another side to that coin: structure is not a static resource to draw on – it is constantly changed or reproduced by human agency. This means that 'existing policy' is not a static entity either, even if institutionalized policy can be recognized as 'a more enduring feature of social life'. Referring to Giddens' ideas, Patsy Healey (1997, see also 2006) expresses these dynamics as follows:

"We live through culturally-bound structures of rules and resource flows, yet human agency, in our continually inventive ways, remakes them in each instance, and in remaking the systems, the structuring forces, we also change ourselves and our cultures. Structures are 'shaped' by agency, just as they in turn 'shape' agency" (Healey 1997: 47).

Giddens' theory was often criticized for still placing too much emphasis on agency. For according to Giddens, the way in which structural forces influence human action is through human knowledgeability. Actors *know* of structures and so when they take action, structures are present through their knowledge. This point of departure means that the initiatives that came up in the three areas analysed in this study were not structure-less from the beginning, even if actors may not at first have been conscious of these pre-existing structures and may have discovered them along the way.

Structuration theory has also been criticized for bringing with it a major methodological problem. The same problem emerges in relation to the framework that I will choose to analyse my cases with. In brief, it is still debated whether Giddens sees structure and agency as separate or as inseparable entities. The core question is how the interrelationship between agency and structure can be investigated if structuration theory implies that they are inseparable – in other words, if structuration theory ‘collapses’ agency and structure. To know more about their interrelationship, Archer says, we have to identify and describe agency and structure as separate entities. Giddens himself seemed to recognize this and solved it by introducing the concept of ‘bracketing’, meaning that structure and agency were alternately placed between brackets while the focus was on the other. I will get back to this issue and to a possible way of dealing with it with the help of Archers work, after I have shown in the next section how the analytical framework used here relates to the ‘duality of structure and agency’. In this study, I adopt Giddens’ central idea that neither agency nor structure should be assumed to determine the other, while making use of Archers analytical dualism as well. In concrete terms, this means that actors who feel attached to an area and also feel a need to do things differently, have the option of changing rules and resources, while at the same time they are never entirely free to do so. Likewise, ‘existing policy’ is the outcome of the previous interplay of actor and structure. Thus, the first requirement to the research framework is met: the idea of the interplay between actor and structure enables us to conceptualize local initiatives and existing policies, and especially their dynamic interaction.

## ***2.3 Further conceptualizing the interplay of local initiatives and existing policy***

### ***2.3.1 Introduction***

Van Tatenhove et al. elaborated on structuration theory with a view to developing a better approach to analysing the institutionalization of environmental policy. However, their publications, with contributions from various angles, have illustrated that the approach can be applied to other domains as well (Van Tatenhove, Arts and Leroy (eds) 2000 and Arts and Leroy (eds) 2006). These domains include nature policy, water management, cultural heritage preservation, rural areas and infrastructure.

The policy arrangements approach emphasises how multi-actor policy processes are embedded in institutions (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2004). This approach meets my second requirement by explicitly bringing in a discursive dimension. By incorporating discourse, it enables us to pay attention to the varying content of initiatives and existing policy, and to



how these change over time. It meets the third requirement by distinguishing a duality of structure at two levels: within day-to-day policy practices and between day-to-day policy practices and broader, structural transformations. I will elaborate on this in the following sections.

The policy arrangement approach builds further on several, mainly sociological and institutionalist theories. For full details of the theoretical roots of the approach, I would refer interested readers to various contributions by Van Tatenhove, Arts and Leroy (Arts and Leroy 2003 (eds): 13, Van Tatenhove, Arts and Leroy 2000 (eds), Arts and Van Tatenhove 2004 and 2006). Briefly, besides Giddens' structuration theory, outlined in these chapters, inspiration has also come from Elias' ideas on *figuration* and Bourdieu's notion of *field* (Arts and van Tatenhove 2004), as well as from sociological analyses of post-modernity, post-materialism and reflexive modernization, from policy science and public administration research on networks, and from recent theories about phenomena such as internationalization and multi-level governance (Arts and Leroy 2003 (ed.):13 – 16)<sup>2</sup>. The theory has also been fed by its authors' criticism of the voluntaristic nature of Dutch public administration research, which they see as too optimistic about the performative impact of strategic action by actors, while neglecting the impact of structural variables such as rules (Leroy, Arts and Van Tatenhove in Arts and Leroy 2003: 9, 14).

In sum, the policy arrangements approach seems to provide a suitable 'lens' through which to look at this research, chiefly for three reasons:

- Its practical elaboration of the duality of structure and agency, enabling me to further conceptualize the interaction between local initiatives and existing policies, and the institutionalization thereof;
- The link it makes between contents and organization: local initiatives and the policies they challenge are about much more than substantive ideas on the design of an area. They include ideas on for example new modes of cooperation and communication, new partners, rules and administration;
- The relation it presupposes between day-to-day practices and alleged broader structural processes such as sub-politics.

In the following, I will first outline the concept of policy arrangements and explain how the approach elaborates the duality of structure and agency at two levels: at the level of day-to-day policy practices and at the level of the interface of day-to-day practices and more macro, structural processes. I will then elaborate on day-to-day policy practices in 'policy arrangements' by means of four dimensions, which combine the duality of structure and

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<sup>2</sup> For more elaborate work on multi-level governance, see Hooghe and Marks 2001

agency and the duality of contents and organization (2.3.2). I will examine the way institutionalization is looked at in the policy arrangements approach (2.3.3) and connect the concept of sub-politics, which was introduced in the first chapter with that of 'political modernization', the umbrella term used by the authors of the policy arrangements approach for more macro structural processes (2.3.4). However, these accounts do not explain how I will deal with the aforementioned methodological 'problem' of structuration theory, which tends to recur in the policy arrangements approach too: the problem of how to explore the actor-structure connection not just in theoretical terms but also in practical research. This methodological problem needs to be discussed in this theoretical chapter because it has its origin in beliefs about the entities the world consists of and the concepts used to refer to them. This will be addressed in section 2.3.5, drawing to a close this brief and narrowly focused theoretical exploration, which outlines how I look at local initiatives and existing policy and provides the overture to the key concept of 'space for policy innovation'.

### ***2.3.2 Policy arrangements***

Policy arrangements constitute an institutional concept (Leroy and Arts 2006:13). Like institutions, the concept of policy arrangements is located on the crossroads of the axis agency/actor versus structure on the one hand and the axis discourse versus organization on the other hand. Policy arrangements are defined by Arts, Van Tatenhove and Leroy as

"the temporary stabilisation of the organisation and substance of a policy domain at a specific level of policy making" (Arts, Van Tatenhove and Leroy 2000: 54).

As I have mentioned, policy arrangements refer to day-to-day policy practices. The concept is about what actors think and actually do in relation to a certain policy domain<sup>3</sup>, who rules by means of what resources, and who does not. The terms *actors*, *rules* and *resources* refer to the organization of a policy domain. *Discourse* refers to the substance of a policy domain. The additional phrase 'at a specific level of policy making' was left out of later definitions, as it is precisely the *multi-level* character of some arrangements that may (partly) explain why the arrangement is stabilized – or, conversely, why it is changed. At this level of day-to-day practices in policy arrangements, four dimensions operationalize the idea that actor and structure are interrelated (Giddens' idea of a duality of structure). In the following I will briefly explain what is meant by the four dimensions.

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<sup>3</sup> The approach was initially thought up to be used in relation to environmental policy.

### *Discourse*

The policy arrangements approach subscribes to Hajer's definition of discourse, which implies that discourse and practices are intertwined: there is a meaning in all practices. In Hajer's definition, discourse is:

“a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (Hajer 1995: 44).

Thus, analysing discourse means that developments are assumed to depend largely on how they are perceived and socially constructed and on the ways in which these perceptions or meanings are embedded in social and institutional practices. Words, and policy vocabulary in particular, are an expression of such perceptions, as are all kinds of unspoken practices and communications. To stay within the scope of this study, a changing relationship between 'city' and 'countryside' can serve as an example. If city and countryside are, for instance, categorized as separate entities which are unlikely ever to form a harmonious relationship, then planning practice is likely to be geared to confirming that idea, which is expressed in policy terms such as 'red' and 'green contours'. These are the boundaries drawn on maps to indicate where building development is allowed (the red contour), and where rural, landscape and nature areas should be preserved (the green contour). Other examples are the practices in which rules make it easier to build in 'open spaces' within the built environment than in areas that are considered to belong to 'the countryside'. This interpretation of discourse is closely connected to Foucault's interpretation, which emphasizes the enabling and constraining role of power. In a critical article on the various misapplications of Foucault's work, Hook interprets the essence of the French philosopher's writings as follows:

“From the outset, then, Foucault is involved in a concerted attempt to restore materiality and power to what, in the Anglo-American tradition, has remained the largely linguistic concept of discourse; it is equally clear that he wants to centre the analysis of discourse within the field of political action. These concerns with not underestimating the functioning of discourse lead also to his emphasis on the fact that discourse is both that which constrains *and enables* writing, speaking, thinking. What he terms 'discursive practices' work in both inhibiting and productive ways, implying a play of prescriptions that designate both exclusions and choices (Foucault 1981a). These processes, of formation and constraint, production and exclusion, are inseparable. More than this, they are both complementary to and constitutive of one another; discourse is formed and exists through their mutual constitution (Foucault 1981a). (In: Hook 2001: 522-523)

This brief detour into Foucault is enough to underline the emphasis in his work on the relationship between practice and discourse. In this view, it is

fundamental that discourse is placed in the field of political action (not just of linguistics), that it is assumed both to enable *and* to constrain, to include *and* exclude, and that discourse encompasses practice, including institutional practice.

Such an approach to discourse acknowledges the possibility of various *coexisting* discourses. This idea helps us to identify the ways in which some discourses are more strongly buttressed by institutional practices than others, perhaps even to the extent that no alternative action is possible. A discursive notion may also come up while the practices which have developed along with other discursive notions still prevail in an implicit, barely recognizable way. These practices may almost have become an automatism; they are seldom questioned.

So, in addition to the analysis of what is said, written in documents, or expressed in any other way, it is important to study the institutional context and practices in which this takes place. This context “co-determines what can be said meaningfully” (Hajer 1995: 2). As Hajer states:

“It (discourse analysis MB) is not as much an approach that puts the strength and power of institutions in perspective, as an approach which emphasizes the role of discursivity therein” (Hajer 2000: 21, transl MB).

Discourse is used in the policy arrangements approach with a similar reference to the relationship between discourse and institutional *practices*. The approach facilitates an investigation into the power relations involved in discursive practices, and an assessment of the degree of congruence between a change of policy vocabulary and a change of institutional practices. With reference to the vigorously publicized policy ambition ‘Room for the River’, for instance, Wiering and Arts (2006) conclude that there is a discursive shift and a change of rules, but that one cannot speak of ‘deep institutional change’, since the power structure and administrative organisation of Dutch water management remained largely unchanged.

Since this research is about the interactions between local initiatives and established policy, I look at how a problem or a situation is perceived and constructed by those who take an initiative on the one hand, and by those representing established policy on the other hand. I also consider how mutual perceptions change in the process. I analyse how the latter relate to institutional practices, how these practices change or do not change, and how they in turn influence those perspectives.

### *Actors and coalitions*

Actors are individuals or organizations involved in urban-rural policies concerning a specific region, either as part of the established policy arrangement, or as part of the initiative which has *not* yet institutionalized into an arrangement. A coalition consists of more than one actor. Actors may cooperate in a coalition to achieve (more or less) shared objectives, by allocating resources in a specific way, agreeing upon certain rules of the game or by employing specific storylines or other discursive notions in such a way as to further their objectives. As Arts, Van Tatenhove and Leroy (2000: 57) point out, there may be supporting as well as challenging coalitions. When the object of study is the interactions between local initiatives and established policy, as it is here, then one can look for the coalitions that are formed to support or challenge the initiative. It would be too simple however to say that a certain coalition that is supporting the local initiative is then the 'challenging' coalition of established policy, as supportive and challenging acts may alternate continuously. The focus in this study is on how coalitions are formed, how they change and/or overlap, and what they *do* to express a challenge or support.

### *Resources and power*

The dimension 'resources' is closely connected to discourse, actors and rules. There are different types of resources. Financial resources may be the first to come to mind, but knowledge, land or legitimacy (for instance the size of membership of an organization) are also sources of power. Those who have control over the collection and distribution of resources may influence outcomes more than those who do not have such control. The examples mentioned so far refer to resources and power as something that can be *put to use*, depending on actors' capacities. They are not often very visible, however, especially when they are firmly embedded in institutional structures and rules. It is as if they are a contextual 'given' that forestalls opportunities for 'doing things otherwise'.

Arts, Leroy and Van Tatenhove consider 'resources and power as one of the four dimensions. However, a real-life story about the development of an initiative and its interactions with existing policy makes sense if there is attention for how the use of resources, and the power derived from it, *are related* to the ways in which actors organized themselves to obtain that power, to the vocabulary a certain coalition uses in its struggle for influence, or to the rules that help or hinder them in achieving their objectives. This means that I look at power as an overarching concept, of a different order than resources. Actors who organize themselves in order to become more influential in decision-making processes also create power. For example, rules of the game, as embedded in laws, give power to those referring to them. Discourse can also be a powerful resource, for instance by

implying what can be part of an agenda and what can not. Local initiatives appealing to other discourses than the ones figuring in formal policy may easily fall victim to that mechanism. Power is a much-debated issue and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give an overview of the theories of various authors about it. Van Tatenhove gives an overview of how power is problematized in various policy theories (1993: 86).

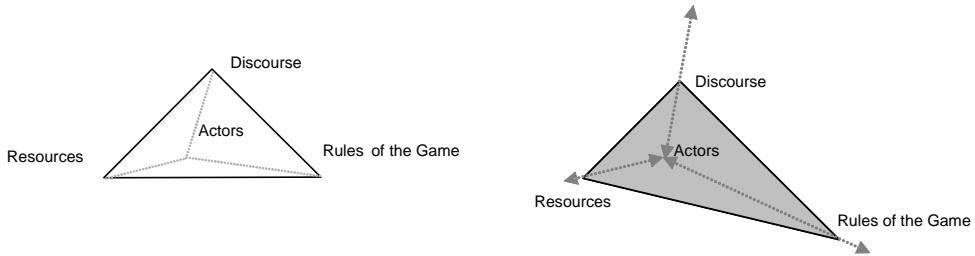
With regard to resources in the interplay between an initiative and established policy, one can examine the resource availability and use by the various parties involved, to see if anything changes in the way resources are mobilized or allocated. Resources may at some point be consolidated in policy in a way that restricts the scope for changing their distribution. In my three case studies, I focus on the dynamics of how resources are used by various actors, how an established distribution of resources may constrain or promote innovation, and how various actors try to put the resources to their own use.

### *Rules of the game*

The fourth dimension of the policy arrangements approach is rules of the game. These may be formal or informal. Formal rules are fixed in legal texts and documents; informal rules represent the do's and don'ts of a political culture. Both formal and informal rules set boundaries to what an actor or an actor coalition may achieve, and they also create possibilities. So they are both constraining *and* enabling. Rules are not just a property of established policy arrangements. Initiators of innovative ideas may also adopt informal rules of the game. In the interaction between formal policy and local initiatives, the 'operative rules' are often claimed to be the main obstacle to innovation. The problem can lie in their discursive contents (the ideas behind the rule) or in the way certain actor coalitions use them and keep them in place.

### *Open concepts*

A policy arrangement is visualized as a tetrahedron in which each of the four corners represents one of the dimensions (Leroy, Arts and Van Tatenhove 2003: 17). A change in one of the dimensions will affect the other dimensions and change the shape of the entire figure.



**Figure 1: The changing dimensions of a policy arrangement**

Source: Leroy, Arts and Van Tatenhove 2003: 17, second figure added by MB

Change may occur in a policy arrangement in many different ways: a new actor coalition may find resources to experiment and thereby gain access to policy agendas; a discursive shift may occur in a broader context and enthuse actors from within the 'temporary stabilized arrangement' to rethink the operative policy; a new rule may be imposed, for instance by international organizations, that challenges actors to find a new balance.

The above illustrates how the dimensions of discourse, coalitions, resources and rules are open categories. They have to be open, because just like discourse and practice, they are interrelated (Metze in Van den Brink and Metze 2006: 79). Looking at the 'rule' dimension of an interaction, for instance, does not reveal much about a situation if one does not also look at who decides on those rules and who is affected by them, and what discourse the rules represent. 'Discourse coalitions' (Hajer 1995) may be seen as a concept which addressed the interrelationship between two dimensions. In this study, an interpretation of discourse was adopted which assumes that all dimensions relate to discursive notions. Such a perspective follows from the definition of discourse as 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities' (Hajer 1995: 44), because the setting and applying a rule, allocating resources or forming a coalition are also such practices. Essentially, this means that all practices are considered as meaningful and as channels of discourse. Conversely, discourse comes into being in social practices and would not exist without 'being practiced'. Similarly, in explanations of change or stability, the dimensions should be looked at in their mutual relationship.

Because the dimensions are open concepts, they can be used as 'sensitizing concepts'. According to Blumer (1954), sensitizing concepts 'merely suggest directions along which to look'. I will say some more about this in section 2.5. Howarth and Stavrakakis even suggest that openness is a 'condition' in order to articulate concepts on the basis of empirical situations.

“Discourse theorists seek to articulate their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research. The condition for this conception of conducting research is that the concepts and logics of the theoretical framework must be sufficiently ‘open’ and flexible enough to be adapted, deformed and transformed in the process of application” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000).

Open concepts need to be applied before they can acquire a more substantive significance. Applying them will give rise to more specific, empirically grounded insights into the meaning of these concepts in particular situations.

On the other hand, the risk of ‘collapsing’ concepts also surfaces again, this time not in relation to actor and structure, but in relation to ‘discourse’ and ‘practice’, and ‘discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game’. Before I finally get to this problem, however, I will first say a bit more about the institutionalization of policy arrangements and structural processes of ‘political modernization’, both of which form an important part of the policy arrangements approach.

### ***2.3.3 Institutionalization of policy arrangements***

The three initiatives and their struggles with existing policy give rise to institutionalist types of questions such as: How their local orientation could have enduring impact; what it was that made them last as long as they did; what observable short-term difference they made in relation to the policies that they challenged; whether they remained once-off, locality-specific incidents in relation to existing policy or had wider implications for policy development in relation to other domains or areas?

To deal with these questions, it is helpful to use the distinction between two dimensions of institutionalization: structuring<sup>4</sup> and stabilization. Van Tatenhove describes the difference:

“The process of structuring (systematization, organization) refers to “the introduction of a certain degree of order in the social domain” (Peper 1973: 153). Activities are tuned to each other and are therefore predictable to some extent. In the process, structures are not just produced by social interaction, but are also reproduced (compare Giddens 1979: 129). The process of stabilization (continuation, preservation) refers to the social-temporal dimension of the institutionalization process. In other words, each structure contains ‘built-in’ provisions for preserving the pattern of activities” (Van Tatenhove 1993: 10, translation MB).

In a process of structuring, the emphasis is on the production (or reproduction) of contents and organization in interactions. Interactions

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<sup>4</sup> Note that I chose to use ‘structuring’ instead of ‘structuration’, to avoid mix-up with Giddens’ concept of structuration which has a different meaning.



therefore consolidate the content and organization of a policy domain. Stabilization refers to a next step: the consolidation of the outcomes of those interactions in rules and resources. Van Tatenhove and Leroy summarize the two processes concisely:

“Structuration refers to the (re)production of content and organization of a policy domain in interaction, whereas stabilization refers to the ‘preservation’ of contents and organizations in specific policy concepts and arrangements” (Van Tatenhove and Leroy 2000: 19).

A local initiative may arise in reaction to how things were already settled. The initiators represent a wish to innovate, to ‘do things differently’, even if not specifically in relation to one policy domain. They may feel that the local setting that they focus on requires such a different approach in order to accommodate their wishes. In the process of their ‘coming into being’ as a ‘local initiative’, there is structuring. For example, a pattern of meetings with particular people at particular times may develop. Explicitly or implicitly, the initiators may reach an agreement about how they wish to work together. After this process of structuring, stabilization may follow. The initiative is linked up with rules and/or resources and changes the existing allocations or rules (or details in them). For example: initiators get access to financial resources or to a certain source of knowledge, which furthers the implementation of their initiative. The other scenario is that the initiative never gets to that stage, but gradually collapses and remains an incident.

Whether structuring and/or stabilization took place, and if so, by what interplay of discourse, actors, resources and rules, is an empirical matter that I wish to find out more about. It is not unproblematic to determine the exact boundaries of a policy arrangement. Nor is it simple to pinpoint the exact moment at which a process of structuring is transformed into a process of stabilization. Such an undertaking is an empirical affair (see also Van der Zouwen 2006). On the basis of empirical findings, a moment may be identified when the existing policy can be argued to have opened up to the initiative, or to parts of it. There may also be a moment when the arrangement may reasonably be argued to have closed to the initiative. Existing policy may change as a result of interaction with the initiative; the initiative itself may also change. What changes and what does not, and how that happens in phases of structuring and stabilisation is what my research aims to clarify.

### ***2.3.4 The influence of sub-politics, political modernization***

As indicated, the policy arrangements approach operationalizes the idea that institutional dynamics (or stabilization) are a matter of duality of structure and agency. It does so at two levels. The first is the level of

everyday policy practices *in* so-called policy arrangements, a level at which structural properties (rules, resources, discourses) and agentic properties (actor coalitions) interfere with each other, causing change or stability in the arrangement. Secondly, the duality of structure and agency is conceptualized at a higher 'macro' level, by means of the concept of 'political modernization'. Political modernization refers to the processes or trends that are less easily influenced because they are situated at a level beyond everyday practices.

While policy arrangements refer to policy practices *in a specific* policy domain, political modernization refers to broader structural transformations. Examples are processes such as Europeanization or individualization (van Tatenhove et al. 2000: 35 - 53, Arts and van Tatenhove 2006).

"It (political modernization, MB) tries to capture those structural transformations in political domains in contemporary societies which have or may have consequences for day-to-day policy practices" (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2006).

Such structural transformations are operative in various policy domains, albeit in different ways and to different extents. In relation to Europeanization, for instance, agriculture and defence policies have a long European tradition, while policy domains such as nature and environment have only been Europeanized more recently. Everyday practices in policy arrangements and the structural transformations of political modernization are both useful concepts for understanding and explaining policy processes and their outcomes.

Arts and Van Tatenhove define political modernization as:

"the shifting relationships between the state, market and civil society in political domains of societies – *within* countries and *beyond* - as a manifestation of the 'second stage of modernity', implying new conceptions and structures of governance". (Ibid., 29)

They continue by stating:

"Inspired by Held (1989), we define 'the political domain of society' as the setting in which different groups (from state, civil society and market) produce and distribute resources (power and domination), rules (institutions) and meaning (discourses) in order to shape public life (Ibid.).

So in order to understand political modernization, it is important to understand what the first and second stages of modernity are. The concepts are derived from Beck's theory on the 'risk society'. In the first stage of

modernity, governments play a central role in managing society, and the key features are 'control' and 'manageability', instrumental rationality, bureaucratic divisions of labour and scientization. It is also typical of the first stage of modernity that policy and policy organizations are organized along sectoral lines. These very characteristics of early modernity, Beck theorizes, lead to a second phase of modernity (also labelled late or reflexive modernization). In this phase, risks start to dominate which are the unintended side effects of early modernity. These side effects undermine trust in the rule of the central state. Now these dangers or risks, according to Beck, bring with them a process of 'sub-politicization'.

"The concept of 'sub-politics' refers to politics outside and beyond the representative institutions of the political system of nation-states. It focuses attention on signs of an (ultimately global) self-organization of politics, which tends to set all areas of society in motion. Sub-politics means '*direct*' politics – that is, *ad hoc* individual participation in political decisions, bypassing the institutions of representative opinion-formation (political parties, parliaments) and often even lacking the protection of the law. In other words, sub-politics means the shaping of society from below" (Beck 1996: 18).

With the concept of sub-politicization, Beck seeks to articulate the trend that society is increasingly being shaped 'from below'. Examples of sub-politicization that Beck refers to in his work are the world-wide movement against nuclear testing at Mururoa, the mass consumer protests against the disposal of an obsolete oil rig 'Brentspar' in the North Sea (Beck 1996 1997), and the BSE crisis, the public perception of which, according to Beck, gave rise to the fastest passage of laws in the history of the German Republic (Beck et al. 2003:14).

It is clear from the above quote and the examples that Beck concentrates his idea of sub-politics on global movements. In this thesis, however, I will concentrate on initiatives with a local, territorial orientation. They reach further than a neighbourhood park or street, but are still very local, especially as compared with the global examples that Beck refers to. Still, I would like to find out whether the sub-politics thesis also applies to this level. It seems as if Beck's idea should not be restricted to the global level. Now how does the thesis of sub-politics link to the concept of political modernization? According to Arts, Leroy and Van Tatenhove 'political modernization' has two dimensions. The first dimension of political modernization is governance: an 'increasing interweaving of state, market and civil society in new institutional arrangements' (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2004: 344, see also Arts and Leroy 2006: 275). The second dimension of political modernization is the second, or reflexive, stage of modernization: "new political practices outside the formal institutions of the nation state" (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2006: 30). In their empirical

work, however, they have not so far dealt with 'sub-political arrangements' (Arts and Leroy 2006: 275). This 'bias', they state, is partly because empirical work on that dimension of political modernization still needs to be carried out. Another reason they mention is that environmental politics is characterized by a lack of sub-politics (ibid.: 276). Instead of reflection, reactions of institutions of state, market and civil society, are characterised by 'reflexes' referring to "more problem-solving by the classical institutions" (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2006: 30). I hope to be able to say more about this on the basis of the three empirical situations studied. The fact that my starting point was three initiatives that did not form part of formal policy arrangements (even though, as the following will make clear, they often emerged in reaction to formal policy), prompts me to pay special attention to the question of sub-politicization. I will use the term sub-politicization rather than sub-politics because it expresses the dynamic nature of the phenomenon.

The above sections, 2.3.2 – 2.3.4 summarized the policy arrangements approach. The approach fulfils the requirements proposed as guidelines for my research. In addition to the duality of actor and structure, the approach also refers to substance *and* organization, *and* the duality of discourse and practice, *and* on the potential influence of structural processes such as sub-politicization on everyday practice.

In sum, the policy arrangements approach implies *four* dualities:

- between contents and organization;
- between discourse and practice;
- between agency and structure;
- between everyday practices in policy arrangements and the wider structural transformations of political modernization.

The framework has not so far solved the analytical problem of dualities that Archer raised. Rather, it has added to the problem by adding new dualities which I will have to address as well.

### ***2.3.5 Dualities and dualism: introducing the time dimension***

So a remaining task is to find a way to investigate these dualities. In this respect, I already pointed at the methodological 'problem of duality of structure'. The 'problem' is that what is integrated into the concept of duality of structure needs to be separated again at the methodological level in order to become researchable. It is this act of *separating* that carries a risk of reintroducing dualism into the analysis, implying that *either* agency *or* structure is attributed predominant explanatory power. This is exactly what I am trying to prevent, along with many other policy analysts and sociologists who have faced the same pitfall.

In the above I presented the dimensions of the policy arrangement approach one by one. In analytical approaches to dynamic real-life situations however, it is not as easy to distinguish them like this. In accounts of those situations, analyses of the interference of events seem to reflect the situations more accurately. Accounts emphasizing relationships are more recognizable than isolated descriptions of dimensions, which seem too abstract, and static.

We can imagine for instance, a hegemonic discourse that may function as a powerful resource for some and deprive others of influence. The story will be about discourse, actors and resources at the same time. Placing the separate dimensions in the foreground while failing to uncover the connections between them, gives rise to abstract and insufficiently dynamic accounts of a situation. Just as rules and resources have their discursive dimension, so do actor coalitions, which led Hajer to speak of 'discourse coalitions' (Hajer 1995). Anyhow, discourse and practice are often seen as two sides of one coin, at least, in institutionalist analyses. The setting of rules, the allocation of resources or the formation of a coalition are also *discursive* practices, in fact. There is always at least one discursive notion behind them. However, the making of conceptual distinctions for analytical purposes too often seduces us into thinking that the world actually *is* like that. That is why I make such a point of emphasizing that the *interrelations* between the concepts of the theoretical framework create a better understanding of human action than do the concepts in themselves. In the end, it is those *interrelations* that explain most about what happened in the three cases in this study.

While discourse analysis is rapidly growing in popularity, the search for a way to conceptualize 'practice' has only started recently. Referring to Wagenaar and Cook<sup>5</sup>, Hajer and Wagenaar state that

"Practice integrates the actor, his or her beliefs and values, resources and external environment, in one 'activity system', in which social, individual and material aspects are interdependent. The focus in such activity systems is on the way the different elements *relate* to each other rather than on the elements themselves" (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 20).

This is how I wish to look at the elements of the policy arrangements approach, just as the authors of the approach intended. Yet this is not an easy thing to accomplish if a framework distinguishes so expressly between various sub-concepts.

So far, I have said nothing about the dimension of time. I have used the word 'situations' a lot, as if everything happens in situations. However, these situations have a history. The way in which discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game relate to each other at a specific moment in time, is partly a result of earlier interactions that have stabilized and become structural in character. When an initiative was launched to make changes to a specific territory, and had to interact with established policy in order to do so, what existed prior to its emergence? And what resulted from the interactions? How could I bring in this time dimension into the research?

In the context of structuration theory, there is a discussion in the social sciences, and between critical realists and constructivists in particular, about the way in which the duality of structure can be known or investigated. I found this discussion to be of particular interest because it addresses the question how to investigate the time dimension. At the heart of the discussion is the question whether agency and structure are separable or whether they should be considered as inseparable entities (see Archer 1995, Stones 2001). It is clear from the foregoing that my point of departure is that an account of social interactions only makes sense if it includes the relationships between all of them. So when the interaction between local initiatives and existing policy is the topic of research, one should focus on interrelationships and interdependencies, not on the dimensions themselves. The latter would provide static descriptions which offer an inadequate account of the duality of agency and structure. For

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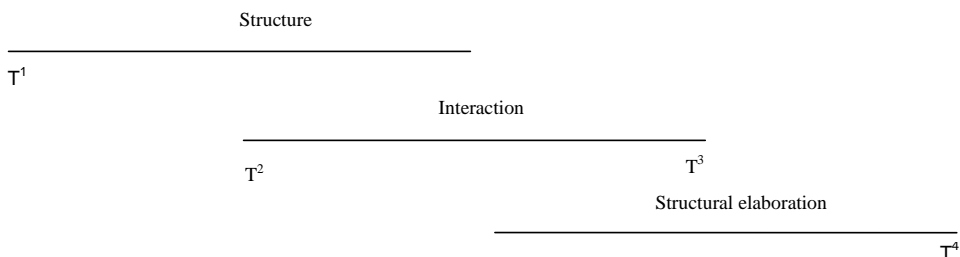
<sup>5</sup> Wagenaar and Cook distinguish various uses of the term practice: as mere doing (Comte), as practical wisdom or phronesis (Aristotle), as habitus (Bourdieu), as particular configuration of human activity (MacIntyre), as constitutive meanings (Taylor) or as a theory of action or an 'activity system' (Lave) (Wagenaar and Cook 2003: 144 - 149). For another overview of different traditions of practice see Kemmis and McTaggart in Denzin and Lincoln 2000.

these dimensions set each other in motion and it is their mutual relationship that determines the progress and outcome of any interaction. The same holds for the interaction between initiative and existing policy. To investigate the *relationships* requires that the elements forming the relationship are separable. The analyst can look for 'agency' and 'structure' as separately identifiable entities, and then focus on how they are related over time. The methodological consequence of this viewpoint is that it is possible to investigate how a structural circumstance at a given time influences social interaction at a subsequent time, which in turn 'elaborates' on structure (Archer 1995). Archer says that

“(the) scheme of Structural Conditioning → Social Interaction → Structural Elaboration which crucially is stretched out over time, underlies all my work” (Archer 1996: 697-698).

Opinions differ on whether this line of reasoning is in accordance with Giddens' idea on the relationship between actor and structure. Archer says it is not, because she does not believe that Giddens thinks that structure could 'pre-exist' agency. However, I tend to agree with Stones (2001), who says that Giddens implies that structure may be considered to precede agency, but not in the sense that it is always completely external to agency. Instead, he “conceptualizes structure as being partly within the agent as knowledgeability or memory traces” (Stones 2001: 18). This does not mean abandoning Archer's proposed separation of these elements for analytical purposes. Moreover, the strength of Archer's approach is the way she brings a temporal dimension into the analysis of structuration processes by introducing the scheme of 'structural conditioning → social interaction → structural elaboration', which is also referred to as 'sequencing'. This is the only way to “acknowledge the *interplay* between structure and agency” and so “this has to be predicated upon some autonomy and independence being assigned to each” (Archer 1985: 80).

More elaborately, she visualizes her scheme as follows:



**Figure 2: The Morphogenetic sequence**

(Archer 1995: 76)

I will make use of the sequencing method in my stories about the three situations. In the analysis of these stories, sequential interrelationships will be highlighted, particularly the ways in which larger scale structural processes such as sub-politicization impact on, and are reproduced by, these day-to-day policy practices. It is crucial that the two tasks are taken up in an analysis such as mine, rather than separating the two ways of looking at social phenomena. Archer:

“(W)ithin social theory in general (...), considerably more effort has been devoted to conceptualizing how structural and cultural properties of society are transmitted to agents and condition their doings than has been given to the other side of the equation, namely how they are received and responded to by agents in return” (Archer on her website: [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/-academicstaff/archer/msarcher/research/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/-academicstaff/archer/msarcher/research/)).

In the same line of thinking, I hope to pay attention to both sides of the ‘equation’. So when I want to know more about the origins of the initiatives, I look at the structural conditions and how these formed the context for social interaction. I seek to clarify social interaction taking place at the interface of initiative and existing policy, by means of the dimensions discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game. Finally, to see what comes of the social interaction, I want to know whether and how it gave rise to ‘structural elaboration’, which can also be defined in terms of stabilisation. When structural elaboration takes place, the results of social interactions are consolidated into rules and resources. Structural processes such as sub-politicization may be the outcome of social interactions (i.e. structural elaboration), but at a later stage, they may also give rise to social interactions, changing structures in their turn.

In the context of my research, I elucidate ‘structural elaboration’ by means of the term ‘space for policy innovation’, which will be further explained in section 2.4.

To conclude this section, I wish to say one more thing about the methodological difficulty of structuration theory. I cite Flyvbjerg at length because he is optimistic about the possibility of keeping agency and structure together at the methodological level. He writes:

“As anyone has tried it can testify, it is a demanding task to account simultaneously for the structural influences that shape the development of a given phenomenon and still craft a clear, penetrating narrative or microanalysis of that phenomenon. (...) Social scientists tend to generate either macrolevel or microlevel explanation, ignoring the critical connections. Empirical work follows the same pattern. (...) Structural analyses and studies of actors each get their share of attention, but in separate projects, by separate researchers. Those who join structure and actor in empirical work most often do so by theoretical inference: data at one level of analysis are coupled with theoretical speculation



about the other. (...) There is mounting evidence, however, that the actor/structure connection is not an insurmountable problem” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 138).

I hope to contribute in this research to the ‘demanding task’ that Flyvbjerg points at, and I believe that this can be done using Archer’s ‘analytical dualism’ or morphogenetic approach<sup>6</sup>, as she calls it, and I hope to demonstrate that investigating the interplay between actor and structure is not really problematic if it is done by taking the time dimension into account to separate actor and structure.

## ***2.4 Space for policy innovation***

### ***2.4.1 Looking for non-institutionalized initiatives***

As I have already indicated, sub-politicization is a macro-sociological *thesis* about the changing loci of politics in an ever more complex society. The thesis suggests that a greater role is to be reserved for citizens and their organizations or social movements, especially in relation to the growing risks of an environmental crisis. My cases will provide more specific insights into sub-politicization because they are about initiatives coming ‘from below’ (even though in the Grensschap case, the first contacts were established in the context of an interactive event which had been organized ‘from above’).

I need an additional concept, however, to draw attention more explicitly to what local initiatives that were not yet institutionalized may achieve, and to focus on their development as the initiatives and existing policy gradually position themselves in relation to each other. Such a concept should operationalize ‘structural elaboration’ in the context of this particular research, meaning that it should suit the purpose of analysing what comes of the interactions of local initiatives and existing policy. I suggest using the term ‘space for policy innovation’.

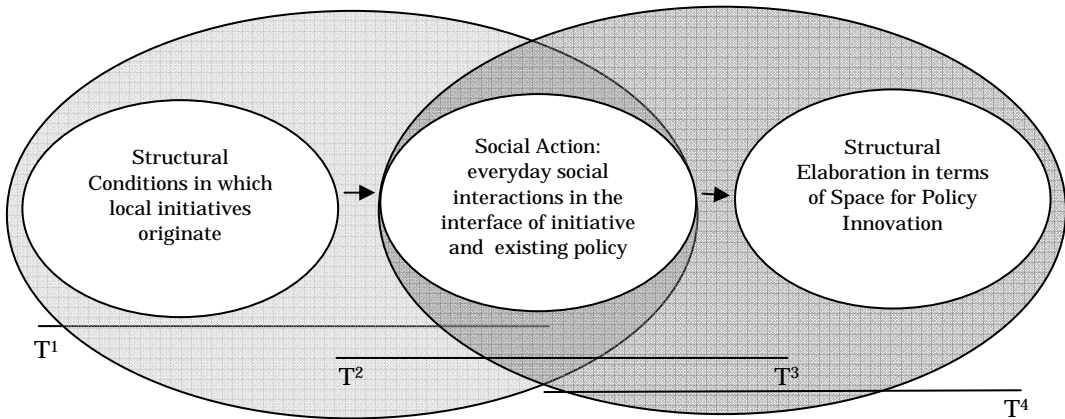
Space for policy innovation refers to the possibilities arising when existing policy ‘opens up’ to policy options which had not been possible so far. It is the enabling space created when the existing order or ‘temporarily stabilized’ relations between actors, resources, rules and discourse are challenged and changed.

Figure 2 can now be tailored to the specifics of my research. The left, light grey oval indicates that most research efforts so far have focussed on this

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<sup>6</sup> Morphogenesis refers to ‘those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system’s given form, structure or state’ (quote to Walter Buckley by Archer: 1995: 75).

part of the scheme, whereas the right, dark grey oval refers to the part of the scheme that is generally less well investigated.



**Figure 3: Rephrased scheme Structural conditions, Social Action, Structural Elaboration**

Whereas the foregoing placed the concept of ‘space for policy innovation’ in the context of the other concepts used here, the following two sections deal with how ‘space for policy innovation’ relates to other well-known concepts in public administration literature. The first is ‘discretionary space’ which, as mentioned when I spoke of my positionality, featured in my university training but did not appear to fit with my topic.

### ***2.4.2 Discretionary space***

How does ‘space for policy innovation’ relate to a well-known concept such as ‘discretionary space’? Does a concept such as ‘space for policy innovation’ not simply add to our vocabulary without substantively contributing to it? In my view, the two concepts differ fundamentally, even though both of them may play a role in the interaction of initiatives and established policy arrangements. ‘Discretionary space’ was a reaction to the supposed ‘implementation failure’, which was high on research and policy agendas in the eighties. It was assumed in most of these studies that ‘good’ policy formulation was *the* prerequisite for unproblematic implementation. Negative surprises at the implementation stage were considered as proof that policy had not been accurately formulated. Pressman and Wildavsky criticized this point of departure: “Instead of asking why the process of implementation was faulty, we ask why too much was expected of it” (1973: xxiv). In their influential book on implementation (1973) they argue that

policies and implementation should be viewed as two sides of the same coin, and that the latter can inform the former to a large extent:

“The learning society views the implementer as a source of new information. On this basis, a case can be made for the reconceptualization of implementation as an exploratory rather than an unquestioning, instrumental, and even subservient type of behavior” (ibid. 256).

The subtitle of their book on an economic development program which initially seemed to have everything it needed for success, is telling of their perspective: *How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; Or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all, this being a saga of the Economic Development Administration as told by two sympathetic observers who seek to build morals on a foundation of ruined hopes.*

Pressman and Wildavsky consider implementation as an evolutionary process. Therefore, they state “now it is time to bring in a real devil - the divorce of implementation from policy” (135), and “implementation should not be divorced from policy” (143). They were of the opinion that whoever thought that policies should and could unambiguously be translated to action, would eventually feel cheated. Rather, they stated that policies have to be interpreted and renegotiated in order to come to terms with a much more complex reality than they initially presuppose. The authors emphasized that this process of interpretation and negotiation was not something to be avoided, but was a way to improve policy implementation. By considering implementation as an integral part of the policy process, the policy could become part of a more comprehensive learning process.

Following this tradition, the concept of ‘discretionary space’ was launched by Lipsky to draw attention to the enabling potential of implementation (Lipsky 1980). According to Lipsky, the ‘street-level-bureaucrat’ in large bureaucracies, who, according to the command-and-control model, would merely have to implement the policies developed at higher levels, was in fact a policymaker himself. He could use his discretionary space to make policies workable.

The two studies I have just cited were both valuable in their time and are still relevant today.

However, the concept of discretionary space is not particularly suitable in the context of issues addressed here. ‘Discretionary space’ is a concept that matches with the idea that policy institutions make policies first and then face the challenge of implementing them. The key question that is addressed is how ‘street-level bureaucrats’ or ‘front-line operatives’ can improve the implementation of state policies by using their discretionary

powers. But the intentions of the state are still considered point of departure. The question addressed is not how bureaucracies can become more open or responsive to ideas from private actors. Emphasizing the power of 'street-level-bureaucrats' to make policies fit better with social realities, and the importance of discretionary space to have implementation power, still fits within an idea of 'government' in which the state is the primary locus of policy-making.

The distinction between space for policy innovation and discretionary space is a reflection of the difference between government and governance. Van der Zouwen sums this up:

"Generally, 'government' is (...) understood as a hierarchical style of policy making in which governmental bodies dominate. 'Governance', obviously, represents a policy-making style which challenges this dominant governmental position' (Van der Zouwen 2006: 17)

'Space for policy innovation' is a governance concept. As indicated, the source of innovation may be governmental bodies but it may be local initiatives as well. This research focusses on the latter, but this does not exclude the possibility that street-level-bureaucrats play a role, just as higher-level bureaucrats may. That, the analysis of the cases will tell. Assessing 'space for policy innovation', then, is first and foremost an empirical question.

### ***2.4.3 'Innovation', a growth industry***

'Innovation' has become something of a 'growth industry'. Perhaps because of this, it gives rise to critical questions about its meaning. The most popular approach to innovation nowadays is '*system* innovations', referring to comprehensive changes of entire governing systems (see for instance InnovatieNetwerk 2000). Perhaps superfluously (since it is no different from the view taken elsewhere in this study), I wish to emphasize here that innovation is not considered as an essentially objective, neutral thing, but as a social construct (see also Rogers and Shoemaker in Engel 1995). Also, it is not a precondition that the innovative idea has 'never and nowhere been invented before'. What is of importance is that the 'innovative' idea can reasonably be described in terms of its difference from existing policies. Innovation is also something gradual. In the sequence of events, an idea may gradually disappear from agendas and be forgotten, or it may be taken up to improve or modify existing policy (at one or more of the many levels of policy-making).

For the purposes of this research, space for policy innovation is related to structural elaboration. When an innovative idea that is turned into a

collaborative initiative does not, in the end, lead to a change in the rules and resources that actors may draw on to influence their social world, then there is no space for policy innovation. When, positively formulated, the local initiative leads to a change of rules and resources, space for policy innovation emerges. What types of space for policy innovation can be discerned, and how these emerge is an empirical matter.

The relation between innovation and policy arrangements is not unproblematic. Boonstra states critically that the policy arrangements approach can hardly account for the emergence of *new* arrangements because of its emphasis on that which is already stabilized. That which already has firm institutional anchors draws more attention. This difficulty may partly be related to the position of the researcher; perhaps one needs to be deeply involved in a situation first if one is to be able to find and unravel these 'not-yet-stabilized' initiatives. Boonstra distinguishes between 'emerging arrangements' on the one hand, and 'stable regional arrangements' (2004: 25, 31) on the other hand. This distinction is useful for drawing attention to that which is not yet institutionalized. The question remains, however, whether initiatives such as the ones selected here will institutionalize into 'arrangements' at all. Also, whether an initiative remains local or leads, for instance, to a reconsideration of existing government policy options is a matter of judgment that needs to be made on the basis of empirical data.

It is exactly as Van der Zouwen wonders in her study, also with reference to Boonstra:

"When has a new practice enough 'body' to really distinguish it as a new policy arrangement? (...) I wonder whether I would have paid attention to this 'arrangement in gestation' if it had not institutionalized into a more mature arrangement (...). More generally, one could argue that the policy arrangement approach has no specific tools to clearly focus on initiatives which do not eventually institutionalize into an arrangement and to assess whether and under what circumstances and conditions they are likely to do so (or not)" (2006: 227).

The concepts introduced here are perhaps not exactly the 'tools' that Van der Zouwen refers to, but I expect the concept of space for policy innovation to invite us to look for results of social interaction that were not yet part of existing policy, but which may give rise to the formation of a renewed arrangement. This will provide the basis of a better insight in the circumstances and conditions which influence how innovative initiatives institutionalize, or how they don't.

## *2.5 “Sensitizing devices, nothing more”*

“There is, of course, no obligation for anyone doing detailed empirical research, in a given localized setting, to take on board an array of abstract notions that would merely clutter up what could otherwise be described with economy and in ordinary language. The concepts of structuration theory, as with any competing theoretical perspective, should for many research purposes be regarded as sensitizing devices, nothing more” (Giddens 1984: 326).

The foregoing presents a framework that fulfils the requirements put forward in the introduction to this chapter. The concepts making up this framework serve as sensitizing concepts, which means that I will look for manifestations of these concepts and how they are related, in empirical situations.

According to Blumer (1954), “sensitizing concepts” lack the specification of attributes or benchmarks that is characteristic of definitive concepts.

“Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer 1954: 7).

For this reason, there is the possibility that the concepts can be refined on the basis of the three situations. This will also prevent the analysis from becoming isolated in a world of its own. The concepts are guidelines for the analysis, rather than imperatives. I may also bring other aspects to the surface if what I see in the three situations prompts me to do so. The policy arrangements approach sensitizes the researcher to how actors attempt to get their initiatives implemented in the context of temporarily stabilized practices, some of which are expected to be changeable and others less flexible. It also inspires the researcher to look for structural forces that may seem to be beyond the control of local initiators of policy change, as well as for the interrelations between discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game in relation to a policy domain in empirical situations, and how these processes give rise to structural elaboration. When I speak of the ‘interconnections between actors, resources, rules and discourse’ they ‘sensitize’ us to look at what happens in the real world, but they still need to be refined and perhaps complemented in order to specify what is going on out there.

In addition to policy arrangements, another sensitizing concept making up the policy arrangements approach is political modernization, which refers to broader structural transformations beyond day-to-day policy practices. Here I focus on what is alleged to be one of those structural transformations: the trend of sub-politics. By means of the cases, I will find out whether and in what form sub-politics manifests itself in the three

situations. The sequencing method will introduce a time dimension by means of which structural conditions, social interactions and structural elaboration can be identified, successively. The concept 'space for policy innovation' urges us to look at the outcome of the interaction between a local initiative and existing policy.

In the final chapter my concepts will be evaluated against the background of empirical experiences. This evaluation will bring to light whether essential processes remained invisible because of the adopted framework.

## ***2.6 Research Questions***

On the basis of the concepts explained in the above, the research questions can be reformulated as follows:

1. What was the origin of the initiative and how did it relate to then existing arrangements?
2. How do discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy?
3. Does the case point to sub-politicization or can other structural transformations be discerned?
4. What types of space for policy innovation emerged and how can they be characterized?
5. What are enabling or impeding conditions for the emergence of space for policy innovation?

In the next chapter I will deal more profoundly with methodological issues and describe the steps taken to get where I wanted to go.





## Chapter 3: Methodological Account

“(Policy analysis, MB) is no longer about the invention of solutions *for* society; it often finds itself in the ‘mud’ of policy practice, trying to assist in the discovery of new policy options and the formulation of compelling arguments” (Hajer en Wagenaar 2003: 19).

### *3.1 Introduction*

This chapter outlines *how* the research was conducted, or in Yanow’s terms: how it is that I did what I did (Yanow 2003). As such, it connects the analytical framework (chapter 2) with the case studies (chapters 4, 5, 6). It presents the strengths and weaknesses of the steps taken, as well as how I think these weaknesses could be dealt with.

My own experiences in various contract-research projects laid the foundation for this PhD research. These projects were commissioned by government institutions (national government, province and municipality) and (in one case) by a private company. As project leader and researcher and/or advisor in these projects, I was actively involved in what was going on and had my own ideas about what was to be done in terms of ‘process management’. When there was sufficient overlap of ideas with funders and funding was arranged, a research process could start that was never just research, and never predictable. In all of the three cases, research was combined with decision making by various actors at various levels (be it companies, steering committees of alderman or other executive bodies or the European Commission). There were also in all three cases more informal processes of mobilization and decision-making by state *and* private actors. While implementing such multi-faceted projects, I always felt that there was much more to be learned than the answers to the practical questions that we were trying to solve within the boundaries of the funded projects’ objectives. Often, I felt I had to stay at the surface of important processes, while there was a lot going on beneath the surface which it would be interesting to discover and to share experiences about with others. I was therefore happy that I was offered the opportunity to combine my contract research work at Alterra with a more in-depth study at the Social Spatial Analysis chairgroup of Wageningen University. By that time, the Biesland case and the Grensschap projects had already started; along with the Efteling case, they formed the topic of my research. This begs the question: how does this study meet criteria of ‘scientific rigor’.

This chapter will explain that traditional criteria such as validity, replicability, generalizability and objectivity, belonging to the positivist research tradition, will be replaced by other criteria and their accompanying techniques<sup>7</sup>.

Being involved in actual cases or projects had advantages. It meant that I had relatively easy access to all kinds of information. It also meant that I could 'feel atmospheres' such as disappointment, inspiration, trust, and anger - things which often cannot be read from words, or observed if one does not know the people involved quite well. Besides, these sorts of emotion do not surface so easily a long time after the event, when a retrospective interview can finally take place. Thus, what may have remained hidden from more distant observers was quite accessible for me. Participating in meetings, following the exchange of e-mails, frequenting kitchen-table discussions, talking during occasional car rides and the constant exchange of phone calls all gave insights that allowed detailed descriptions of what had happened, of emotions accompanying key events in the process and of strategic thinking of actors involved. Because of this, I often felt like an 'anthropologist in the field' who was, at the same time, involved in the process of change. Due to difference in the research budgets and the scope of the three projects, the intensity of the contact was different too. Contact was most lengthy and intense (and still is) in the Biesland case. The duration of the projects was shorter in both the Grensschap and the Loonsche Land cases. As a result, contacts were intense for a short period, after which I had to fall back on research methods such as interviewing. The following two sections will describe the differences and how I coped with them. Section 3.2. briefly introduces some basic similarities and differences. Section 3.3. looks more closely at the differences, paying special attention to my positionality and roles. In section 3.4 I will explain how Action Research played a role in the first and (to a limited extent) the second phase of the present study. In section 3.5 I will outline the principles of interpretive inquiry, and in section 3.6 I will discuss the research criteria underpinning these approaches.

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<sup>7</sup> For an overview of research paradigms ("the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways") see Guba and Lincoln in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994.

### *3.2 Three different cases*

At first sight, my three cases are very different – and are perhaps even more so upon closer investigation. And yet there are some similarities if one looks at them from a distance:

1. All three cases are about initiatives which can be related to ‘spatial issues’ at the interface of the policy domains of urbanization, cultural history, water, recreation, agriculture and nature;
2. They are about concrete areas in which I worked as a contract researcher;
3. The initiatives originate mainly with private actors;
4. Citizens and/or societal organizations, politics, administration, researchers and public officials play a role in all three cases;
5. The contents of the initiatives conflict to a greater or lesser extent with existing policy and can, in that sense, be labelled ‘innovative’.

A sixth, incidental similarity was the scale of the areas involved: from 70 hectares (Efteling) to a few hundreds of hectares (Grensschap).

At a more specific level, it was known in advance that the cases would differ in various ways:

1. The origin of the various initiatives was different: citizens who participated in an ‘interactive event’ organized by the municipality (Grensschap), a coincidental meeting of a farmer, volunteer and researcher (Biesland), the agreement between a private company and societal organizations (Efteling);
2. Researchers played different roles in the projects (as ‘traditional’ researchers, as process facilitators, and as a combination);
3. The initiatives refer to different policy domains and to either one or more levels of government (agriculture, for instance, is strongly influenced by the European Union and to a lesser extent so is nature, whereas cultural history and spatial planning are more of a regional or national matter);
4. Because of this, the initiatives required input into decision making at various levels (regional in the Grensschap case, local and national in the Efteling case, and local and European in the Biesland case).

Contrary to the views of some of my colleague researchers on this departure from their traditional research paradigms, I do not see this lack of comparability as a weakness of the research. Instead, I think that even single cases can give rise to invaluable insights about how things work in particular contexts (see also Flyvbjerg 2001: 77, Yin 1994: 130). This is not to say that ‘nothing is comparable’ in the three situations. Stake (2000) distinguishes three types of case studies: *Intrinsic case studies*, which are

meant to get a better understanding in a particular case; *instrumental case studies*, which use a particular case to provide a deeper insight into a broader issue or to formulate a generalization; and *collective case studies* in which a number of cases are investigated to get a grasp on a phenomenon (Stake in Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 435-454). I would locate my own study in the first category and somewhere in between the first and the second category because it also produces suppositions or assumptions about what is more general. I do not see the production of 'hypothesis generalizations' as a prerequisite for 'good' scientific research output, but will do so in order to stimulate debate.

In sum, the above presents some basic points of departure as to the use of the case study method in this research. It should:

1. give insight into the *variety* of ways in which actions and context are related with respect to the research question,
2. serve as a basis for rich empirical data provided by the contract researcher,
3. be a potential source of hypothesis generalizations which should, as proof of the pudding, be communicated in such a way as to become 'input to the ongoing social dialogue' (Flyvbjerg 2001).

### ***3.3 Three different roles***

In the cases, I was not in the 'neutral', detached position that is often expected from researchers. The question is whether one assumes that 'detached researcher status' is possible at all. I believe there *is* no privileged space for the researcher from which he or she can draw objective conclusions about what is going on. It is therefore important to be explicit about one's positionality (Ateljevic et al. 2005).

For sure, the fact that I was a contract researcher influenced the course of events. Funders pay for a project on the condition that it renders results within a certain budget and time span, even though these sometimes appear to be changeable, as in the Biesland case. "Result-drivenness" was important – it prevented a funder from being left 'empty-handed' when legitimizing the investment to his or her superiors, be they politicians or others (cf. Allen 2005). With regard to our own organization, it was at the back of our minds that we had to achieve a certain level of 'productivity', which was measured by means of the percentage of our time that had to be spent on funded projects (mostly 80-85%). What complicated things was that the projects were not of the 'on demand delivery' type. First of all, because ideas took shape in interaction: "the demand" was not very clear at the beginning of the three research projects. Secondly, my PhD-study

reached further than our own involvement in the processes: things happened both before and after the contract research projects and I had to do some extra work to find out about them. Thirdly 'the' funders were not monoliths but organizations in which there were battles to be fought, not the least between the contact persons who wanted the research done and those who made the decisions about that. My role and the intensity of my involvement differed over the three cases and I will therefore say a bit more about this in terms of each case.

### *Biesland*

Unlike the other cases, my involvement in developments in the 'Polder van Biesland' only ended in early spring 2007, when we found another project leader. In July 2006, the European Commission finally approved of the proposed activities and instruments, which meant that there were no longer any obstacles to implementing the ideas from that end. My diary about this case in the meantime covers 5 years of intensive involvement. The research took place in many places: in the offices of the Ministry and the province, at the kitchen table, in the community centre ('buurthuis'), with groups of 20 people in the farm living room, or in among the cows in the 'melkput' (a modern type of milking stall), at the offices of the European Commission, at the ministry, in the rooms of the municipal council, in the hay-barn which we converted several times to a meeting room, and on the phone! My diary on this project contains many pages. I wrote down details without always knowing at the time of writing what their relevance was. I also tried to be specific about my personal feelings in specific situations: disappointment, enthusiasm, doubt.

We were setting up a 'monitoring and evaluation' process which draws heavily on the input of local knowledge. Meanwhile, we have met the citizen involved several times (at least twice a year), and the researchers carried on with their work in between the meetings. At the end of my study (which was not the end of the project), I discussed with key stakeholders to discuss the mechanisms that I had 'retrieved' from my experiences which had been 'stored' in the form of diary entries, minutes of meetings, e-mails, photographs. My role as a project-leader was multi-faceted: coordination of the multidisciplinary research work which I wanted done together with local stakeholders as much as possible, acquisition of funding, coordination of the decision-making process, making sure that information from 'the field' was also given to decision makers who played a role from a greater distance. Luckily I did not have to do this alone. Project management was not easy in terms of coping with the internal organization of the research institute, either. Because of the research setup the farmer was also a paid member of the research team. We also had to hire people from outside the organization in order to be able to do all the relevant research. For several

years, I had to defend this situation with might and main: it was not considered financially advantageous for the organization for a considerable part of the research work to be 'outsourced'. I often felt that I had to compromise on time because of tight budgets. It is important to note that the funding organizations were large: a national ministry and a province. This made it possible for close cooperation to evolve at the 'field level', even though others within these organizations were not always very keen to fund what we were doing. It was partly for this reason that what happened was never predictable and project plans were always being changed along the way.

### *Grensschap*

That it is not always easy to speak of either 'bottom-up' or 'top-down' is illustrated by the Grensschap case. What started as a 'top-down' initiative to organize participation led to the foundation of an organization of Dutch and Belgian citizens and officials who shared their concern for the Western city border of the city of Maastricht. My involvement in the Grensschap case was restricted to the 'interactive' event organized by the municipality and the Ministry, in which they aimed to formulate a coherent plan for the area. What we brought in as researchers was a calculated plan for the two-day event. After the writing-up and discussion of the results, our involvement as researchers more or less stopped (we were hired once more by the municipality to help citizens write a proposal to obtain European subsidy). The Grensschap continued to exist and had become an almost unavoidable 'partner' for municipal decision-making. I kept informed of its activities and concerns through their frequent newsletter. Also, I did ten in-depth interviews with members of the Grensschap, municipal officials and the alderman involved. I taped these interviews, fully transcribed them and sent the reports to the respondents for them to correct them if they wanted so. In a meeting between the alderman and the members of the Grensschap, organized after the interviews, I outlined my findings and asked for their reactions. While for me the meeting was one of the steps in my research, for them it was a moment to evaluate with the aldermen how things were going, and to voice their criticism on some points. I taped this meeting as well and the summary of it was spread among the participants and included in the above-mentioned newsletter.

### *Loonsche Land, Efteling*

The research context in relation to the Efteling theme park was very different from that of the other two. The Efteling process was much more 'closed' than the other projects in the sense that involving neighbouring citizens or other groups that were involved with the area was not an ambition of the funder. Instead, a distinguishing feature of this case was the newly established agreement between nature organizations and the

Efteling, materialized in a 'covenant'. Whereas for a long time they had been 'fighting' each other, even in court, about the construction of houses for recreation on unexploited terrain, they had now come together to formulate a win-win solution. To assist them in finding solutions, they hired researchers to elaborate a plan. My role as a project leader was restricted to leading the multidisciplinary research cooperation. Initially, I proposed to establish a much more intensive cooperation with the various signers of the covenant and to find a way to link up with neighbouring citizens as well. Cooperation with the signers was organized by the Efteling in the form of regular meetings between the signers and a somewhat broader "sounding board group" (klankbordgroep). 'The Efteling' kept process management in their own hands. Anticipating that the case would become of interest for my PhD study, I kept a diary of what happened and collected reports of meetings and other relevant documents.

In my experience, one disadvantage of being personally involved in the cases, especially in the Biesland case, was that events happening at the time of writing tended to appear 'bigger' than they would have been if I had been writing about a period that was over. In these circumstances, it was important for me to take notes about such events, and about my own feelings. This enabled me to reflect on these experiences after the projects themselves had been finalized (with the exception of the Biesland case, since that project is still ongoing). The quiet workspace with the "Social Spatial Analysis" group at Wageningen University was another indispensable condition. There, I was able to distance myself (physically as well) and reflect on what I had been 'immersed in' during the projects.

Roughly two types of activity can be distinguished in the entire research project. They can also be distinguished as phases, with different degrees of overlap in the three cases.

1. A phase of being involved *in* the projects which later became the 'cases' in this research. This phase is characterized by active engagement in networking to connect citizens, policy officials and researchers, trying to get people involved, organizing and holding meetings, formulating problems and identifying solutions, constantly reworking these problem formulations and solutions and working them out for practical application. The wishes of the funders of the research were important in this phase, even if 'a' funder often appeared to have many faces. Collaboration came about with funders with whom there was a positive chemistry.
2. A phase of reflecting on these projects. This phase involves critically reading data such as minutes of meetings, e-mails, diary, conducting additional interviews and discussing findings with involved stakeholders. In this reflective phase I attempted to put some order into the

findings from the above-mentioned projects. This involved reading theoretical work, albeit on a modest scale, in the expectation that it would enable me to get more out of the cases. Indeed, I was prompted to take another look at what happened, and to reinterpret and compare what I saw in the light of the insights I had read about.

I consider the two types of activities as very different. When I look back on my research period, the main challenge was to combine these two types of activities, to switch between the modes of 'hectic and engaged' and 'calm and reflective'. That was not always easy.

The two types of activity can be distinguished schematically as follows:

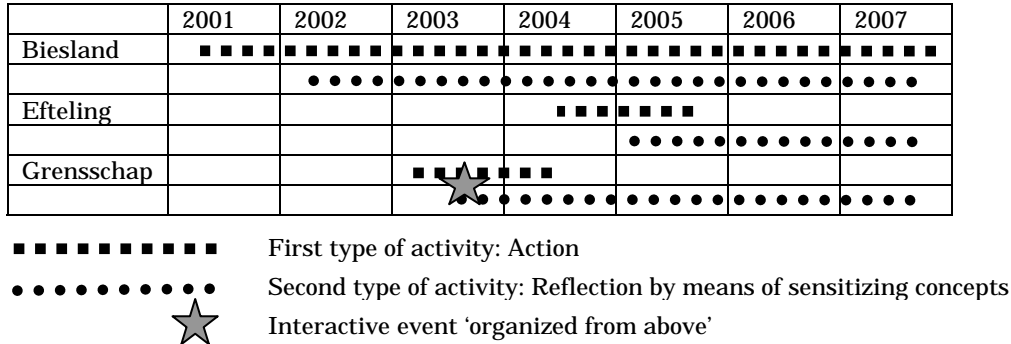
<b>Type of activities 1: Solving concrete problems in contract-research projects, Action Research characteristics</b>	<b>Type of activities 2: reflection on contract-research projects by means of sensitizing concepts</b>
Type of questions: responding to concrete problems or concrete design tasks in specific (spatial) areas.	Type of questions: wishing to understand more about how things work, of the 'how of power'.
Hectic environment, many ad-hoc activities	Quiet environment, 'peace' required
Relatively easy to find non-university resources	Relatively difficult to find non-university resources
In the 'mud of policy practice'	From a somewhat greater 'distance'
In a multidisciplinary team	From a social science angle
Anthropologist in the field <i>and</i> project leader	Anthropologist in the field <i>and</i> trying to interpret what happened in terms of my questions from a somewhat greater distance

The first type of activity has similarities with 'action research' (see section 3.4 for an elaboration). The second type of activities is more akin to the techniques of what is known as 'interpretative research' (see section 3.5 for an elaboration). I feel that my presence and active involvement in the first type of activity enabled me to reflect better on what happened than I could have done had I been an outsider, even though, as said, I sometimes found it very difficult to withdraw from my hectic involvement in the contract research activities. This is probably something that contract researchers have to live with.

The duration of these phases was different in the three cases. The Biesland project grew in the course of the years, so that each year we had to find resources for continuing work on the project – not too easy, in the case of the Ministry. The Efteling project, on the other hand, was a one-off project which spanned little more than a year. In this case the local initiative had come into being before the 'research' project started, in the form of a



covenant. The Grensschap project was also a short-term project, taking less than a year, the heart of which was a two-day interactive event. In relation to the Grensschap I focused on what happened during *and* after that interactive event and went back to the area to do interviewing and organize a group-discussion. Schematically:



**Figure 4: Overview of two types of research activities**

Where the lines of square dots stop, the activities in the field did not stop, in most cases, whereas my role as a contract researcher did.

### ***3.4 Interpretive inquiry***

Interpretive policy analysis covers a wide range of research approaches of which action research is one (Yanow 2003). In my opinion, action research is interpretive by definition, which means that it focuses on the *meanings* given to a situation by the actors involved, including researchers (as actors and stakeholders). Thus, my approach is based on the idea that both are involved in meaning making. Moreover, there is, in the interface between them, what Giddens calls a 'double hermeneutic':

“the intersection of two frames of meaning as a logically necessary part of social science, the meaningful social world as constituted by lay actors and the metalanguages invented by social scientists; there is a constant 'slippage' from one to the other involved in the practice of the social sciences” (Giddens 1984: 374).

'Interpretive research', and interpretive policy analysis in particular, is a widely acknowledged research approach which emphasizes meaning-making. On interpretive methods, Yanow states:

“(Interpretive methods) are based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations. In this world

there are no “brute data” whose meaning is beyond dispute. Dispassionate, rigorous science is possible – but not the neutral, objective science stipulated by traditional analytic methods (as represented by the scientific method). As living requires sensemaking, and sensemaking entails interpretations, so too does policy analysis” (Yanow 2000:5).

Thus, social science is not a ‘mirror’ of the social world but *constitutes* human interpretations of that social world. These interpretations may (at least, if not formulated in such abstract terms that only a small part of a scientific community understands them), subsequently trigger social debate (Yanow 2000).

In the following sections, I will be more specific about the research criteria which I consider important and relevant for the interpretive type of work carried out here. For, as Yanow (2003) wrote:

“The criticism of these (interpretive, MB) methods as lacking reliability and validity evaluates them according to criteria grounded in positivist ontological and epistemological presuppositions. Interpretative methods hold to their own criteria of trustworthiness and dependability, an argument made extensively in Erlandson et al.” (Yanow 2003: 241).

In the next section I will first explain how action research was interpreted in the present research. In section 3.6 I will say a bit more about the criteria mentioned by Yanow above.

### ***3.5 Action Research***

Standard textbooks on qualitative research offer various data gathering methods. The five ways to gather data that we were offered as graduate students, for instance in the handbook for beginning researchers by Ilja Maso (1989), included the gathering of documents, distanced observation, experiment, interview and participatory observation. Although the present study made use of several of these techniques, none of them describes exactly what was done. Perhaps participatory observation comes close, except that, as Maso indicates, researchers following this method are supposed to stay as invisible as possible, and not influence the daily practices of the observed. This is obviously *not* what was done in the periods of field immersion in my research. We were even paid to exert an influence!

The activities performed in the contract research projects discussed in this study bear most resemblance to ‘Action Research’. It is important to note that not all contract research projects are of that nature; on the contrary, much of the research done at our institute does not build on the idea that

'knowledge' is to be seen as something that can be brought in by various actors, and in the first instance by local stakeholders. Action Research is described as follows by Greenwood and Levin (2003):

1. Action research is inquiry in which participants and researchers cogenerate knowledge through collaborative communicative processes in which all participants' contributions are taken seriously. The meanings constructed in the inquiry process lead to social action, or these reflections on action lead to the construction of new meanings;
2. Action research treats the diversity of experience and capacities within the local group as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research/ action process;
3. Action research produces valid research results;
4. Action research is context centred; it aims to solve real-life problems in context" (Greenwood and Levin in Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 149).

There is an ever growing body of literature on research methodologies which are more oriented towards an active, involved role of the researcher. 'Action research' is perhaps the most well-known. It fits well with what was done in two of the three projects involved in this research: Biesland and Grensschap, both projects which focused on immediate, practical problem-solving (Groot 2003) and aimed to connect theory and practice (Greenwood and Levin 2003). The social psychologist Lewin was among the first promoters of Action Research. Lewin's statement that the social world can only be understood by trying to change it is often cited in the Action Research literature. In addition to being practical and solution-oriented, Action Research is characterized by collaboration between researchers and practitioners, working in groups and an emphasis on learning in an iterative process.

These are also the qualities of the research work in 'the first phase' of the three projects (while I was still involved 'hands on'). The following table illustrates the action-research character of the three projects in a more systematic way.

FIRST PHASE	Biesland	Grensschap	Loonsche Land
Practical problem-solving	Find new way to integrate agriculture, nature, water management and recreation purposes	Strengthen the 'open' area in between Maastricht, Lanaken en Riemst by involving local people	Solve conflict by designing a plan which is endorsed by both the theme park and nature organizations
Working in groups, cogeneration of knowledge	Plan is made in workshops, working groups, monitoring and evaluation approach is also designed by local stakeholders.	'Interactive event' is designed in such a way as to promote the establishment of groups which bring in their own knowledge. Regional actors organize themselves and 'cogenerate knowledge' in follow-up process with very limited involvement of the researchers.	Plan is made by team of researchers on the basis of expressed wishes in covenant between theme park and nature organizations, and individual interviews with various organizations involved. Work in groups of researchers and regional actors is limited to a workshop organized by the theme park.
Learning in iterative process	Continuous adaptation of plans, common strategizing, trying things out. This approach is also built in to the setup of monitoring process.	Regional actors organize their own learning process after the interactive event.	- Not an explicit process
Connect theory and practice	Theoretical assumption of the 'Farming for Nature' philosophy is changed on the basis of requirements that appear from practice.	Theoretical assumptions behind setup of the interactive event are changed on the basis of event, reported and brought in differently in the next interactive event (in Zwolle).	-

The second type of activity, which was more directly related to the development of this thesis, was primarily one of reflection on the first phase. At this point I used the sensitizing concepts presented in the previous chapter to get to a better understanding of what happened. However, I also tried to insert ingredients from the action research philosophy. In the Biesland case, my own interpretations of the

mechanisms at work were discussed with key stakeholders, although without using the abstract terminology of the theories that had ‘sensitized’ me to certain connections. I used the outcomes in turn to improve the analysis. In the Grensschap case, after the round of interviews, I organized a discussion with the Grensschap and the alderman. This led to greater transparency about the experiences in the past collaboration. The participants also made some agreements on how to deal with each other in the future, including issues of communication (there had been some disagreement on how the process was organized and on how this had been communicated about). However, practice-theory interaction and ‘cogeneration’ of knowledge (second and fourth row) were limited in this second phase. I consider this as a very interesting possible next step: to establish learning communities with actors involved in the three cases, to see if the mechanisms and conditions influencing space for policy innovation that were identified in this thesis could become the topic of more intensive learning modules for all the stakeholders, including the researchers. The policy arrangements approach could be part of those modules in order to improve practice-theory interaction.

### ***3.6 In the name of ‘trustworthiness’: criteria and techniques***

If criteria such as validity, quantifiability, objectivity, reliability and generalizability, which are generally applied in the positivist research tradition to judge the trustworthiness of a research, hardly apply to the kind of interpretative study carried out here, then what *are* relevant criteria<sup>8</sup>?

Guba and Lincoln have dealt extensively with the question of quality criteria in constructivist social scientific research, which they initially referred to as ‘naturalistic inquiry’ (Erlandson et al. 1993). They drew up a much-quoted list of alternative criteria and techniques for establishing trustworthiness. Instead of internal and external validity (which refer to causal relationships, within the study sample and beyond), reliability (which means that one gets the same results if the study is repeated) and objectivity (which means that human ‘biases’ are annulled), Guba and Lincoln propose respectively credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as relevant criteria for establishing whether what they call naturalistic or constructivist research is trustworthy (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Lincoln and Guba 2003). Although I was not able to meet these

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<sup>8</sup> Schwartz-Shea has generated an elaborate overview of criteria discerned by various authors in relation to interpretive inquiry (2004).

criteria at every stage, I would like to say a bit more about them here, and relate them to the techniques used in this study to achieve an acceptable level of trustworthiness.

In brief, the credibility criterion is geared to having the findings approved by the stakeholders involved. Transferability can be established by generating hypotheses (the closest one can get to generalizations) and finding out in practice whether these fit in different contexts (Guba and Lincoln: “the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts”). Dependability means that when replication of the study leads to different results, this does not necessarily point at unreliability, but rather at changed or different circumstances. Therefore, the dependability criterion means taking changed circumstances into consideration. Confirmability is meant to assure that the findings represent more than “figments of the imagination” (Guba and Lincoln 1989: 243). To achieve a high level of confirmability, events that are independent of the researcher need to be included in the analysis.

Guba and Lincoln then operationalize the four criteria by means of a list of eleven research techniques: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, member checks, thick description, dependability audit (including audit trail) and reflexive journal. These techniques are well elaborated by Erlandson et al. (1993). A summary will suffice here. Thus, *prolonged engagement* means that the researcher stays in contact over an extended period of time with the situation that is the topic of study. This helps the researcher to build trust and get to know the culture. Prolonged engagement also enables a researcher to distinguish which events in a case are exceptional and which occur more often. While prolonged engagement contributes to the scope of a study, *persistent observation* contributes to the depth. It means that details are explored to the extent that it becomes clear whether earlier hypotheses about how things work should be altered or refined in order to do justice to practice. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation were very important in this research, especially when it encountered subtle and ‘below the surface’ power processes. The techniques implied that I stayed close to what actually happened and thereby learned *from* and *in* actual situations. In the Biesland and Grenschap cases I was able to exploit these techniques better than in the Efteling case. *Triangulation* is a well-known technique in the social sciences implying that various sources of data and/or methods are used. Thus, participatory observation, informal talks, secondary sources and interviews were combined to improve our understanding of a situation. *Peer debriefing* means asking professionals who are not familiar with the cases but do know about the issues in general terms to reflect on methods,

interpretations of what happened and preliminary conclusions. This step partly still needs to be taken for the benefit of the findings of this research. *Negative case analysis* involves the elaboration of conflicting interpretations. When I assumed that a particular process played a significant role in the confrontation between government policy and local initiatives, and one stakeholder maintained that another process or phenomenon was being overlooked, then this is taken up in the analysis. *Referential adequacy* meant that materials were used which provided insight in the context of a case. Keeping up with newsletters about the policy domain, for instance, kept me in touch with how far and in what way the three cases were picked up by policy makers as relevant for their policy practices. *Member checking* was conducted to allow stakeholders to test conclusions about findings. This can be done in various ways: by presenting findings, by sending them the report (or parts of it), in interviews and in informal conversations. *Thick description* means that the reader is offered in-depth insight into what actually happened in a certain context. Based on prolonged engagement and persistent observation, the abstraction level of such descriptions is low. Part of the chapters four, five and six consist of such 'thick descriptions'. As Erlandson et al. put it:

"While in the context, it is important to stop and look, listen, smell, and feel the surroundings and interaction. When reading a description, one should be able to get a feel for what it is like to actually be in the context" (1993: 146).

*The dependability audit and confirmability audit*, which both form part of an '*audit trail*', entail an ordered documentation of raw data, interpretive steps, methodological choices and other notes on the research process. This allows a potential auditor to determine trustworthiness. A reflexive journal is one element in an audit trail, in which the researcher keeps track of him- or herself.

I made use of these techniques to varying degrees. However, I felt it was important to mention them all because they represent an 'ideal picture' of what a research should be like, and provide an excellent starting point for much research work. As indicated in the above, most of the techniques were used in this research. I would like to single out peer debriefing and the audit trail as techniques to which I would like to pay more attention in the future. There are of course reasons for the less scholarly approach I applied. In an environment where research budgets are tight and with the pressure of high 'productivity-standards' (percentage of time which needs to be spent on externally financed projects), a technique such as 'audits' by peers is only possible if there is sufficient budget to have peers invest time in the project. The same holds for the audit trail. While I was still 'hands-on' in the projects, time was always short. At the end of the day, priority

had to be given to the delivery of 'products' before tight deadlines and to project administration – which were requirements imposed by the financing bodies and the research institute, while the kind of 'audit trails' or peer reviews that I am referring to were *not* an official requirement. If we take the ambition to learn from contract-research projects seriously, then it would also be a major step forward to invest more in techniques such as these, and either convince the funder of the research of the importance of doing so, or invest more research and development money in it on behalf of the research institute. I therefore also see this study as one step in a long process and it is my ambition to acquire the means and support to apply these techniques more thoroughly than has so far been done in the context of this specific research.

And of course, this work is part of an open-ended process. I therefore agree with the following statement by Lincoln and Guba:

“We wish to call attention to the fact that naturalistic criteria of trustworthiness are open-ended; they can never be satisfied to such an extent that the trustworthiness of the inquiry could be labeled as unassailable. (...) [Unlike conventional inquiry: MB] naturalistic inquiry operates as an *open* system; no amount of member checking, triangulations, persistent observation, auditing, or whatever can ever compel; it can at best *persuade*” (1985: 329).

Now this is what I would like the reader to assess – whether the analysis *persuades* him/her sufficiently to enter into debate about the issues raised.

### ***3.7 Progressive refinement of sensitizing concepts by action and reflection***

In the above, two phases were distinguished: a phase of solving concrete problems in contract research projects and a phase of reflection in which there was a greater distance from the contract research projects. The approaches of Action Research and of interpretive inquiry were described as they respectively characterized the two phases (to a greater or lesser extent). Then research criteria that match with the chosen approach were described, as well as the techniques by which these criteria were to be met.

Doing interpretive inquiry by means of a combination of action research, discourse analysis and the use of the techniques of naturalistic inquiry is a fruitful way to progressively refine sensitizing concepts. In my situation, the phase of 'field immersion', which I characterized as action research, provided for close contact with the empirical world. As Blumer stated:



“Theory is of value in empirical science only to the extent to which it connects fruitfully with the empirical world. Concepts are the means, and the only means, of establishing such connection, for it is the concept that points to the empirical instances about which a theoretical proposal is made” (Blumer 1954: 4).

The interpretive phase allowed for reflection on the *manifestations* of the concepts used in practice. By doing this kind of research I could refine the concepts, or complement them if empirical examination required it. The results of this will be presented after the case chapters. Action and reflection ideally take place in a constant loop. Of course, findings should be recorded at intervals, providing a moment of consolidation, after which others can take up the job again in the next research project. As highlighted in the above, I found working in this way rather difficult at times because it requires a switch between two rather different ‘states of mind’. Still, I am convinced that it is a useful way to achieve a successful refinement of sensitizing concepts. The main obstacle that I experienced was the completely different nature of the action types of activity on the one hand and the reflection types of activity on the other hand. This problem could partly be tackled by enhancing the scope for peer review and audit trails, of which I made mention in the previous section. Situations in which contract research institutes collaborate with universities should provide a good context for such methods. Their success will also depend on the creativity and seriousness of the researchers and research environments involved.



## Chapter 4: From Biesland to Brussels

### *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter starts off in section 4.2 by describing the Biesland Polder, located in the West of the Netherlands, with the aid of topographical maps and pictures. Section 4.3 outlines the formal policy that was operative when an initiative emerged to promote a different policy regarding land management and design in that specific territory. Section 4.4 tells my story of that initiative and its interaction with existing policy. I will show how ‘*the*’ initiative to design and manage the Biesland area on the basis of ‘nature-oriented farming’ had various sources, how it became a joint undertaking by various people and organizations, how it related to existing policy at the start and later on, how it required decision-making at various levels and what came of it in the end. The story will mainly be told chronologically, following the sequence of the main events. In section 4.5, the story continues but now in terms of the gradually changing relationships between actors, discourses, resources and rules of the game. I will then also look for broader structural transformations that played a role in the confrontation between the initiative and existing policy. And, as announced in chapter two, I will pay special attention to Beck’s thesis about sub-politics: that society is increasingly being shaped *from below*. I will go on to define the kind of ‘space for policy innovation’ that evolved from the interactions, and to assess the factors emerging from the story that have not been accounted for so far in the conceptual framework. This chapter will thereby answer the first four questions presented in chapter two, with reference to this case.

1. What was the origin of the initiative and how did it relate to the then existing arrangement? (4.5.1)
2. How do discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy? (4.5.2)
3. Does the case point to a structural transformation of sub-politicization or can other structural transformations be discerned? (4.5.3)
4. What space for policy innovation emerged in the course of the Biesland process? (4.5.4)

I will conclude with some reflections on the story (in 4.6.1), in order to re-assess what other dimensions might have influenced the interaction between the initiative and the existing arrangement. I will also reflect again on my own positionality (4.6.2).



*Cow and at the background marsh area and windmill without wings*



*Flowery ditch*



*Marsh and wood*



*Cows and farm house*



*Cows and the urban fringe of Delft*



*Watching birds*



Alterra Top10smart 2006

*Map 3: Polder of Biesland in urbanizing area*



© Eurosense BV DKLN-2006

*Aerial photograph 1: Polder of Biesland*

## **4.2 The area**

The area around the Biesland polder has changed considerably in just a couple of decades. At present, the conurbation of The Hague, Delft, Pijnacker-Nootdorp and Zoetermeer almost reaches the polder on all sides. On the Delft side, the distinctive blue and yellow of the home furnishing store IKEA conspicuously marks the transition between city and polder, while on the other side, housing development on the edge of the municipality of Pijnacker-Nootdorp is almost visible. Behind the 'Delftse Hout', a State Forest Service recreational area, the cities of The Hague and Delft are encroaching more and more. Meanwhile, the character of the remaining area has changed too, with agricultural land use giving way to parks and nature areas. [topogr kaarten toen en nu] Times have changed for the Biesland Polder itself, too. Whereas in previous decades an area of one hundred hectares would have accommodated several farms (about ten in the 1980s), just one dairy farm occupies the same area today. As in

former times, the farmland is characterized by long, narrow fields, separated by twenty three kilometres of ditches. These ditches and narrow fields are typical of the traditional polder landscape in this area. {pictures} Unlike most contemporary farmers, who keep their cattle inside winter and summer for the sake of efficiency, the Biesland Polder's organic<sup>9</sup> farmer keeps his more than one hundred cows grazing outside in the fields. The picturesque hamlet of 'Klein Delfgauw', which nowadays consists of a campsite and hotel, a restaurant, a day care centre, a wingless historical windmill, stables and a few houses, divides the Biesland polder into an upper and a lower part. The upper polder is located within the municipal boundaries of Delft, the lower part in Pijnacker-Nootdorp. The entire area forms part of the Province of Zuid-Holland.

### ***4.3 Operative policy: "Every city needs a forest"***

The Biesland area is part of the 'Green-Blue Streamer', an S-shaped band of rural land and water intended as a provincial version of the national Randstad Green Structure (Randstadgroenstructuur): a spatial policy goal of preserving a coherent green structure, mainly for recreational use by the growing urban population of the Randstad. A national policy document described the green structure policy goal as follows:

"The quality of the rural area in the Randstad must improve and be geared to the users by realizing forests, recreation, and nature areas". (Structuurschema Groene Ruimte 1995)

The main idea behind the green structure was that of a 'buffer zone'. Green areas would have to protect the open areas between the cities and prevent them from gradually fusing together. In and around the Biesland Polder, most land was acquired from farmers in the seventies and eighties and was partly transformed from meadows into housing estates, and partly from meadows into forest or recreational parks. The remaining polder has been in the hands of one farmer since 1993. As far as the upper and lower Polders of Biesland were concerned, 90 hectares were projected to remain agricultural land. Ten hectares were to be acquired for the newly-planned Biesland Forest.

Implementation of the Randstad Green Structure resembles the national 'Main Ecological Structure' (MES):

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<sup>9</sup> In the Netherlands, an 'organic farmer' does not use chemical pesticides, artificial fertilizers or genetically modified organisms and keeps animals in conditions that are as natural as possible.



“However innovative the idea for nature development might have been, and however well tuned to the demands of policymakers, institutionally it had strong overtones of traditional top-down policy planning. The MES was conceived as a ‘national policy plan’ and was agreed upon by the national parliament. Having gained official policy status, it had to be implemented at the regional level. Local communities, however, had difficulty with the superimposition of ‘new nature’ on their lived environments” (Hajer in Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 109).

Broadly speaking, the Randstad Green Structure was administratively supported by a coalition of the Ministry of ANF, the four nature organisations<sup>10</sup>, the Government Service for Land and Water Management (DLG) and the Province. Just as with the national MES, the Ministry of ANF would decide on land acquisitions. Then, together with the Province they would commission the DLG to carry out the decisions. Finally, the management of an area would be given to one of the four nature organisations. The Randstad Green Structure policy was later linked to the ‘Green in and around the City’ policy, later known as ‘Recreation around the City’ and ‘Green and the City’. Regardless of changing labels, the practice of land acquisition formed part of all of these policies. This meant that quantitative norms were set for the acquisition of land, which would have to be expropriated from farmers and given to nature organizations.

The policies summarized above imply a specific way of looking at the city, and, more particularly, at the *relationship* between agriculture, nature (specifically forest) and the city. In the view of governments at various levels and of nature organisations, the vicinity of a city or an urban fringe justified special attention for the establishment of ‘green structures’: as the aforementioned buffer, as recreation area for the city dweller (‘uitloopgebied’) and also as a ‘corridor’ for animals and plants. Neutral as they may have first sounded, ‘green’ structures were not just ‘green’. They were generally interpreted as ‘nature’, ‘forests’ or parks with a strong recreational function. The idea was also that land acquisition and renewed planning of that land would be necessary. The State Forest Service proclaimed in a magazine article that “every city needs a forest”. Such statements were quite common: Forests and parks were expected to meet with the approval of city dwellers. Research was quoted as evidence that there was a shortage of such areas (see for instance de Vries and Bulens 2001 for the Dutch Automobile Association ANWB). ‘The city’ was put on the scene as an enemy and an ally at the same time: as an enemy when ‘urban expansion’ was feared, and as an ally when citizen support for the parks and forests which would serve as natural buffers against such urban expansion was emphasized. Part and parcel of that thinking was the conviction that agriculture would *not* provide a strong buffer, either in

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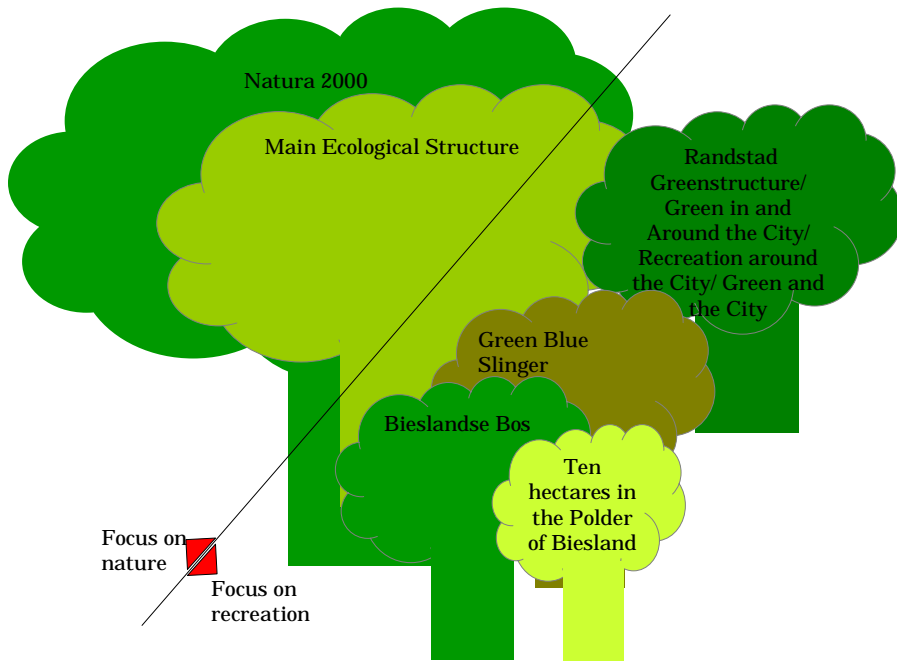
10 Natuurmonumenten, the ‘Landschappen’, Domeinen and the State Forest Service.



terms of ecological achievements or in terms of the capacity to fulfil the needs of recreational users. In this view, agriculture had no future in these urban contexts. In view of the increasing land prices near cities, farmers were often accused of speculation for their own financial benefit. Nature organisations, on the other hand, were considered to be perfectly capable of managing the new parks, forests and nature areas. These organisations would often be associated with expressions such as ‘sustainable’ and ‘strong enough’, while farmers were expected to fall prey to developers in the end. There was yet another, more quantitative motive for the plea for forests or parks instead of open landscapes: the former would offer a greater ‘capacity’ to accommodate tourists and day-trippers. All in all, in urban settings ‘nature’ and ‘agriculture’ were considered as conflicting domains and the often implicit conclusion was that they should be in separate hands.

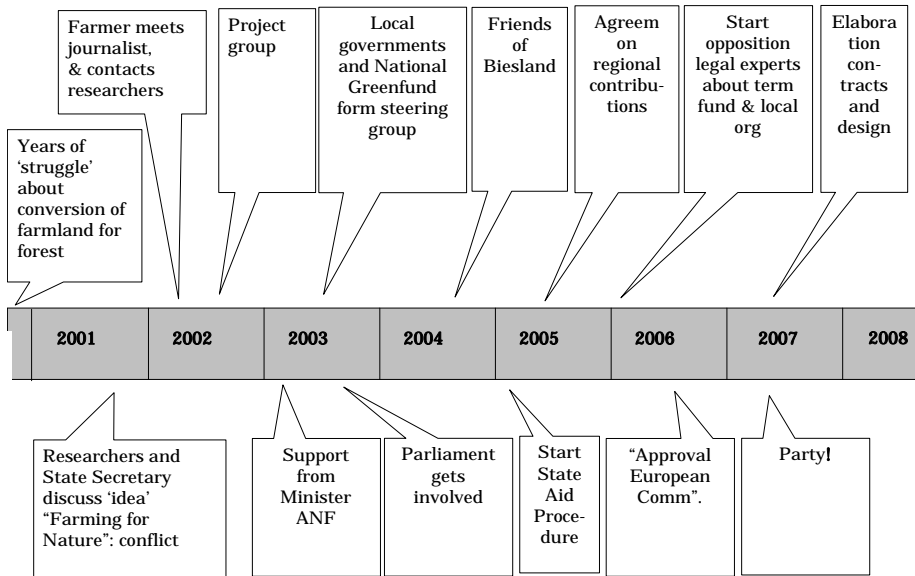
While part of the Biesland polder was designated to become forest, there was also potential in the area for making use of subsidies available through the national regulation for Agrarian Nature Management (SAN), and funded by the national government and the European Union. The SAN policy was geared to achieving specific ‘nature target types’ in areas delineated by the province. A subsidy could be granted for a six-year period for measures such as mowing late for the benefit of meadow birds. Such contracts had to be renewed every six years. The measures did not require a major change in farming philosophy, since they could be combined with ‘operative’ farm practices, and a farmer did not have to adopt the principles of ‘organic farming’ in order to be allowed to participate in the SAN. From 2002, the combination of the ideas of a new Minister and the difficulties of acquiring land led to an increased emphasis on such possibilities for nature management by farmers.

Briefly, then, this was the existing policy context in which a new coalition was born. The following figure summarizes the partly overlapping green structure ‘policy concepts’ which were operative. To the left of the line are green structures that do not apply to the Biesland area, and which mainly focus on nature values. To the right are the green structures that apply to the polder, and which mainly focus on recreation (although, some ‘nature-target-types’ were also formulated for these areas).



**Figure 5: Hierarchy of green structures: from the local level (trees at the front) up to EU level (trees at the back)**

## 4.4 A long story



**Figure 6: Overview of main events**

### *Of one farmer who turned his head towards nature and the city*

Right from the start, the farm family at the heart of this story tried to secure their future as a *farm* enterprise. In this sense, they were not very different from many other farms in the Netherlands. The usual way of doing this was to enlarge the area available for farming and intensify production, achieving a higher output at lower costs. The Biesland farm family did this successfully, expanding both their area and their herd considerably. They went from 35 cows on 17 hectares in 1993 to 130 cows on 90 hectares in 2003. By that time, they used 90 out of their 100 hectares for agricultural purposes; the other 10 hectares consisted of the home yard, roads and landscape elements such as ditches and a marsh area (see also the farm's website [www.hoevebiesland.nl](http://www.hoevebiesland.nl)).



*Friends, Ikea personnel, provincial official plant a woven fence at the occasion of the foundation of the Friends of Biesland*



*Meeting on monitoring and evaluation in the living room at the farm*



*Celebration of final decision – farmer and minister at the front*



*Children at one of the open farm days*



*Children playing at one of the open days at the farm*



*Signing of declaration of intent, with cow Clara bringing in the document*

One day in 1996, the farmer met with officials of the municipality of Delft to discuss the possibility of leasing land in the 'upper polder'. The officials advised him to contact a volunteer from a local environmental group (whom I will henceforth call 'nature volunteer'). That volunteer was active in various nature-related activities in the city. In these conversations with municipal officials, the farmer began to realize that there were limits to the kind of farm expansion that he had gone through, especially in this urbanizing region. Together with the nature volunteer, he started to explore the options for running a farm that would incorporate nature, water and recreation objectives, while remaining economically viable. Barely aware of the meaning of organic farming a few years earlier, the farm family switched to that approach in 1997. The switch to organic farming yielded higher prices for the milk produced. The family also believed that organic farming fitted well in this urban environment, with many eyes always following what happened on the farm. Together with the nature volunteer, the farmer made a plan for turning the upper polder into an area that combined agricultural land with 'nature elements' such as a marsh area and wooded grove ('geriefbosjes'). The plan for the redesigned polder was implemented in 2000, and enabled the farm family to lease the upper polder land from the municipality of Delft on a long term basis, on terms laid down in a lease agreement. Meanwhile, they made optimal use of the subsidies for Agrarian Nature Management (SAN), entering into 6-year contracts for a combined 'package' of late mowing, use of fresh manure, and proper management of the sides of ditches. However, the limited duration of the SAN contracts prompted the farmer to continue to look for other possibilities for developing the farm: a six year period was too short to be a solid basis for a long-term farm strategy.

In the context of the green structure policies described in the previous section, negotiations with the one remaining farmer in the area had been going on for several years. The subject of the negotiations was approximately ten hectares of the farmland, targeted for acquisition for the realization of the 'Bieslandse bos' (the Biesland forest). The farmer's response to these attempts was to form another alliance with the volunteer. At several meetings they tried to convince the responsible officials of the various involved organizations (ANF, the Government Service for Land and Water Management, the State Forest Service and the Province) that higher nature values could be achieved by integrating nature on the entire farm, rather than setting aside ten hectares that would be owned and managed by the State Forest Service. Besides, they maintained that the farmland could already offer city dwellers an attractive, quiet and open landscape. In 2001 a new plan (planwijziging Bieslandse bos) from the province and state organizations was expected to solve the deadlock by replacing forest with marshes (open water, reeds, undergrowth and flowering grassland). This

plan drew the indignation of the farmer and the nature volunteer because it failed to answer their request to abandon the plans to purchase the land. State agencies persisted in their claims to the right to buy land and put these in the hands of nature organisations. And the farmer and the volunteer persisted in their resistance to a plan that would further diminish the amount of farmland in the area. Instead, they wanted to show that farmland could be equally valuable for nature.

### *Expanding the coalition*

One day in autumn 2001 the farmer met with a journalist who happened to know a bit about the ideas of researchers on improving the relationship between farming and nature management. These ideas matched those of the farmer and the volunteer, so the farmer kept the journalist's contact details. From what he had heard from the journalist, the farmer realized that *if* the vision were really to be put into practice and become part of mainstream policy, it would mean that he could also apply more far-reaching nature measures in the lower polder, and be paid for them. Sufficient financial compensation would allow him to choose even more radically for a farming system providing agricultural products *and* nature values *and* the value of an attractive landscape for citizens. That winter, the farmer contacted the researchers – who happened to be searching for areas where they could put their ideas into practice. There seemed to be a good match between their ideas and both parties hoped that a new alliance could force a breakthrough. The researchers believed that practice-based experience would be more effective than a report in convincing policymakers of the value of their alternative vision. Besides, that experience would also give them the opportunity to refine the ideas.

### *What the farmer, the volunteer and the researchers shared*

What the farmer, some nature volunteers and the researchers had in common was the ambition to reconcile nature objectives with agricultural enterprise. They also attributed an important role to agriculture in relation to the neighbouring cities and the need for recreation. Similar to the 'forest and park promoters' mentioned in the above, they looked at the city as a potential ally in the protection of the agricultural landscape. The farmer often said that it was his principle not to fight *against* the city or nature, but to look for positive opportunities to continue with the farm together *with* these. They believed that *if* the role of farmers in the landscape were properly rewarded, they, like the nature organizations, could form a counterweight to urban expansion. They emphasized the positive experiences that farmland could offer people.

A key ingredient brought in from the researchers' side was the zero-input principle. What they called a 'nature-oriented farmer' would not import or

export any fertilizer or fodder (i.e. no minerals) to or from the farm. This would go further than organic farming. It meant, for instance, that the farmer would start producing the fodder himself. In many cases, the cattle breed would need to be slowly adjusted by cross-breeding so as to be able to digest the fodder. In the researchers' eyes, the concept of 'nature target types' was a contradiction in terms: unpredictability was considered the very essence of nature. Instead, nature values were looked upon as the *possible* consequence of the creation of certain *conditions*: rather than targeting specific 'nature types', we have to leave it to nature itself to determine the exact outcomes. An additional point of departure was that farmers themselves could best decide which parts of the land were most appropriate for which types of land use. The zero-input principle and the conservation of a structure of landscape elements were the *only* restricting requirements. Within this scope, the farmer and his associates needed to make choices about which kinds of fodder crops to use, how to deal with new natural sources of fertilizer such as mud from the ditches, and how to make use of the land.

Changing a farming system into a 'zero input' system would be long-term and expensive and would lead to a halving of the income from milk production. Because of this loss of income combined with the costs of changing cattle breed and buying new machinery, the innovation could not be implemented without financial compensation. Moreover, most of the changes would be irreversible and therefore needed a long-term financial perspective. With their limited time span of 6-year contracts, the current policies were not geared to this kind of in-depth transformation. Therefore, a crucial element of the idea was that both various regional (municipalities, province, water board, private parties) *and* national parties would have to make a one-off investment in a fund. Computations were made by researchers to show that such a fund would require an even lower investment than would be required in the scope of existing policy for the acquisition of land to be managed by nature organizations. The assumption was that the fund would generate interest for a long time, out of which the participating farmers would be paid. A regional foundation would be involved in the monitoring, sanctioning and decision-making about new applicants. It was expected that a regional foundation and a sustainable fund would be more reliable than the 6-year subsidies of the Programme Beheer. The landscape structure and the zero-input principle would be included in a special juridical arrangement: private-law agreements in the form of servitudes with a qualitative liability and perpetual clause, with no time-limit. This type of contract would have to guarantee that the measures would be connected to the land and not to the person. Thus, the farmers' successor would be liable to apply the same nature-oriented measures and would be entitled to an income in exchange for it. The fund,

the contracts and the foundation had to guarantee the sustainability of the approach.

The farmer, the volunteer and the researchers took ample time to discuss the meaning of these ideas. Their ideas matched well and in their discussions the ideas gradually became more concrete and applied to the local situation. Unaware of the hurdles that would follow, they all realized that if they were to be successful, their collaboration should be continued.

The following scheme summarizes the differences mentioned so far between the initiative and the existing policies. The first four differences are more substantive, the last four organizational. It immediately becomes clear, however, that substantive and organizational aspects are related. For example, the ownership of land (a resource) seems at first sight to be an organizational affair, but is just as closely related to the contents of the ideas in which nature is appropriated by the 'nature sector' and dissociated from agriculture.

<b>Operative national policy</b>	<b>Initiative</b>
Forest, parks, nature areas in the hands of nature organisations which were considered strong enough to protect the open landscape against urbanization	Agriculture as another potential ally of the city dweller, in the protection of the open landscape against urbanization
Nature organizations are best-equipped to safeguard nature target types on what should be their land, especially those belonging to 'real nature'	Farmers are well able to safeguard nature on their land, especially those related to the historic cultural landscapes
Agriculture and Nature separate: nature measures on the farm are a supplement to common, intensive farming practices	Agriculture and Nature integrated: farming practices and nature management go hand in hand.
Create Nature target types	Create conditions in which natural values are likely to develop
6 Year contracts: - politicians should not reign beyond the period that they were elected for and be accountable for what they have decided and invested in	Long term – contracts: - nature needs time to develop - transformation of the farming system is irreversible - a fund generates more income when it is long term
Yearly subsidies	One-off investment (a large sum once)
National government/ EU subsidize agrarian nature management	Regional parties, national government/ EU pay part of the income of farmers, in exchange for nature management
Public-law contracts: contract connected to the person	Private-law contract: servitude connected to the land



In sum, it was not just the ideas on what the polder should look like and on how it should physically be managed that differed from the policies described in the foregoing section. The ideas on social and administrative organization differed too. In view of these differences, the discretionary space of the 'street-level-bureaucrats' was not sufficient to carry on with the initiative; its implementation would require a change of rules and a new division of resources. Also, as the story in the next section will illustrate, the confrontation soon drew attention from the higher echelons, including that of the Minister, who made use of his own 'discretionary space' to support the initiative.

### *The initial search for support from the Ministry*

In the beginning 'Farming for Nature' was 'only an idea' about ways of securing the future of small-scale agricultural landscapes. It was then developed into a 'strategic expertise development project' of the research institute Alterra. This status of the project implied that no organisation had commissioned the research. In contrast to most projects carried out by this privatized institute, there would be no funders imposing specific requirements on the contents of this project. After it had ended, the project was followed by a year of writing memos on the relationship with operative policy objectives, of making promotion material and of meetings with policy officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (ANF). 'Research' activities in that year focussed on the search for support from the Ministry of ANF, so that it would become involved in the project on a more intensive basis and start to finance it from other research budgets. Arguments were sought to show that the idea would be a good way to realize the Ministry's existing policy ambitions.

As we have seen, before the Biesland farmer and the researchers got to know each other, steps had already been taken to put the idea on the policy agenda of the Ministry of ANF. An official of the Regional Directorate 'East', who was a friend of one of the researchers, embraced the idea and wrote various policy documents to promote it. He saw himself as one of the 'fathers of the idea'. In July 2001, this official and the researchers managed to meet the State Secretary, the highest responsible official at the Ministry at the time. Her reaction was far from enthusiastic, and she expressed her worries about earlier media exposure of Farming for Nature. Her concerns focused on the researchers' claim that by means of a fund, more nature objectives could be achieved at less expense. The researchers had emphasized that the costs of the current policy of buying land for the realisation of the 'Main Ecological Structure' were higher than the costs of establishing a fund from which farmers would be paid for the realisation and management of nature values, on what would remain *the farmer's* own land. The timing of this claim was very unfortunate for the State Secretary,

who had just spoken in Parliament to defend her need for a bigger budget to acquire land for 'nature development'. In this context, she preferred not to present 'Farming for Nature' as a cheaper alternative to the policy which she had just defended so forcefully. Opinions at the Ministry were ambivalent. Policy documents that were discussed in Parliament did make mention of the vision as an 'extra method to realise policy objectives' (draft-*'plattelandsbrief'*, and there was a letter to the Parliament about the operative policy for agricultural nature management '*Programma Beheer*', 3 July 2001).

*A new Minister's promises result in deeper involvement of the Ministry*

A change of leadership at the Ministry of ANF was a key factor in the acquisition of pilot status. While the aforementioned State Secretary was a member of the Social Democratic Party, the new Minister belonged to the Christian Democratic Party. The former had prioritized the realization of the Main Ecological Structure (MES). Since agriculture was seen more as a competitor of the MES than as a potential partner, 'Farming for Nature' did not fit within the social democrat ambition and it was therefore not surprising that the presiding state secretary did not favour the approach<sup>11</sup>. The Christian Democratic party, on the other hand, traditionally had strong ties with the agricultural sector. The Minister, a farmer himself, introduced the new policy of achieving more nature objectives on farms by a move 'from land acquisition to management' (*'van aankoop naar beheer'*). Part of the money earmarked for land acquisition was transferred to agrarian nature management in the *Programma Beheer*. Farming for Nature matched well with this change of policy. The political tide seemed to have turned in favour of the idea.

Secondly, in his previous post, the Minister had been general chair of the research institute and university where the researchers were employed. During that time he had formed part of a reading committee that had positively recommended the idea when it was still in its infancy. When the regional activities to make a region-specific 'Farming for Nature-plan' for the polder had already started, a meeting with the new Minister resulted in formal acknowledgement of two initiatives (Biesland and Twickel) as pilot projects. On several subsequent occasions, the Minister challenged regional parties to reserve financial means for the project, just as he had done.

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<sup>11</sup> At a later stage, members of the Social Democrat Party actively started to promote decision making regarding the project, for instance by asking questions to the Minister about the project, alongside with members of the Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party and 'Green Left'.

Thirdly, this initiative seemed to be consistent with policy development in relation to 'green services'. Both policy makers and the initiators considered this policy development as a possible stepping-stone to more support from within the policy-making bodies. Although the status of the 'Farming for Nature' pilots was initially unclear, they were gradually taken up in the 'Green Services' policy development process, which provided them with an official framework. The 'Green Services' concept stemmed from a policy document 'Structuur Schema Groene Ruimte 2 (2001)', and from an advice of the advisory council for rural areas (RLG 2002). The concept of 'green services' was a response to the increasing awareness that a system of subsidies to farmers like those included in the 'Programma Beheer' would not be viable in the long run, because of free market regulations of the European Union and the World Trade Organization. New partnerships were therefore stimulated, and private actors who were not subject to free market regulations were to invest in nature and landscape measures (RLG 2002) because it would become increasingly difficult for state actors to do so. The term 'Green Services' made it explicit that farmers were offering a 'service' that should –naturally – be paid for, rather than subsidized. The plan was that a Green Services policy would at first run alongside the implementation of the 'Programma Beheer', and would eventually be integrated. However, in a letter to the Parliament<sup>12</sup> (July 2003), the Minister did *not* mention the two Farming for Nature projects as official 'explorations' of the Green Services policy, while two other (government-initiated) projects *were* included. Biesland and Twickel *did* form part of a *draft* of the letter, but had later been removed by the department of Legal Affairs of the Ministry. This department had serious doubts about the implementation of the projects and did not want to arouse expectations about them. In July 2004 a second letter to Parliament informed the parliamentarians that six exploratory 'green services' had been selected to contribute to further policy development. This time the two Farming for Nature pilots were included. In the end the initiative gained a stronger position on the agenda as an 'exploration' in the context of new policy development. Still, officials of the Ministry continued to emphasize that the present policy was successful and that 'Farming for Nature' would therefore not in any way supplant that policy.

Briefly, there were several reasons why the Ministry of ANF became deeply involved in the process. As indicated, the first reason was the Ministry's financial involvement in both the research process and the implementation of the measures (the contribution to the fund). 'Green services' became the framework within which officials could work on the matter. For his part,

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<sup>12</sup> July 7 2003: <http://www.minlnv.nl/infomart/parlemnt/2003/par03223.htm>

the Minister promised early in the process to finance half of the plans<sup>13</sup>, provided that the other half would be financed by regional parties. This did not guarantee support from middle-level officials however. They objected when they were reminded of the promise, especially when 'half' turned out to be a higher amount than foreseen. Middle level officials continued to say that there was an option in existing policy that would boil down to the same thing: subsidy-regulation nature management. This implied however that the land would be designated as nature, and this legal conversion would be definitive. As the Ministry's own website says about such conversions: "it is not possible to use the land for agriculture again at a later stage". Yet the whole point for the participating farmer was that he wanted to be able to *combine* agriculture and nature management. A permanent designation as nature area would miss that mark.

A second reason for the Ministry's involvement was the emphasis placed by the Minister on European approval for implementation of the idea. This gave the regional initiative a European dimension. The Ministry of ANF<sup>14</sup> itself would have to organise the procedure to submit requests for so-called 'state support' to the European Commission, a procedure to make sure that support given to farmers by governments would not distort free competition amongst European farmers. A third reason was that the initiative had gained the support of top Ministry officials (including the minister) and at field level (the officials of the Regional Directorates). Also, parliament started to get involved and to ask questions about progress. First I will describe how a coalition was gradually growing at the regional level.

### *Becoming organized at regional level: a growing coalition*

Not long after the meetings between the journalist, the farmer and the the researchers, a 'project group' was formed by regional policymakers (province, municipalities, and water board) and a representative of the Western regional directorate of the national Ministry of ANF. The project group consisted of the officials of the various government bodies involved (the province, the two municipalities Delft and Pijnacker-Nootdorp, the water board and the 'stadsgewest' (urban district) of Haaglanden), the farmer, the volunteer, and two of the researchers. The project group began to hold regular meetings from the autumn of 2002. At first they met every six to eight weeks, depending on the state of affairs; after a few years the

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<sup>13</sup> Later, during the negotiations on the exact contribution of the Ministry, this pronouncement was called into question by officials of the Ministry. Hadn't the Minister said: "the Ministry can not 'stay behind' when regional parties reach agreement on financing the project", rather than being specific about its share in the financing?

<sup>14</sup> Officially, provinces may also submit requests for approval of support to agriculture to the European Commission, through the Ministry of Domestic Affairs.

frequency of the meetings diminished. The project group meetings were mostly prepared by two researchers and the official from the province. They also organized various activities on the farm to involve a wider range of people and to establish a 'monitoring and evaluation system' intended to provide a learning approach for the researchers to develop and implement together with 'lay' experts from the region.

While the initiative had not yet obtained a clear position on the various policy agendas, the province and the research department of the Ministry of ANF<sup>15</sup> were willing to finance the project. After a year the involved officials had gathered sufficient support from members of the executive bodies.

In the summer of 2003, it was clear what those who had organized themselves around the Polder wanted. Researchers, farmer, volunteers and regional officials had worked together on the publication of a colourful book summarizing the ideas. The book was produced in workshops in which researchers, officials and people from the region worked in small groups, often at the farm family's kitchen table.

A year after the formation of the project group, a steering committee of regional administrators was formed in order to establish a link between the activities in the polder and political decision-making in the region. In the Netherlands, forming such a steering committee is standard practice in projects of this kind. From this point on, the project group would draw up the agenda for meetings of the steering committee, which would take decisions about allocation of resources, administration of the initiative and other matters which they would sometimes have to defend to the representative bodies. The steering committee met for the first time in September 2003. Successful lobbying led to the provincial executive hesitantly agreeing to chair this group (although he did not initially want to call it a 'steering committee' because he wished to emphasize the temporary nature of the undertaking). Aldermen of the municipalities of Pijnacker-Nootdorp, Delft and The Hague participated in the steering committee, as well as an executive of the Waterboard and of the urban region ('stadsgewest') of Haaglanden, and the Director of the National Green Fund, the organization that would 'manage' the fund and make sure

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<sup>15</sup> At this time, the Ministry's financial involvement in the research was independent of the involvement of the relevant policy officials. This was made possible by the way the research was embedded in the Ministry, with different contact persons for policy-related matters and for research-related matters. Later the link between policymaking and research became stronger. It would be worthwhile to investigate the implications of this change. In what situations did the link increase or decrease the policy relevancy of research? Did it lessen or improve the chances of obtaining research budgets for ideas that diverged from operational policy?

that the farmer would receive his compensation. The Ministry of ANF did not participate in the steering committee. Meetings focused on the acquisition of financial resources in the region and the political procedures this required, ways of persuading the Ministry of ANF to work faster and with more conviction, and organizational concerns such as the contracts which needed to be agreed on to establish a legal basis for the payments to the farmer. At the end of 2005, the first precondition of the Minister, namely that half of the required amount would have to be furnished by regional parties, was fulfilled.

The aldermen involved and other members of the executive bodies at provincial, urban region and waterboard levels did not want the undertaking to become a purely regional affair. They were of the opinion that rural areas belonged to a *national* policy domain that the Ministry of ANF had traditionally financed. If 'the region' were to achieve national policy ambitions in the area, even though by different means than projected in the SAN of the Programma Beheer, why then should ANF reduce its payments? Besides, they argued, expenditure for the SAN would be annulled if the new measures were implemented. Payment for the new measures might well take the place of these. They claimed that their support for the project was already a *new* type of investment for them and thus they expected the Ministry to contribute as well.

The Biesland pilot received considerable attention, even from other countries, and there were frequent visits to the farm by all kinds of groups, including academics, senior citizens, officials, other farmers and school children. The activities that the farmer undertook in the name of Farming for Nature were paid for from the research budgets, enabling him to hire contract workers to do the work on his farm on the days when he was doing his share of 'research work' for the project. Even though it was difficult at times, the coalition was relatively successful in gaining access to resources such as research budgets.

A principle shared by the people most closely involved in the project was that it was vital for success to make sure that as many people as possible experienced the polder. Those who had been sceptical at first would start to refer to the project in terms of 'we' once they had visited the area a few times. Well aware of these mechanisms, the initiators tried to invite people who didn't have strong links with the area to come and see it, and listen to the farmer's story. That was a successful strategy. It was often an eye-opener for the visitors, most of whom were amazed to find such a quiet, 'rural' enclave in the middle of a heavily urbanized area. The farmer's personal capacities were important here. Due to his networking capacity, strategic thinking (and actions!) and communicative abilities he became

quite a celebrity, with frequent exposure on television and in other media. This attracted a lot of attention and hardly a week went by without a group of interested people visiting his farm.

*Legal objections at provincial level – overruled by the steering committee*

The farmer, the researchers, the project group (and the provincial official in particular), and the steering committee took the lead in pushing for progress. The steering committee succeeded in reserving most of the required regional part of the budget. Despite these ‘successes’, legal objections were raised by a provincial legal expert who had been approached at a later stage in the process by the provincial official in the project group. The provincial jurist stated that neither a regional foundation nor one-off investments in a fund that was to render an income over a long period, were possible. The provincial project group member had often ‘crossed swords’ with this legal expert, who told her that he was convinced that the plan would fail because it was not in accordance with the rules. Despite this situation, the provincial official kept working on the project with undiminished determination.

At one of the steering committee meetings, the legal objections were ‘overruled’. The legal expert was given the assignment to work out a workable, simple way to realize their ideas. The steering committee members insisted that a fund and a regional foundation would have to form part of that solution. They were of the opinion that the financial mechanism of a fund was more attractive because their investments *now* would accrue interest in the long term. They agreed that a regional foundation was less bureaucratic and closer to the citizen than a formal public arrangement. The legal expert persisted in his views, but to no avail at this point. In the meantime, the process continued. The steering committee pressed the Ministry to decide quickly on its contribution and to move fast in Brussels.

*Help from an unexpected quarter: the birth of the Friends of Biesland*

An event which broadened societal support was the founding of the ‘Friends of Biesland’. A local service club got wind of the initiative when the voluntary ‘Working group Green’ took them to work on the farm. That was during the spring of 2003. The working group would usually organize ‘work days’ on the land of the State Forest Service, but this time they decided to go and help the farmer to lay hedges. This was no coincidence: the provincial official was an active member of the working group. In the meantime she had become enthusiastic about the Farming for Nature idea and thought up all sorts of ways of putting it into practice, including mobilizing the service club. She was undeterred by the fact that the provincial executive let her know that if he were asked again, he would

probably not commit himself to the ideas because of the many hurdles involved.

After the working day with the service club, the provincial official and the farmer were invited to present the ideas to a larger group of its members. These members became inspired and to help the initiative, they organised a fundraising dinner together with local entrepreneurs and politicians. In autumn 2004 the 'Friends of Biesland' were officially founded, so that other people from the region could join the service club members in supporting the project. (picture) The Friends were invited to nominate a representative to the project group and the steering committee. Membership gradually broadened to include members from outside the Service Club. Chairmanship was handed over to a non-Service Club member as well. In the summer of 2007, the Friends had 230 paying members and 35 business members. The Friends received a subsidy from the province to hire a part-time employee to organize activities. In terms of contents, the Friends' activities in the Polder went beyond the promotion of the Farming for Nature ideas, as they organized all kinds of activities: working days, excursions, open days, activities for children, business events. By running these activities in addition to those of the farmer himself, the Friends help to strengthen the Biesland's position in the urban environment. The friends also offered their help with policy influencing on several occasions, facilitating access to key persons, especially politicians or other higher public officials. After some time, the Friends were invited by the provincial executive to participate in the Steering committee. There was agreement in the Steering committee that the Friends, because of their wide local embedment, would have to be part of the regional foundation that would control the project during implementation.

*Continuing controversy about the land for the Randstadgroenstructuur*

While working on this process, several attempts were made to involve the State Forest Service, the owner and 'manager' of the neighbouring park and nature areas, in the Farming for Nature project. These attempts were successful in some respect: suggestions from the project were accepted, for example to change the vegetation on the edge of a bordering forest, so that a natural gradient would develop between the farmland and the forestland. On the other hand, the State Forest Service persisted in claiming the ten hectares for nature development. They did not agree with the farmer and the volunteer who said that they could create much more nature on the entire farm than the State Forest Service could on ten hectares, if they were given the chance to do so. The Service did not want to participate in meetings on the development of a monitoring and evaluation system, because this would take too much of the time formally allocated to them to manage 'their areas'. Explicit reference was made to the formal task of the



organization to manage specific nature areas, and to the 'already limited budgets' available for this, and it was not considered feasible to spend too much time on a project that would not be on their land. One middle-level official in the State Forest Service called the concentration on their own land 'a necessity to make ends meet' ('brood op de plank'). Besides, the Service made a point of being recognizable as a 'nature manager'. When the farmer suggested that he was also able to manage the marshes, this was rejected because, according to the State Forest Service, it would no longer be clear to the outsider what was nature-land and what was farmland. For his part, the farmer said that he wanted the marsh area to be one of his "PR-elements".

All in all, this meant that the State Forest Service dissociated itself from the project, and chose not to take part in the Biesland agreement. This was not entirely without consequences. After the official foundation of the Friends of Biesland, the occasion on which a symbolic woven fence ('vlechtheg') was planted, the State Forest Service accidentally cut the young plants during their yearly round of maintenance activities. Had the service participated in the hedge planting this accident would probably not have happened.

Meanwhile at field level, relations between the farmer and the field personnel of the service were generally good. In the end, an ingenious land swap was agreed upon which satisfied both the farmer and those responsible for the realization of the Randstad Greenstructure.

#### *Different motives for joining*

A good economic perspective for the farm was an important driving force and a precondition for the farm family to engage with the idea of Farming for Nature. That economic motivation did not prevent support for the initiative from growing. Mainly as a result of good communication by the farmer and the involvement of the Friends of Biesland, it became further embedded in society. The specific details of zero-input farming were the technical heart of the idea. But it was the area itself and the authentic way in which the farm family operated and communicated about their work, combined with the enthusiasm of other people such as the Friends and regional members of the executives (the aldermen and the other members of the steering committee) that made other people enthusiastic as well. Participants were bound together, not by *one* particular 'detail' such as the zero-input norm, but by the broad scope of the undertaking.

Even if the people involved in the Biesland initiative shared the broad objective of strengthening the open, agricultural landscape by facilitating new forms of nature management on the farm, their motives for committing

themselves to the initiative were diverse. Some emphasized the need to counter a trend that could be observed near most cities: a replacement of farmland by built-up areas for housing, commerce or infrastructure. Others saw an additional threat in the large scale replacement of farmland by nature and/or recreational areas, and the accompanying steady disappearance of farms. Still others stressed the meadow birds or plant species in the polder that they had monitored for a long time, or the 'openness' of the polder that city dwellers should be able to experience. One birdwatcher was specifically concerned about the forage possibilities for spoonbills, a particular marsh bird. The owner of a nearby campsite saw benefits for the attractiveness of the campsite. Members of the Friends of Biesland would stand up for the area for various reasons and perhaps most of all because of its openness in the urban context. Finally, the farmer and his family wished to continue farming in this area, as most of their extended family still lives in the vicinity. Perhaps there is only one word that captures all these motives: 'Biesland', the name of the area itself. In contrast to the sectoral approach of government policy, the Biesland initiative mobilized wider involvement by focusing on an area, rather than a sector.

### *Persistent hurdles*

When the region had assembled their share of the required budget, it was the Ministry's turn to fulfil the Minister's promise to provide the other half of the funding. It did not seem to be so easy, however. Even though the Minister himself was positive and the officials in charge of contacts with the region tried to promote fast decision making, procedural hurdles remained which appeared difficult to overcome.

There was a certain resistance to the project at the middle level in the Ministry, which was explained by three different officials in different words but with a similar meaning:

"the project was 'not invented here' "

"the project is going too fast" (loopt voor de troepen uit)

"the officials did not develop the ideas themselves".

In terms of contents, several 'middle' level - officials continued to cast doubt on the expected nature values, on the real costs in comparison with existing policy, on the feasibility of monitoring results if no clear nature targets were formulated in advance, and finally on the possibility of creating a long-term fund in the context of the so-called 'comptabiliteitswet' (a law geared to ensuring the accountability of any organization or project receiving state grants).

To concede to the Ministry's wish to predict outcomes in terms of nature target types, the Ministry's 'Expert centre'<sup>16</sup> was called in by the researchers and an ANF-official to assess the expected effects in terms of nature target types. The outcome was positive, but did not dispel worries about farmers' capabilities to manage nature, especially in the long run. The second question about the costs appeared even harder to tackle. In terms of financial investment, the present policy and the initiative could hardly be compared because the points of departure were so different. What was the value, for instance, of a marsh area and its nature species, as compared with the gradient of a meadowland ending in the grassy side of a ditch? Another point of discussion was the conflict between the Ministry's wish to control *outcomes*, on the one hand, and the Biesland vision's approach of creating *conditions* which could give rise to various, unpredictable outcomes, on the other hand.

The problems with the long-term character of the proposals were perhaps the most persistent. The officials' emphasis on having an exit-option, explained one official, was inextricably linked to the formal representative system in which politicians were elected for a period of four to five years. Elected representatives were not allowed to 'reign past the period which they were elected for', he said. Putting money into a fund which would then be used for years to come would be contradictory to this democratic principle. There was a way out by using a construction which was already used in other domains, such as the Restoration Fund. If the National Greenfund took care of the financial management, the money would continue to be part of the national budget. That would not jeopardize the principle that governments were not legally authorized to reserve money for a long time period and gain interest from that money in the meantime. From the point of view of the initiative, making one-off investments in a fund to pay for nature-oriented farming was compared with one-off investments in the construction of a road, which was also to be maintained over a long period of time, and hardly reversible. Apart from comments by the one official, however, 'democracy' was hardly an 'issue'. The fund was an issue, but not the underlying principles. Other relevant questions, such as 'is this a desirable way to sustain farming in the vicinity of cities' were not picked up for discussion. On the contrary, the fear was regularly expressed that farms that would otherwise have disappeared were 'kept alive' with nature subsidies. The disappearance of non-viable farms went unquestioned, and there was no support for the idea that such farms should be kept going by government payments for nature- or landscape management.

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<sup>16</sup> The Expert centre later became part of the 'Directorate Knowledge'

Practically, the problem was solved when the Investment Budget for Rural Areas (ILG) was implemented, after years of preparation. This budget was meant to bring together several sectoral policies' financial resources, so that it would become easier to coordinate and integrate various sectoral policies. The ILG was to be implemented by the provinces and financially managed by the National Green Fund. Like the Green Services policy development had accommodated the Biesland initiative in 2003, the ILG provided an 'existing policy' stepping-stone to solve the financial hurdle, even though the timeframe for the Ministries' contribution would be restricted to seven years.

At one point, the researchers organized a meeting at the Ministry to debate dilemmas like the democratic quality of a fund-construction and the 'value' of nature and to compare the 'conditions' philosophy with the 'nature target types' philosophy. Although it had some support and was chaired by a Ministry official, attendance was low and there was no follow-up. The same questions about targeted nature types, costs and controllability came up again at the meeting. However, they were not treated as dilemmas but as questions that had absolute answers which could be found by objective research.

In the meantime there was also admiration for the level of local involvement. An official asked: is it not possible to generate the same amount of local support, financially, for the 'Programma Beheer' (SAN and SN)? The researchers were asked not to resist the operative policy but to present the pilots as a way to implement the existing policy or as an 'addition' to it. At the same time, there was pessimism about the scope for implementing the initiative:

"There is a tension between the enthusiasm of the people who are involved with the initiative at regional level, and the procedural possibilities to really implement the initiative. Expectations should be managed more carefully. Otherwise the Ministry could end up being seen as the bogeyman" (personal communication with an official of the Nature Directorate).

The whole Farming for Nature exercise had become a highly bureaucratic undertaking which was far from the lives of the people in the region. People who were involved in the project in one way or another, or had participated in any of the workshops, were kept informed of the state of affairs by means of a regional newsletter. It was sometimes hard to find topics for the newsletter that were *not* highly bureaucratic. Yet the project group and the researchers wanted to keep everybody informed about what was going on. Later, a general website was launched and anybody could subscribe to an e-newsletter prepared by the researchers.

In the annual 'open days' (taking a weekend), between one and two thousand people visited the farm. On several occasions, the farmer told the visitors about the plans in his own words. He did not use the term 'Farming for Nature' very often, but told a lively story about the achievements so far and his future plans. What the people knew about was the area and the farm, not 'Farming for Nature' in the abstract. Most of the visitors were unaware of the procedural discussions taking place between the bureaus and directorates of the Ministry and the European Commission. All they knew was that the whole enterprise was 'held up' in Brussels. The role of the internal market discourse and the way it maintained a rather strict separation between nature and farming, was not a topic of deliberation.

In the meantime, the members of the project group anticipated a positive decision by the European Commission by preparing the necessary contracts (the troublesome conversations between the provincial official and her 'legal' colleague continued), discussing and preparing a 'monitoring and evaluation system' with various people from the area (results were summarized in three reports 'Stories of Biesland' (Buizer et al. 2004, Ekamper et al. 2006, Westerink et al. 2007); and by discussing other policy matters with the waterboard and the DLG (Government Service for Land and Water Management), mainly about the design of the area and the consequences for the above-mentioned plans of buying part of the land for the realization of the 'Randstadgroenstructuur'.

### *Political lifeline*

At the regional level, the involvement of elected representatives was limited though continuous throughout the process. The councils of Pijnacker-Nootdorp and Delft supported the aldermen's wish to reserve money for the project. On invitation, the farmer and researcher presented the ideas twice in the relevant committee of the municipal council of Pijnacker-Nootdorp. At the provincial level, no representatives were involved. The relative absence of politicians at the regional level continued to bother the farmer, the provincial official and the researchers. If the members of the steering committee did not inform them, how would *they* get them on board? Occasionally, the representatives would visit the farm, for instance on the open days. These opportunities to inform them were seized with both hands, and special VIP meetings were organized during the open days by the Friends. So far, insufficient involvement of representatives was not a problem for the project. It 'survived' the municipal elections of 2006, when three members of the steering committee were replaced.

The fact that the initiative gradually *did* start to be an issue at the Ministry had a lot to do with the role of parliamentarians at national level.

At a critical moment in the process, shortly after the Minister's letter to Parliament of July 2003 (which did not explicitly mention the pilots Farming for Nature because of the legal expert's intervention), the Director General of the Ministry of ANF informed the chairman of the 'Friends of Biesland' that it would be good if the Parliament asked questions through official channels. The chairman subsequently called a researcher to ask which parliamentarians were informed about Farming for Nature. Some of these parliamentarians were asked to apply pressure by asking questions, and soon afterwards they did so. The parliamentary questions helped to set the machinery in motion. By taking these steps, the higher official connected the formal representative system to the regional initiative, and thereby mobilized bureaucracy. On several occasions, the officials at the Nature directorate expressed their uneasiness about the involvement of Members of Parliament – they felt they were put under pressure to put into motion a process which they were doubtful about. The farmer was called by one of them, who thought that the farmer was behind the parliamentary questions, to say that this was not a proper way to deal with the situation. From this moment onwards, political representatives would keep an eye on what was going on.

*The toughest hurdle: "Brussels"*

The second requirement of the Minister, the approval of the European Commission, left its mark on the entire undertaking, not just in terms of time required to receive approval, but also in terms of the eventual contents of the plans.

First of all, it is important to note that the rural policies of the European Union, with the shift from product-related subsidies towards subsidies for agricultural practices that enhance nature, landscape and environment, appeared to match well with the ideas of farming for nature. In terms of nitrates for instance, which had been a problem for the Netherlands in relation to the European norm of 170 kg per hectare, the zero-input system entailed a reduction to far less than 170 kg per hectare in Biesland. In view of the European 'rural' and environmental policy discourses, acceptance of the initiative could hardly pose a problem in the end, the initiators thought.

It was not as easy as that, however. These policies hardly played a role in the arguments that followed. Arguments were mainly about state support to farmers. In order to obtain approval, the initiative had to comply with the European Commission's policy of preventing unfair state support to farmers, which would place the latter in an advantageous position as compared with other farmers in Europe. To prevent distorted competition, compensation would only be allowed for the 'loss of income' that would be the result of the measures taken for nature and landscape. In Brussels

these were called 'environmental measures'. It was quite clear that the farmer would lose a considerable part of his income due to the zero-input principle, which would force him to reduce the size of his herd to about half of what it was in the organic system. To compute the exact loss of income sounded easier than it was: 'Loss' in comparison with what kinds of farm? In Brussels the term 'reference farms' was used: these were regular farms from within the region that complied with the European environmental standards. What would happen if the 'reference farms' came off badly in a few years time? Would that not also be the end for the nature-oriented farm? In the rapidly urbanizing region of the Biesland farm, it seemed likely that farms would continue to disappear. Farmers were already hardly able to keep their heads above water by means of conventional, intensive types of farming. This was due to the 'natural handicaps' in the landscape (high water level, dense pattern of ditches) and the lack of possibilities to expand the farm in the vicinity of the city, which made land scarce and expensive. And what if the general European environmental standards were raised? Would that also mean that part of the payment for Farming for Nature would be annulled? An alternative way to survive was to combine farming with other income-generating activities, such as a campsite, restaurants, day care for children or the elderly, etcetera. In contrast to these activities, it was difficult to find a paying 'market' for far-reaching on-farm nature conservation and development, which did not generate secure and sufficient income under the operative policy. Clearly, therefore, to combine farming and nature management throughout the farm enterprise remained a difficult challenge.

Despite the problems of calculating the amount of the payments on the basis of 'loss of income' in comparison with reference farms, the initiators chose to give in to this requirement. Besides, the alternative computation basis previously thought out by the researchers, namely to base it on the price of land, also appeared to have disadvantages. The 'loss of income' requirement had been presented by the European Commission and the Ministry of ANF as a non-negotiable.

The initiators chose to make use of a complex computation model that had also been used to underpin the state support test for the existing policy Programma Beheer (SAN and SN), the operative Dutch policy for agrarian nature management. The model's purpose was to compute 'loss of income' resulting from farm practices geared to achieving nature targets, because for the European Commission, only a computation of 'loss of income' as compared with 'reference farms' would legitimize payments for changed farm practices. Chances of success in applying for state support were estimated to be higher if the amount of compensation was underpinned on the basis of the model, which was already known in Brussels. So again, the

materials of existing policy were used to realize a breakthrough. There were frequent contacts between the person responsible for the technical basis of the model calculations (an official of the DLG) and the provincial official, the farmer, and the researchers. The DLG official supported the ideas and took time to try to explain the negotiation process to those with less insight into the complex technical calculations, such as the provincial official, the farmer and the researchers. His most-repeated argument to assure progress was that he could apply the model in many different ways. In terms of the amount of the justified compensation, he said he could always get what he wanted out of the computations. He repeated this viewpoint in various meetings, including at the European Commission. Meanwhile, he was the only person who knew enough about the complex model to engage in the discussions with the European Commission, so if he was out of the country the negotiations would have to be suspended. He himself was concerned about that situation and expressed his moral objections. There was a risk, he said, that there would be nobody within his service who could understand the computations in five years time, when he himself would probably retire. Who would make sure, he asked at one of the meetings, that there would not be a dramatic fall in income at that time?

Discussions about these issues took place far from the Polder, even though occasionally the farmers, officials of ANF, the provincial official and researchers would meet to discuss progress and the legal expert at the Ministry made an effort to communicate results of the meetings in Brussels to the representatives of the province and to the researchers. While there was open communication at this level, decision-making had now fallen into the hands of European Commission officials and the legal experts of the Ministry. In a way, they had the future of the project in their hands. The computations and legal formulations which formed part of their language were hardly understood by others. In January 2005, the official request for state support was submitted for the first time.

One and a half years later, in July 2006, more than two years after the legal experts of the Ministry of ANF started work on the 'dossier', and more than four years after the start of the activities in the Polder and involvement of policy officials from the Ministry, the European Commission granted approval (but see the section on 'a changed plan' for the restrictions that accompanied this approval). All the parties involved, including the Ministry, were quick to bring out press releases, pointing at the success that they had achieved in Brussels.



*A changed plan*

In the end, approval for the measures was accompanied by restrictions. Two of these have already been mentioned: the computation basis for the amount of the compensatory payments (loss of income rather than the price of the land), and the duration of the fund. In the end, 'Brussels' granted approval for only ten years, four more years than in the operative policy. When Farming for Nature was embedded in the ILG, financial commitment was 'cut' into terms of seven years. But neither a timespace of ten, nor one of seven years was in line with the ideas behind the initiative: a longer time span was needed in view of 1) the irreversibility of the transformation of the farming system (which farmers would not opt for without a long-term perspective of financial compensation); 2) the time required for nature to develop; and 3) the mechanism of the fund which had to guarantee income from interests. A shorter-term arrangement would require a relatively higher input to guarantee the required return on investment. The European Commission also decided that there would have to be an evaluation after five years to assess whether the compensatory payments would still reflect the difference in income between the nature-oriented farm and the 'reference farms'. For the farmer who would adjust his farming system so drastically and irreversibly, this limitation of the approval to ten years, and the evaluation after five years was a big concession. What if the 'reference farms' proved unable to keep up their incomes?

A third setback was the decision not to allow the proposed payments for preserving *existing* landscape elements. The European Commission assumed the latter to be already protected by restrictive rules in the field of spatial planning and so payment for these was not allowed, even if the gradual but steady disappearance of ditches, small groups of trees or wooded banks was hardly a secret.

Fourthly, the set-up involving a regional foundation was not approved. According to the legal experts, the foundation was given too many powers. This would make it effectively a 'ZBO' (Autonomous Administrative Body), which they considered undesirable. Their reasons for this remained hazy.

Part of the contents of the final decision of the European Commission ([http://ec.europa.eu/community\\_law/state\\_aids/agriculture-2005/n058-05.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/community_law/state_aids/agriculture-2005/n058-05.pdf)) illustrates the way in which the initiators on the one hand and the legal and European officials on the other talked at cross-purposes. The decision included an overview of 'Management packages' under the Programma Beheer, complete with projected percentages of land per package. A management package is a SAN-term; it contains a list of the nature objectives to be achieved, the characteristics of the terrain and management prescriptions. Deciding which percentage of the land would

become meadow, hayfield or wheat field presupposed exact prior knowledge of the proportions of types of land the zero-input system would require. Yet, in the philosophy of the zero-input system, such knowledge could only be developed in the course of the new way of farming. Only after some time would it become clear how many hectares of wheat field for instance would be required to keep the cows healthy, and even then the situation would probably be continuously changing. So the decision to 'approve' the Farming for Nature measures included elements which were in contradiction with its' basic principles. As had happened on several previous occasions, the formulation was changed to fit with existing policy, this time by the officials of the European Commission.

### *Perseverance required*

This 'procedural' side of the process required tremendous perseverance by the people involved, especially those who had been involved from the beginning onwards. The procedural discussions mainly took place a long way from the Polder. Meanwhile, the farmer anticipated approval by adjusting his farm strategy, but he also followed other roads to improve the position of his farm. For instance, he started to sell organic meat on the farm, and to promote his product via his own website. He also collaborated with a tea and lunchroom in the city centre of Delft to sell and promote his meat. The website of the Friends provided the same information. While the farm family needed to be patient, these extra activities made them less dependent on the outcome of the entire process. Officials from the Municipality, and particularly from the Province, realized they couldn't stop the train, and they didn't always feel as comfortable about this as they had in the early days. Less perseverance was required from most of the ANF personnel: due to frequent personnel transfers, most of them were only involved in the project for a short period of time. In the end, the previously mentioned official of the Regional Directorate East (who felt 'a father' of the idea) appeared to be the only 'constant factor' in the Ministry over the years. All the other officials changed desks in the course of the process, sometimes more than once per year. For one directorate, six officials in succession had to be taught the ropes in the space of five years. The 'stayers', such as most members of the project group and the steering committee, were concerned that interest would 'ebb away'. The promised funding needed to be reserved, politicians, changing aldermen and other politically appointed administrators needed to be informed and sometimes convinced, the farmer needed to remain positive (which was not a problem due to his character) and the local people who had committed themselves to activities needed to be kept 'on board' for as long as it took to get the approval from the European Commission. Without interruption, the Friends of Biesland continued their activities and focused on other things, such as the future design of parts of the polder, the renovation of an old

barn or the education of school children. For the researchers, the acquisition of budgets for the research activities continued to be a laborious undertaking each year, since the multi-disciplinary expertise required had to be financed through several different research programs. They had to respond to the doubts expressed about the amount of money requested, not just by the Ministry but also by the program leaders in the research institutes.

### *Two pilots, full stop*

Perhaps the most important restriction was that approval was only valid for the two 'pilot areas'<sup>17</sup>. The farming for nature approach had initially been intended for inclusion in the "Catalogue of Green and Blue Services". Provinces had taken the lead in creating the Catalogue with a view to streamlining and coordinating application procedures for state support. It consisted of maximum allowed compensations for specific nature and landscape measures. It would make it easier for funding governments to compose their own set of allowable measures, for which they no longer had to pass the state support procedure because the Catalogue as a whole would already have been submitted for approval in Brussels. Moreover, apart from the Programma Beheer, the measures were to be applied outside the Main Ecological Structure. They would therefore also require additional, non-state financing because areas outside the Main Ecological Structure were considered as the responsibility of regional government and non-government institutions. For some time, the perspective of being included in the Catalogue offered opportunities for wider implementation. However, the Farming for Nature approach was left out of the catalogue, a decision which excluded other farmers or areas from implementing the approach. Similar initiatives would have to go through the same lengthy European procedure – if they got the chance at all. Thus, while the Catalogue met the streamlining purposes of the initiating provinces, it also served as a restrictive frame. Initiatives that did not fit within the Catalogue would have to try to get it adjusted during its (projected) annual evaluation, and if they did not succeed, the Ministry would not any longer make a special effort to submit separate proposals.

Closer inspection of the catalogue shows, as said, that it was mainly composed of elements of the measures that were already part of operative policy. Its innovative character lay mainly in the overview of allowed measures (rather than predefined packages of measures), the possibility for

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<sup>17</sup> A few months later it appeared that the approval for Twickel was not valid. The dairy farm computations still had to be adapted to match with sheep farms. Late autumn 2008 approval for Twickel was granted as well.

funding agencies to compose their own set of possible measures, and its application outside the Main Ecological Structure.

### *Party*

On the day of the provincial elections in March 2007, a party was nevertheless organized in the Polder to celebrate the fact that a project could be implemented at last. More than 150 people gathered in a party tent at the farm yard. A big window at the front of the tent offered a view of the cows in the barn. They had been placed on piles of hay to make them visible to the entire audience. A lot of the people who had been involved in one way or another were present. The newly-appointed Minister made a supportive speech (her maiden speech!) in which she emphasized the positive relationship between city and countryside and the opportunities for urban children to learn a bit about farming practices and the origin of their food. This was another illustration of how the undertaking was placed in a new light by the new Minister. Her predecessor would probably have emphasized his 'from acquisition to management' priority. From the Minister's weblog (March 9<sup>th</sup>):

There is good cooperation in Delfgauw as well. Here I opened the initiative 'Farming for Nature'. The farmer and his wife farm in a natural way, initiated by a big group of urban dwellers and their administrators. Urban dwellers are friends of the 'Biesland' farm. Children can obtain a farming diploma if they show that they can milk a cow, feed a calf or lay straw. It would be great if next year I met a group of youngsters in Delft and Rotterdam, wearing a t-shirt with the text 'I am proud to be a farmer'. As I have already written, cities and ANF have a lot to offer to each other.

Officially, the celebration was about the regional-national collaboration that had made a new type of farming possible, and the European Commission's approval of it. Few of the people present knew how the plan had been changed to get it through the bureaucracies. As far as they were concerned, they might have been celebrating the implementation of the blend of ideas created in 2002. Nor did many of them have any idea of the scope and intensity of the activities that had been necessary to reach the implementation stage, compared to the scope of the provisional approval of the measures (one farmer in one polder). These are of course subjective matters, but the point here is that neither the meaning of the changes *nor* the relation between effort and result were explicitly discussed at any point.

## ***4.5 Interpretation***

### ***4.5.1 Origin of the initiative in the context of existing policy***

This section addresses my first research question about the origin of the initiative and how it related to the then existing policy.

In section 4.3, I described how the initiative evolved from two sources. In the first place, the initiative originated in the activities of a nature volunteer and a farmer in the 'Biesland upper polder'. Officials of the municipality of Delft stimulated the two to make a nature-friendly plan for the upper polder. On this condition, the farmer was allowed to lease the land from the municipality. The farmer and the volunteer also collaborated to prevent acquisition of part of the farmland (in the lower polder) for nature development by the State Forest Service. The second source of the initiative was the vision of 'Farming for Nature', which had grown from a 'strategic expertise' development project at a research institute. Both these initiatives had strong institutional anchors: the first in struggle about land acquisition and in a fruitful collaboration with a municipality, the second in a stable research environment with strong historical links with the Ministry of ANF. It is important to be aware of these 'institutional roots', because actors with less prior 'institutional knowledge' may have been less knowledgeable about the possibilities for introducing their ideas into the various policy-making processes. The initiators in this case knew in advance that they would have to operate at various levels, if only to acquire the necessary funds. That knowledge did not deter them from trying to realize their ambitions, even though they also knew that these diverged strongly from operative policies, in terms of both contents and organization.

In terms of the international context of what was happening in the polder, world market agreements between governments were becoming increasingly influential, as was the role of European rules in preventing state-caused distortion of competition. However, the initiators were not at first very conscious of the possible influence of these wider trends on their plans. The actors involved certainly did not think of the possibility that the fate of their ideas for this specific area (which was not part of a European 'greenstructure'), would eventually have to be decided in Brussels – and then, not on the basis of its consequences for nature, but on the basis of the risk it entailed of distorting competition in an agricultural market.

In more abstract terms: this social action came about under structural conditions of which the actors involved were only partially aware. They

were not aware of the consequences of the free market philosophy. However, they did have experience of the other structural condition that influenced the development of their ideas: the sectoral approach to both agriculture and nature in mainstream policy, which had previously made it hard for them to connect the two in the way they wanted to. State ambitions to acquire land for forest development had even given rise to conflict and an impasse.

#### ***4.5.2 Discourse, actors, rules and resources***

This section deals with the second question: How do discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy?

##### *Three discourses*

The foregoing told the story of a situation that can be described in terms of discourses that are dynamic yet clearly discernable. Three discourses can be discerned, involving three partly overlapping coalitions. In the first place there were *two* different discourses that reinforced each other. The first of these discourses departed from the idea of separating real nature or recreation nature from agriculture and cities. Greenstructures would have to be created to safeguard nature, and to function as a 'buffer' against urbanization. The idea of make-ability of nature was linguistically captured in a term like 'structure' and 'nature target types'. These terms implied practices such as acquisition of farmland and the transformation of these into 'parks' or forests. Even though the policy domain had changed a bit in recent years so that farmers were more often considered as potential 'nature managers' for specific types of nature, the main characteristics of this strongly institutionalized discourse did not change. It was employed at various levels of government. I call it the 'greenstructure discourse'.

There was a second, at first sight rather different discourse in play in relation to the initiative. I call it the 'internal market discourse', and its roots were mainly at world and European level. The degree to which this discourse was institutionalized is clear from the foregoing story itself: an initiative involving one hundred hectares that had support from the local level to the parliamentary and Ministerial levels required a procedure taking over two and a half years (including preparations at the Ministry in the Netherlands) to get the approval of the European Commission. The internal market discourse insisted that state-supported market distortion should be prevented. Violations of the internal market principle were so frequent that the European Commission was very wary of attempts by governments to support 'their' agricultural sector in an indirect way. The Biesland initiative was a victim of this wariness, even though the actors could not at first imagine how their initiative could cause unfair

competition if the livestock and income from dairy farming were to be halved as a consequence of the proposed measures. Moreover, another 'rural development' discourse at European level, emphasizing environmental measures taken by farmers, suggested that the initiative matched well with European policy. This discourse did not manifest itself in the process, however. It was the internal market discourse and its accompanying procedures that 'ruled the game'.

Within this context of strongly institutionalized discourses<sup>18</sup>, the Biesland initiative represented a third discourse that was geared to integrating agriculture and nature across the board on the farm. The discourse implied a belief that farming and nature objectives *could* be integrated, and form the basis for an attractive landscape in an urban environment, to be managed by farmers. In this latter view, nature could not be 'controlled' by setting targets, but would be preserved and well-managed if the right conditions were created. Also, nature, landscape, water management and an attractive recreational environment were considered as assets that farmers could earn an income with, even if these 'assets' were very different from the farm products that they marketed at national, European or world level. In this view, it would depend on regional recognition whether sufficient support and resources could be mobilized to pay farmers for these 'services'. 'Biesland' integrated the various ways in which meaning was attributed to the area. I therefore call this the 'Biesland discourse' or the 'Farming for Nature' discourse. The coalition that came into being in relation to this broader Biesland discourse could be described as a looser, networked form of political mobilization that connected the farmer, nature volunteers, researchers, politicians and policy makers at the regional level. Despite a growing coalition supporting the initiative, the Biesland, or Farming for Nature discourse had considerably weaker institutional anchors than the other two in terms of rules upholding it and resources allocated to it.

These, then, were the discourses in play. It was not the contents of the policy vocabularies themselves that seemed to put up barriers. Indeed, the case exemplifies how they could coexist. *Through* the attached rules and resources however, the first two discourses both put up barriers to governments paying farmers for their efforts for nature, landscape, water or other public functions, in spite of the presence of a broad supportive coalition. The internal market discourse entailed that payments were only allowed to the extent that the national government that wanted the

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<sup>18</sup> I have already explained how 'existing policy' was not static itself – two examples of how 'existing policy' changed are the emphasis on 'from acquisition to management' and the elaboration of the 'green services' concept.

measures was able to prove that the level of payments did not create unfair competition with other farmers. Proving this was a complex matter, however, mainly because a far-reaching integration of agricultural and nature-oriented activities at farm level, which would more or less halve income from farming, had not been raised at the European decision-making level before the Biesland case, at least not by the Dutch government. So far, the measures that were approved of could be carried out in *addition* to mainstream business-activities. The entire way of thinking among the officials and 'calculators' dealing with the matter was oriented towards complementary measures, not integration. Because of this difference, the potential innovation had to go through a complex process of modelling and calculating.

In the greenstructure discourse, in its turn, farmers were only recognized as nature-managers to a limited extent. Basically, there were two options: the farmers could apply limited nature activities on the fringe of their farm, or they could choose to transform their farm into 'nature', but then it would not be a 'farm' anymore. The latter option implied that commercial farming activities were ruled out and that the land would have to be designated as 'nature' in the municipal land use plans. For farmers willing to continue farming in a 'nature-oriented way', this was not an option as they would still earn half of their income by selling their farm products. Just like the internal market discourse, the parameters of this discourse hampered a far-reaching integration of agriculture and nature at farm level.

In sum, the Biesland case showed that despite the gradual change in operative policy discourse and a related change in policy vocabulary, a drastic integration of farm and nature-oriented practices was still a long way off.

In the process, there were moments when the existing arrangements opened up for the initiative, and moments when they closed again. The case study revealed these moments, which are summarized in the following.

For the farmer and his allies one such 'opening' that improved their chances of realizing their ideas was the involvement of the researchers. Together, they got access to the Ministry and were able to generate regional support. A second opening was the positive reaction of the Minister himself, for whom the combination of farming and nature matched well with his new policy 'from land acquisition towards management' (by farmers). The pilot status and the link with the Green Services policy development were additional 'openings' that promised a future for the initiatives on a larger scale than Biesland and Twickel. Within the region, the support of 'Friends', officials, and members of the Steering committee provided



openings, too. At times, the farmer also created openings through specific actions such as personally contacting a high-level ANF official who could in turn mobilize the member of the Provincial Executive who was hesitant about participating. Political support from members of the Parliament further increased the pressure on the Ministry to look for ways to implement the ideas.

Looking again at these openings from the perspective of discourse, coalitions, resources and rules, different types of openings can be discerned.

- a *discursive* opening in the Minister's new approach 'from acquisition towards management' and the 'Green Services';
- an opening due to growth or use of the *coalition*: the farmer and the nature volunteer, the researchers, the Minister, the regional coalition at municipal and supra-municipal level, and the involvement of a wider group of citizens through the 'Friends';

These two were conspicuous transformations. On the 'resources' side, there were also episodes that facilitated the alternative ideas

- research budget was acquired from ANF and the province; there was regional commitment to establishing a fund; there was collaboration with the Green Fund to make the fund possible; legitimacy was gained by the activities of the 'Friends of Biesland'.

Most of these were existing resources that were successfully mobilized to support the regional vision, while some of them were new, such as legitimacy gained through the friends.

The combination of these three types of opening – discursive shifts, the formation of a new coalition and the mobilization of resources – enabled the actors to exert a certain degree of power. They were able, for instance, to obtain access to important decision-makers such as the Minister and the European Commission.

The openings seemed almost to create the perfect conditions to 'move mountains in the nerve centres' of government, in Beck's words (Beck 1994: 23). But, as the story demonstrates, what happened was something else.

When it came to rules (formal and informal norms, laws to regulate behaviour), and standard ways in which resources were allocated, the ideas met with barriers that were difficult to overcome. In fact, during the period that I experienced and studied what happened in Biesland, actors were not able to create significant changes in the ways in which rules set the limits of their behaviour, or to significantly influence the way in which resources were distributed. So, the plan for the Biesland Forest was not changed after

all, and the approval of the EU was limited to the one area<sup>19</sup>. The undertaking remained an 'exception to the rule'.

One of the innovative dimensions of the initiative was that it connected a great many people and organizations, and encompassed their diverse ways of looking at the landscape. The organizational structure of the Ministry and the way things were generally looked at there did not match this many-sidedness, however. When the Ministry decided that the directorate for Nature would be the key directorate to deal with and pay for the initiative, the relatively narrowly defined rules and procedures on nature policy started to dominate progress in the project. From then, discussions between the initiators and ANF were dominated by the questions 'will the nature target types be realized', 'at what cost?' and 'why not use the existing policy?' The focus was on the sector that the middle-level officials were formally responsible for; questions and issues outside their sectoral brief were not raised.

At this middle level of the bureaucracy, which appeared to be crucial to the success of the project, a process of 'narrowing' took place, with discussions dominated by a procedural or instrumental discourse related to the more macro-discourses that I have labelled greenstructure discourse and internal market discourse. The main issues were how the initiative related to existing rules and if and how resources were going to be spent on them. Strict rules reigned in both the nature and the internal market domains. Both were characterized by clearly defined, scientifically established norms: nature target types and numbers of hectares and loss of income. Thus, the initiative ran into a 'sectoral' policy bias and a 'procedural' bias.

A picture emerges of two separate worlds. One world at the state and European policy level in which procedural arguments stood centre stage and in which the initial ideas were gradually reframed in order to match better with standard procedures, and another world at the concrete level of the farm and the area. Here, various activities made the ideas more and more part of a number of people's daily lives. Middle-level officials were the 'voice' of the rules that the initiative gradually complied with. In most cases, the middle-level officials had little or no experience of the area. For the initiators, it was hard to 'get through to them', and they only managed to talk to them on a few occasions.

### *Structuring and Stabilization*

The fact that a coalition emerged in relation to an upcoming discourse did not mean that it was institutionalized. In terms of the 'structuring'-concept

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<sup>19</sup> Approval for the measures at the Twickel country estate was granted in November 2007.

that was presented in chapter two, meaning the development of “a certain degree of order in the social domain” (Peper 1972), there were clear examples:

- the regular pattern of meetings of the project group and a steering committee,
- the organization of the Friends of Biesland,
- the various websites that gave expression to the ideas and
- the sessions to establish ‘interactive’ monitoring and evaluation.

These structuring activities give the impression of an arrangement in-the-making. The discourse and the level of organization of the discourse coalition at the Biesland level could coexist with existing policy discourse and coalitions. The Biesland discourse and coalition even coalesced with recent changes in state policy, such as the Green Services policy development and the policy ‘from acquisition to management’. However, when the second dimension of institutionalization processes, stabilization, is considered, another picture emerges. The arrangement in-the-making is hampered by rules and resources connected to the nature or ‘greenstructure’ discourse. As a result, the continuation or preservation of the initiative is uncertain. For the time being, the ‘arrangement’ remains a regional affair and is restricted to a time limit; it is impossible to predict whether this will change. The existing arrangement included several obstacles to the institutionalization of the initiative, leading to an imbalance or incongruence between structuring and stabilization.

### *Becoming a lookalike*

In reaction to this situation, as the story reveals, the initiative gradually changed to become more of a lookalike of operative policy. Although the principle of being paid for the zero-input farming system was preserved in the end, the initiative was distinctly less innovative once it had gone through the confrontation with existing policy. The restriction of the ‘approval’ to Biesland (and Twickel a year and a half later) was perhaps the most important restriction. When we analyse the differences and the results of the confrontation between policy and the initiative, the following scheme emerges.

<b>Operative policy</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Outcome of confrontation</b>
"Green" should be in the hands of nature organisations. These only are strong enough to protect open landscapes against urbanization. This policy changed somewhat with the strategy 'from acquisition towards management'.	Agriculture is also a potential ally of the city dweller, in the protection of the open landscape.	Both discourses and related discourse coalitions coexist
Nature organizations best-equipped to safeguard 'real nature' on what should be <i>their</i> land. (Changed somewhat with strategy 'from acquisition towards management')	Farmers are well able to safeguard nature on their own land, especially nature values related to historic cultural landscapes	Both discourses and related discourse coalitions coexist
Agriculture and nature separate: nature measures on the farm are a supplement to common, intensive farming practices	Agriculture and nature integrated across the board on the farm. Farming and nature management go hand in hand by means of 'zero-input-farming system'.	Both discourses and related discourse coalitions coexist, but for the time being European Union and ANF rules prevent wider implementation than in one area.
Create nature target types	Create conditions	Initiative uses nature target types to convince policy makers
Six-year contracts: - politicians should not reign beyond the period that they were elected for - it should be possible to hold politicians accountable for what they have invested in	Long term – contracts: - nature needs time to develop - change farming system irreversible - fund generates more income when it is long term	Initiators have no choice but to comply with the formal rule of the game that contracts cannot be made for a period longer than 7 years
Subsidies, farmers apply for measures every six years	Investment (large lump sum) into fund, pay farmers an income from interests (rather than a subsidy)	Fund is created when it can be combined with the new ILG policy, meaning that grants from various public sources can be combined in one fund, but it is not a long term fund (see above).
National government/ EU subsidize agrarian nature management	Regional parties, national government/ EU pay part of the income of farmers	Regional parties contribute as well: more providers of resources
'Management contract' connected to the person, for limited period of time	'Servitude' contract connected to the land, for a long period of time.	'Qualitative liability' contract connected to the land, for a long period of time
Existing policy bodies should be responsible and accountable for implementation	Regional foundation 'close to the people' should be responsible and accountable for implementation	Rules prevent the founding of regional foundation with competences
Democracy requires allowing the changing of decisions on expiry of the mandate of democratically elected persons.	Democracy sometimes implies the making of long-term decisions; landscape is, in that sense, not different from roads.	Democratic dimension is not debated. Two types of measures: long-term rule is established to safeguard nature, short-term security about finances. Rules equivocal.
Base amount of compensation on EU-policy: amount of compensation should be related to "loss of income" in comparison with "reference farms".	Base amount of compensation on price of land, or base it on the amounts that would make the nature-oriented farm financially competitive to alternatives.	Adaptation of initiative in direction of European rule about allocation of resources: loss of income.

The overview shows once more that, in the end, the new discourse and coalition could coexist with existing policy discourses and coalitions.

The new discourse did not spread into mainstream policies however. In the end, the measures are only allowed in Biesland, one farm of 100 hectares. When we look at the organizational dimension, the initiative gradually had to be adapted to the rules and resources of the existing policy in order to be realized. This is clear from the short-term nature of the fund and of the financial compensation, the limited role of the regional foundation, and the translation of objectives to nature target types. Also, operative policy continued to focus on land acquisition – even on the limited scale of the polder itself acquisition targets were not adjusted to the new situation in which the farmer himself was going to realize a lot more nature values. The risk involved in the short-term nature of the financial compensation had to be accepted by the farmer. The governments, on the other hand, reduced their risk by requiring long-term contracts with a qualitative liability to manage the farm on the basis of a zero-input system. At the start of the initiative, nobody had foreseen this incongruence between rights (the short-term financial compensation) and liabilities (maintain the zero-input system in the long run). Thereby, governments provided themselves with an exit option as regards their payments, but did not link it to an exit option for the farmer. It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate whether other farmers than the Biesland farmer will enter into such an agreement. The Biesland farmer signed the contracts mainly because he is an optimistic person. He said:

“I have rock-solid confidence that this will be continued. Time will overtake this. The renewed approval in ten years time will be a formality. What I would find more difficult, is if it remains a possibility for this farm enterprise only”.

The farmer trusted to his capacity and that of his allies to show convincing results. He also had high expectations of the political and societal support he had, which had grown so much that it seemed very unlikely to fail the farmer or the area in the years to come – although only time can tell.

#### ***4.5.3 Structural transformations; depoliticization rather than sub-politicization***

In chapter two I presented Ulrich Beck's sub-politicization thesis, which formed the basis for my third question: Does the case point at a structural transformation of sub-politicization or could other structural transformations be discerned?

I expected sub-politicization to be a relevant structural transformation that would probably play a role in my cases. For the Biesland case tells a story

of an *attempt*, perhaps not to 'shape society', but to 'shape policy' in such a way that a regional idea could be implemented, starting in one farmer's polder. The idea was implemented – albeit in a considerably modified form – in the polder itself, but did not have wider policy implications. The initiative faced considerable difficulties and could not by any stretch of the imagination be said to have 'moved mountains in the nerve centres of development'. Neither could a decrease in the central rule approach be observed. Rather, the initiative became entangled in decision-making at many levels. At the European level, where an internal market discourse prevailed, the initiators themselves did not participate in the deliberations taking place between the national Ministry and the European Commission. In the end, the remote deliberations in Brussels put limits on possibilities to renew the existing arrangement, which remained unaltered.

The difficulties at European level were accompanied by continuing resistance at the Dutch Ministry of ANF. There, resistance concerned doubts about the (long-term) possibilities for farmers to achieve nature target types, the costs in comparison with operative policy for nature management by farmers, and compatibility with laws ('comptabiliteitswet') that prevented governments from making one-off investments in a fund and handing over some authority to a regional foundation. This is important to note in the context of the structural process of Europeanization and the accompanying dominance of the internal market discourse, because in spite of its different nature, the latter seemed to strengthen the objections raised at national level. In the end, it was the European Commission that was referred to as the actor which dictated that agreements had to be restricted to ten years, that existing landscape elements were not to be paid for unless they were designated as nature in municipal zoning schemes (which was a huge psychological barrier and hardly doable for farmers), that the measures had to be restricted to the polder and that the regional foundation was not authorized. The European decision even contained a specification of the nature target types that needed to be achieved in numbers of hectares, an issue that was previously usually decided by the National Nature directorate of ANF. All of this tallied with the objections raised by the Ministry of ANF, discussed above. So, even if 'Brussels' appeared in the end to be the main antagonist of the local ideas, the home-grown objections of the middle-level-officials had thrown up some serious hurdles along the way as well.

The difficulties contrast with the support offered from many different sides: in the region people got organized in the 'Friends of Biesland' and started to mobilize resources; political agreement was reached among aldermen and other administrators; researchers and farmer joined forces; some members of parliament followed the process and took action when it was needed; the

national green fund supported the project with expertise and financial support. The minister also gave his support to the initiative by recognizing it as a pilot project and by promising to provide half of the fund. On the basis of this observation, another hypothesis about a structural transformation can be formulated; namely that Europeanization was accompanied by regionalization.

In the context of the sub-politics thesis, it is important to note that discussions taking place at European level (between the national Ministry and experts of the European Commission) on what would be regionally possible focused on procedural matters, not on underlying principles, 'dominant discourses' or worldviews. Thus, the way in which a real integration of nature and agriculture objectives was hampered by the internal market discourse, for instance, was not a topic for debate. When the process came closer to decision making, discussions took place further from the polder, at the offices of the legal experts or in Brussels. These discussions went over the heads of the local people involved, the many policy officials, and even the researchers. Now these 'Biesland experiences' may suggest an alternative thesis to that of sub-politicization, namely that in complex multi-level decision-making situations, there is a process of depoliticization going on.

In sum, the Biesland case is not a manifestation of sub-politicization. Instead, the case gives rise to the hypothesis that there are parallel processes of Europeanization and regionalization at work. When farming is involved, the European discourse prevails. Opportunities to innovate are limited to those that fit within the internal market discourse. Government paying for nature management by farmers does not fit within that discourse. The deliberations take place at a distance from the area and without the participation of regional stakeholders. They are, moreover, of a highly procedural character. This provides grounds for speaking of a process of depoliticization.

#### ***4.5.4 Space for policy innovation: selective elasticity***

This section will answer my question: what space for policy innovation emerged in the course of the Biesland process?

In terms of coalitions, the above account shows that one can not speak of organizations as unified entities. Coalitions cut across the various organizations involved. The project had allies *and* critics in all organizations. Although discourses could reasonably be distinguished, a specific discourse was not what bound the actors together. Individuals could associate themselves with different discourses at the same time. Also,

while 'Farming for Nature' was the label to indicate the importance attached to a reunion of farming and nature, some actors were 'allied' to the initiative for other reasons, such as keeping the Biesland landscape open.

There appeared to be an incongruence between the development and coexistence of various terms of the discourse and discourse coalitions on the one hand (dynamic), and continued existence of resources and rules of the game on the other hand (stability). Remarkably, the actual contents of what was at stake (in terms of values, interests, opinions) faded into the background and the procedural issues gradually became more important. The latter were often directed at keeping the arrangement as it was. As one official of a regional directorate said:

"it seems that in this case laws and regulations are dominating what is possible, rather than facilitation of the implementation of politically agreed objectives".

Looking purely at the terms of the discourse and the attached coalitions, and ignoring the ways in which resources and rules of the game were related to them, one can observe a gradual 'opening up' of the policy debate. This discursive 'space' meant that the Farming for Nature initiative could play a role both in policy debates and in the Biesland area. It facilitated the transformation of policy making into a broader political effort in which various actors could participate. But when this discursive openness is approached from a perspective that looks at discourse in connection with practices such as the use of rules and the distribution of resources, the discursive openness appears to be rather superficial. The fact that 'Farming for Nature' was drawn into the sectoral corners of nature policy and unfair competition and subsequently had to adopt the language of 'nature target types' and of 'loss of income' shows that the formal policy discourses on nature and the internal market were still dominant, even if not to the extent that the ideas were entirely excluded from the policy debate. Ironically, the fact that total exclusion from the policy debate did not occur was also due to the many dimensions of the vision.

So the picture of relative 'easy' coexistence of discourses changes when one takes a closer look at the policy arrangement, including resources and rules of the game. Studying 'terms of the discourse' and their coalitions without analysing the practices which went along with these terms of the discourse did not tell us much about the actual fate of proposals for policy innovation.

Taking the multi-level character of the decision-making process into account, the picture becomes even more complex, as rules of the game were not congruent at these various levels. The regional ambition to reward farmers more for their role in nature and landscape management was not



in line with the European rule of the game that subjects such ambitions to lengthy procedures in order to limit risks of unfair competition, even if various EU policy documents promoted such a new role for farmers. This illustrates how in this case the multi-level character of the policy domain *stood in the way* of a local policy initiative<sup>20</sup>.

In sum, space for policy innovation in this case was limited to discursive space that was not accompanied by a reconsideration of rules and resources. The latter proved to be rather static, and for this reason the initiative was restricted to one area. So far, the payments for the zero-input farming system have not become an option for other areas and as far as other elements of the initiative were concerned, existing policy has been reproduced rather than changed.

In terms of Archer's scheme:

Structural Conditioning	Social Interaction	Structural Elaboration
Dominant idea is that realization of nature is to be done mainly by nature organizations. Rules and resources are geared to achieve that objective.	Attempts to challenge the dominant vision – formation of new coalitions, new ideas for the area.	Approval of the ideas but only in a radically changed form, which is a lookalike of policy as it was before social interaction took place.

## ***4.6 The relational dimension and my own positionality***

### ***4.6.1 The relational dimension***

The story showed how socio-psychological and relational factors such as perseverance, trust, empathy and flexibility contributed considerably to the atmosphere among the initiators and their endurance. A relationship based on mutual trust grew up between the 'Friends of Biesland' and the researchers, who shared their personal feelings with each other. They brainstormed about how the Friends and 'Farming for Nature' were related, how they differed, and how the two could convey their messages in a coherent way. The provincial official and the farmer participated in those discussions. In the course of the process, a relationship of mutual trust had also grown between the latter. An example that was not included in the

<sup>20</sup> In this context we should also refer to the examples of local groups making direct use of European legislation to resist government decisions, such as the construction of a road in areas designated for nature under the Habitats directive, or in areas where rare plant- or animal species can be found. Further research is needed to assess to what extent and in what ways the 'multi-level' character of policymaking hampers *or* promotes a renewal of policy arrangements.

story may illustrate this. One evening the provincial official had to defend a policy of reducing subsidies to a room full of farmers. The Biesland farmer stood up and forcefully voiced his criticism of the new policy. The morning after the heated discussion, the farmer called the official. They talked for over an hour about the meeting (and the farmer apologized for his aggressive questions), and about the 'open days' that he and the 'Friends of Biesland' were going to organize at his farm. The incident at the information evening had done no harm to their cooperation. The provincial official offered to help on both 'open days' (in a weekend). They could only deal with each other like this *because* they had experiences that bound them together. Each knew what the other was up to. In a comparable way, trust grew with the officials of the regional directorates of ANF. Their presence during the meetings and their growing role as intermediaries between the Polder and the policy-making level created a feeling that 'the Ministry' was also moving to make things work. This was much harder in the case of people who were not present at the meetings but still had a say in decision-making about the future of the project.

It was also to establish these 'real contacts' between people that the project focused so much on creating these 'meeting moments'. The practice of meeting in the Polder can be presented as 'rules of the game', as a sort of 'strategic' tool to make the plan work, but it was much more than that. It generated a situation in which people could openly communicate and reach each other at an emotional level.

At the 'formal' occasions at which a lot of people would come to the farm, ways were invented to turn these occasions into memorable events. For example, the cows are present at the location at which the events were organized, and one cow brings in the papers that need to be signed.

These are details that are not necessarily noticed when looking from the perspectives of discourse, actors, resources or rules of the game. Also, the direct relevance of these details for how the interaction between initiative and established policy evolved is difficult to assess. However, they had an impact and people continued to refer to them for a long time. The parties at the farm yard, with the cows visible 'on location', were also a symbol of the polder. They seemed to say: this is not an ordinary formality at which papers need to be signed; this formality has to do with the future of the farm. The cows were an expression of this. It is difficult, however, to connect them to one of the four dimensions. They were an *actor*-characteristic: an expression of the creativity of the organizers of the party. They were also a symbol, forming part of the farming and nature *discourse*. And they were a *resource* for introducing an element of humour into the formal setting, as well as an expression of the regional coalitions' *rule of the game* that people should be able to experience the area.

In view of the above I think it would be useful to add a dimension. The relational dimension refers to the socio-psychological characteristics of actors that influence their behaviour in specific contexts. It also refers to the use of symbols by means of which people wish to give expression to their values. The relational dimension also draws explicit attention to how people build up trust, anger, friendship, etcetera. Those emotions play a role in confrontations between local initiatives and existing policy, and I feel they deserve explicit attention in addition to the four dimensions of discourse, coalitions, rules and resources.

#### ***4.6.2 Positioning the researcher***

A second aspect of the relational dimension is the position of the analyst. I realize that this story is involuntarily coloured by my own position and perspective as 'co-owner' of the Farming for Nature idea. I wish here to reflect on that position somewhat more critically than I have so far. In the capacity of 'involved researcher', I emphasized, for instance, the time it took before the European Commission granted its approval. From the perspective of the European Commission, however, it was reasonable and in line with the operative rules to see to it that excessive compensatory payments for nature management by farmers should be prevented. Since my focus was on how that philosophy and rule influenced the future of a regional initiative, that part of the story did not get any attention. Similarly, the rapid turnover of personnel at the Ministry of ANF was perhaps frustrating for us as researchers and people involved from the region, whereas for the Ministry it was a way to prevent officials from developing too strong personal ties with certain policy domains and to promote the broadening of experience among personnel. Because of my personal involvement, the story may also be coloured at times by some of my own feelings, although I tried to avoid this. I do not want to hide however that I felt frustrated at times and relieved at others. That was 'part of the deal' – being so close to actual practice brought an in-depth insight into the how of power, but it also brought occasional sleepless nights. I am of the opinion that those feelings matter in action research. But it is also the responsibility of a reflective practitioner to be open about his or her positionality and to reflect on it. That does not make the project less scientific, but puts the story and the interpretation into perspective for the reader.

It is for these reasons that I wish to share my feelings during the time of the provisional 'end of the project', which was in fact the real beginning of the zero-input system in the Polder of Biesland. At the party in Spring 2007, someone came up to me and said: "this can only be done here". It gave expression to something that had been troubling my conscience for a while.

The time between initiative and approval had been so long, the time and energy invested in the area had been so much, and the amount of money invested in research and other activities had been more than many farmers could dream of. Of course, I say to myself, there are immeasurable results: the general attention for the area and its openness will make it very difficult for anybody to allocate it for housing, for instance. I would require a separate research to find out about all the direct and indirect effects of the efforts. But the entire 'discussion' with Brussels, the official preparations, the many hurdles, the investments: how should these be looked at when "this can only be done here"? At this point, these questions express how I feel about the undertaking, and I hope to be in a position soon to raise the questions:

- what does this experience mean for us?
- what should be done next?
- how can the issues that remained hidden, such as the dominance of the 'European' internal market discourse and its influence on options in a polder, be politicized again?

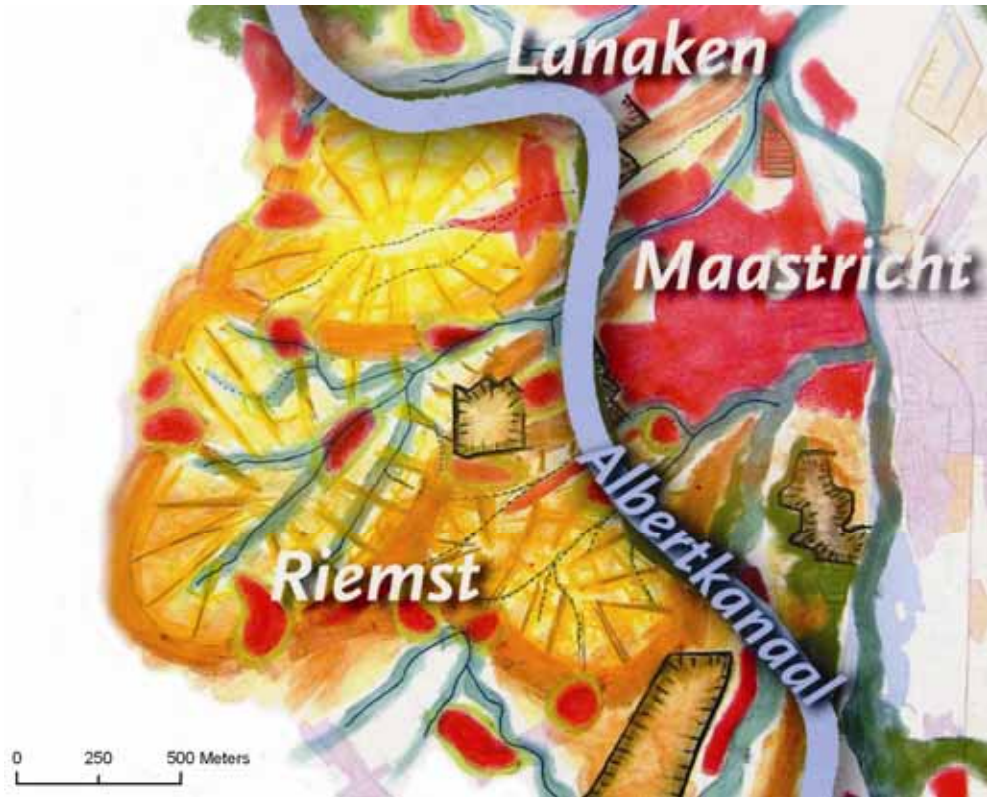
## Chapter 5: Transcending boundaries at the Dutch-Belgian border

### *5.1 Introduction*

This chapter is about the ‘Grensschap Albertkanaal’, or the ‘Grensschap’ for short, a cross-border area in the South of the Netherlands and the North-East of Belgium. The area, which obtained its name only in 2003, will be described in section 5.2, mainly by use of maps and pictures. Section 5.3 summarizes operative policy on the area. The policy density with respect to the Grensschap area was considerably less than in the Biesland case, at least in terms of ‘green’ policies. Rather, the *development* of such policy was an objective of the city administration when they organized and engaged in an ‘interactive event’. Section 5.4 tells my story of this event and of how it caused citizens and officials from both sides of the Belgian-Dutch border to get organized and make attempts to influence decision-making. This group called themselves the Grensschap, too. Section 5.5 contains again an interpretation of the story by means of the research questions:

1. What was the origin of the initiative, in this case the Grensschap, and how did it relate to then existing arrangements?
2. How did discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between the initiative and existing policy?
3. Does the case point to a structural transformation of sub-politicization or can other structural transformations be discerned?
4. What space for policy innovation emerged in the course of the Grensschap-process?

Section 5.6 works out other dimensions or conditions (besides discourse, actors, resources and rules coming up during the research) which influenced the interplay of the local ideas and government policy, and the positionality of the researcher.



*Map 4: The Grensse area*

Map by the Grensse



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*Aerial photograph 2: The Grensschap*





*Urban fringe*



*Building activities and farmland*



*New housing area with path*



*Agricultural activities and sunken lane*



*Boundary pole and industry at the back*



*'Albertkanaal' (Albert channel)*



## ***5.2 The area***

The Western urban fringe of Maastricht, or (from a less city-centric perspective) the area around the 'Albertkanaal' *in between* the municipality of Maastricht and the Belgian municipalities Riemst and Lanaken (respectively c. 120.000, 16.000 and 25.000 inhabitants in 2006), is multifaceted. The 'Kanaalzone' as it was usually called because of the straight, steep-sided canal going through the area, consists of hundreds of hectares of arable farms, loam quarries, rolling hills, 'hollow sandy roads', a golf course, and several places with a view of industry and housing (either new housing development, three storey maisonettes from the seventies, or apartment blocks). The Albertkanaal itself is located on the Belgium side of the border. There is a pulp and paper factory on the canal on the Lanaken side, and a narrow strip of Belgian territory on the other side with a factory that produces filters for cigarettes. Four windmills were built on this strip of land in 2005. To the north of the area is the 'Zouwdal' (Zouw valley), a 160-hectare valley, 60 hectares of which are projected to be turned into housing and industry (Lanakerveld). At the center is the 'Hezerwaterbasin' and to the South-East the 'Vroenhovenbasin'.

## ***5.3 Operative policy: economic opportunities beat the drum***

Unlike other areas around Maastricht, until a few years ago, the landscape qualities of the 'kanaalzone' *as a whole* had not received much attention from the urban administrations, except for individual projects such as the renewal of the Dousberg recreation park or the development of the 'Lanakerveld' industrial site on the Dutch side, and the further development of the 'Europark' industrial zone on the Belgian side. In that sense, the area was different from areas such as Jekerdal and Sint Pietersberg in the South, which were both internationally recognized as Natura 2000 sites for their nature values, or a 'Belvedere'-area in the Northwest of Maastricht, which had obtained special status due to its potential for housing and enterprise development in a green environment. Perhaps because of the kanaalzone's location on a frontier, and because of the kinds of activities taking place there, the area was not defined in municipal policies as particularly 'special' in terms of nature or cultural values. Instead, it was viewed as a potential area for expansion of industry or housing. Both Dutch and Belgian provinces approached the area mainly as one with potential for industrial development. In view of these plans,

Maastricht's oft-cited slogan that it wished to be a "compact city in a vast, open landscape" was not especially convincing.

'Green in and around the City', which was already mentioned in the previous chapter, was a fairly new *national* policy domain that the Dutch Ministry of ANF wished to work out mainly in collaboration with the 30 largest cities in the Netherlands (the G30). The Ministry saw these cities as additional sources of funding for 'green' policy. Maastricht was one of these cities. In the context of this policy development, officials of the Ministry of ANF had established contacts with officials of the municipality. Most of their expenditure in the period 2000 – 2004 was on acquisition and design of land, planting of new forest and the layout of new recreational routes. These expenses were mainly incurred on the Eastern side of the city of Maastricht, however. In view of national cuts in budgets for 'green in and around the city', Maastricht was looking for other financial means, such as European funds.

## ***5.4 A story***

### *Trying to get hold of a no man's land*

The Maastricht city administration became concerned about the Grensschap-area when there was a steady increase in land claims in this area. Almost from the time of his installation in 2002, the alderman responsible for nature and environment approached this area as the 'missing link' in the 'green ring' around Maastricht. A 'Green Left' politician and former activist from 'Milieudefensie' (a Dutch environmental organization), he wanted to make the green ring complete. In a policy document, he stated:

"the area between the Albertkanaal and the Dutch-Belgian border is in danger of becoming a no-man's-land, torn into pieces up to the city border because of the realization of urban functions" (Collegenota 14/10/2003).

The area was subject to extensive and rapid change. A recreational park was under construction at the Dousberg, linked to the existing swimming pool; the activities of the loam industry were being intensified; and, in addition to the industries that were already present in the area, expansion of housing and industrial areas was foreseen on both sides of the border. Meanwhile the farmers were looking for ways to safeguard the future of their farms in an insecure market.

### *Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Netherlands...*

Meanwhile, researchers at Alterra research institute were thinking of ways to promote public discussions about the future of open land in between

cities. These areas were claimed by many parties for many purposes. In the urbanizing landscape of the Netherlands, these landscapes were increasingly subject to policy making by various government and private actors. They often reached beyond the boundaries of one municipality and sometimes even of one province. If nothing was done to conserve open spaces between cities, these cities were likely to be 'glued' to one another, increasing the distance between urban populations and nature and rural areas. There was no guarantee that uncoordinated building activities would form an attractive landscape that would leave room for leisure, nature and farming activities. The researchers feared that without a collaborative effort by the surrounding cities to establish the qualities of these areas as a point of departure, they would eventually fall victim to the accumulated planning practices of individual cities. A relay baton was adopted as a symbol for the exchange among urbanizing regions of lessons and experiences about dealing with these problems. There was another motive for looking for a different approach as well. The researchers believed that citizens were perfectly capable of thinking at a level beyond that of a 'park or a square in a neighbourhood', beyond their own backyards, and for the benefit of regional policy development. The conviction that something needed to be done to promote the input of citizens' knowledge and ideas had been strengthened by their experience in another urbanizing area of the Netherlands, where the future planning of an area had seemed to be the result of interaction between a steering committee of aldermen of four municipalities, and a bureau of landscape architects and process managers, taking place at a distance from 'ordinary citizens'. Only on a few occasions were professional representatives of environmental groups invited to bring in their views. To the researchers, it seemed as if the only role of council members was to nod in agreement when the plans were presented to them. This was the extent of citizen participation, and the role of non-professionals was as limited as that of the political representatives in the municipal councils. Also, the researchers found it frustrating that they were hired to make a 'green' plan while there was little interaction with the bureaus doing the planning work on 'traffic', or 'spatial planning'. They wanted the various dimensions of the planning effort to be linked with each other. On the basis of this experience and of what they had seen elsewhere from a greater distance, the researchers 'created' an approach which they named the 'Estafette City-Countryside' (stad-land), or 'Estafette<sup>21</sup>' for short. Based on the two motives mentioned above, the approach was meant to catalyze more intensive exchange of learning experiences between urbanizing regions about ways in which city and countryside could be better tuned to each other, and to promote partnership between citizens, municipalities and various other government bodies such as province and

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<sup>21</sup> Estafette = relay

water board. This would enable 'the public' to participate in decision-making about these areas in more direct ways than through the representative system – a form of sub-politicization in fact. The expectation was also that they could come to better decision-making together. To start with, the researchers formulated methodological steps and 'lessons' which they expected to be of use for the organization of participatory decision-making processes about the relationship between 'city and countryside' at the regional level.

Their idea was that further development of these steps and lessons could become a collective, progressive learning endeavour, so that a 'method' could be refined and elaborated, and enriched by examples from various urbanizing contexts. A website would have to facilitate that learning process ([www.sturingstadland.nl](http://www.sturingstadland.nl)). Because the Ministry of ANF was traditionally the main funder of the research institute and had also co-financed the above mentioned project, the ideas were presented to officials of the Ministry of ANF in a regular meeting of the advisory board of the funding program. This advisory board was composed of officials responsible for the 'Green in and around the City' policy.

#### *A concurrence of circumstances*

As a result of the above mentioned meeting, two officials from the 'Southern' regional directorate of the Ministry of ANF saw opportunities in the idea of an 'Estafette', which they saw as a potential instrument for putting their policy on 'Green in and Around the City' more strongly on municipalities' agendas. So even though sub-politicization was not *their* motive for linking up with the idea, they picked up the Estafette on account of their own policy practices. They then intermediated to connect the ambitions of the Maastricht alderman and his officials on the one hand and the ideas of the researchers on the other hand. That is when the 'Estafette' really started.

Backed up by the offer to pay half of the expenses for an Estafette project, the officials found a ready partner for applying the Estafette approach in the Municipality of Maastricht (a year later Maastricht handed over the relay baton to Zwolle). Initial contact about the possibility of participation in the Estafette took place between the ANF, Maastricht officials and the researchers at the end of 2002. After some initial hesitations, the Maastricht officials saw opportunities as well and one of the researchers was invited to present the ideas to the mentioned alderman. The ideas matched well with his aspirations and he approved of the project proposal. In a series of preparatory meetings between municipal and ANF officials and the researchers, the way to organize the Estafette began to take shape. The alderman, an advocate of a greater involvement of citizens in policy-

making, indicated which organizations and neighbourhood platforms he wished to see represented. The municipal officials contacted their Belgian colleagues to discuss the possibility of an 'interactive event'. The latter expressed their readiness as well, and indicated which citizens could be involved. On the Belgian side, the village councils and an environmental council were invited to participate by letter. For practical reasons of budget and time constraints, a two-day event was planned in June 2003 at a beautiful location: Vaeshartelt castle. Just over fifty people participated. Not all invited groups were present, but in general attendance was as planned. For the municipalities, the event was a rather new undertaking because citizens were involved at such an early point in the policy-making process – namely before any policy had been prepared. An official said about this:

“That was quite a risk. The people could have said: ‘don’t you know then what you want yourself? They could have become really angry: ‘what are we doing here, actually?’ But it was a success, because the structure and the goals of the two days were clear”.

For the alderman, the absence of ready-made policy proposals was exactly what he wanted.

“If people think of something, or put it on paper, then it becomes their baby. Then you want to protect that baby. Every impulse from outside is reacted to with distrust. It is your own plan. That is why I want officials to communicate with citizens when there is no plan yet”.

Months before the event, the alderman presented the forthcoming interactive event to the mayor and the other aldermen in the municipal executive. They decided that the outcome of this could not overrule any earlier decision made by them and the council, that it should contribute to the specification of existing policies and that it should not lead to additional spatial claims (meeting of the executive of 11 February 2003, and minutes Project Group 13 February 2003).

The most important preconditions that were imposed on the event and its follow-up were perhaps the 'vlekkenkaarten', literally translated as “patches on maps” which stood for building volumes that were already agreed on and which only needed elaboration at that point.

### *Two special days at the castle*

Rather than trying to inject the process with 'formal scientific knowledge' the researchers facilitated a two-day event at which participants were first invited to share their own knowledge and experiences.

The programme of the two days consisted of four 'blocks'. The first block was geared to sharing ideas about the area, and to experiencing it together. During an excursion on foot, the participants told each other what they knew about the area. That was an eye-opener for many of them. They were surprised about the vast amount of knowledge about the area available among them - about the cultural history of the area, art, archaeology, agriculture, nature, water, or about past urban plans. Participants were asked to take pictures of desirable and undesirable qualities. Later, participants referred to the excursion as an important source of their initiative to organize themselves in the 'Grensschap'.

The second part was used to get 'inspiration' from others from outside the area and identify possible development orientations. The alderman expressed his desire to 'finish' the green ring around Maastricht, and that he wished everybody to be involved in the process of making a plan to realize that. He also communicated the 'message' of the Municipal Executive (Mayor and other aldermen), that decisions that had already been agreed in the council, could not be changed again. The third block was oriented to the 'how' in terms of required coalitions and other organizational matters. The fourth block aimed to make specific agreements on future collaboration. Various agreements were made. Participants representing a neighbourhood emphasized that they wished to communicate the results of the event to their neighbourhood councils, if these were active ones. Most of the other agreements were about the continuation of discussions about the area.

The field visits and the pictures taken during these visits, the presentations by outsiders (for instance urban planners and a city-farmer), the maps and pictures spontaneously brought in by the participants and the activities in small groups all combined to create an open atmosphere. Most of the participants had taken two days off from their work to be able to participate. All the activities were reported in a booklet that summarized the results of the event (Van den Top et al. 2003).

Most importantly, the event led to a new organization of citizens and officials: 'the Grensschap Albertkanaal', in short 'the Grensschap'. The first activity of the Grensschap was the preparation of an Interregproposal, an idea that had come up during the event. The idea was pursued despite the warnings of the mayor of Riemst, who emphasized that preparations for European projects were mostly costly, lengthy, and administratively complex. The alderman of Maastricht realized that officials needed time to get on with the process, and that officials from other sectors than 'green' needed to be involved more intensively. Besides, during the two days, awareness had grown that farmers were important for the area. For the

first time, Maastricht officials had to engage in policy-making about agriculture. That required a reallocation of budgets and input of personnel; a change of routine that nobody had foreseen before the event. Unsure of the future, follow-up meetings were planned to prepare the Interreg-proposal. At this point, all that remained for the researchers to do was to prepare the report on the event. After that they would disappear from the stage and leave future activities in hands of the people in the region.

### *The 'Grensschap'*

The Grensschap Albertkanaal was the name that some of the active participants of the Estafette gave to the area because of the key role of the boundary (grens means boundary, 'schap' refers to a community or organization). They delineated the area themselves, based on their in-depth knowledge of it. They also used the name Grensschap Albertkanaal for themselves as an organization. In their own words:

“The exact delineation of this unique, old landscape is shaped by the ‘Kempisch Plateau’ in the North, by the outskirts of Maastricht in the East, by the catchment boundary (‘waterscheidingskam’) between the Schelde and Maasbasin in the West, and by the Interreg project areas Jekerdal and Sint Pietersberg, with the Sint Pieter fortress, in the South. The name is a neologism, with associations with terms such as county (‘graafschap’), landscape (‘landschap’) and neighbourhood (‘nabuurship’). Where the old county of Vroenhoven was unified in the person of the count, the Grensschap is unified by its borders and its citizens, organizations and governments on both sides of the border, which care for the area. The name denotes the organization as well as the area” (Grensschap Albertkanaal 2004).

They made their own maps of the area and created an elaborate database of maps and other information on the internet ([http://home.tiscali.nl/grensschap\\_maps](http://home.tiscali.nl/grensschap_maps)).

They worded their vision as follows:

“The rural area between the Western fringe of Maastricht and the Eastern fringe of the Flemish Lanaken, Bilzen and Riemst accommodates valuable landscape, nature and cultural historical elements. Most of these valuable elements, however, are no longer visible in the landscape. Where they *are* still visible, they have lost their significance for a majority of visitors. The Grensschap Albertkanaal aims to reveal again the different layers in the landscape, so that they can be experienced again. Three dimensions each give their own significance and value to the landscape;

- geology, archaeology and cultural history;
- nature, landscape and water; and
- the relationship between city and countryside.

Where these dimensions come together, a fourth dimension comes into being: which focuses on coordination and cooperation” (Grensschap Albertkanaal 2004).

The group soon became very active. It consisted of people who lived in the Western neighbourhoods of Maastricht, owned a farm in the Grensschap area, or lived in one of the Belgian municipalities. It met its first success when it won the 'environment prize' of the German city of Aachen in September 2003, even though it was not a German initiative. The Grensschap became the centre of attention and was praised for its positive role in the establishment of cross-border collaboration. There were regular meetings and field-excursions, a website was launched (<http://home.tiscali.nl/grensschap>) and an e-newsletter MaLaRiA (referring to Maastricht, Lanaken, Riemst) was sent out roughly every two weeks with announcements of meetings and relevant articles in the media. An artist member of the group designed an emblem, which was printed on a badge. The most important strategy of the group was to use their expertise to influence policy. They wanted to be a 'platform of expertise'. Critical statements were rare, on the website or in other written material of the group. Rather, their energy was directed at giving insight into archaeological values, the water systems, and the ways by which small-scale agriculture could support an open, cultural landscape and nature. Also, they wished to conserve the fields with farms, meadows and hedges of historical value, to restore the causeways ('zouwen'), lynchets ('graftern') and sunken lanes ('holle wegen'), to conserve the specific "border character" of the area and to show the role of the war in local history. Their philosophy was that if knowledge about these special characteristics were more widespread, it would provide an automatic counterweight to economic considerations (which gave rise to initiatives to find more lucrative destinations for parts of the area).

People brought in their perspectives during the frequent field excursions or at the meetings of the Grensschap. For them, their knowledge became a resource to draw upon in order to exert an influence on policy making. The officials were impressed by the things that these people knew, and by the time they were willing to invest. Knowledge which had previously remained hidden was opened up for use in the policy-making process. In various anecdotes, the Grensschappers proudly emphasized how their expertise was a powerful resource. For instance, they were proud to provide maps which did not end at the Dutch or Belgian border, especially so because the municipality did not have such maps. Another example of how they distinguished themselves by means of their knowledge of the specificities of the area was the reaction to the choices of a famous Dutch architect, who made a design for a housing project at the Dousberg. The architect used the towers and city wall of the Tuscan town of San Gimignano as a reference for his design. One member of the Grensschap:

"I do not want to discredit his work, but he could have referred to little villages on hills very nearby! I would gladly have brought him there."



People were generally positive about the walks and meetings organized by the Grensschap, in which both officials and citizens participated, especially at the start. Because of the available knowledge, their modest approach and their willingness and ability to formulate their wishes in policy language, the members of the Grensschap were respected as partners for discussion. It is likely that this policy language also inhibited others from participating, but the tasks were divided in such a way that those with most experience with the policy strategies, networks and language were engaged in the tasks related to them. Words like liveability ('beleefbaarheid'), layers in the landscape ('lagen in het landschap'), meaning making ('betekenisgeving') were used (see elaborate citations in the foregoing). These words can be found more often in policy documents and scientific accounts than in the daily vocabulary of an average visitor to the Grensschap. This goes to show that the Grensschap did not just know much about the area, but also about ways to translate that knowledge into policy vocabulary.

The idea of the area as a 'no man's land' was not just a slogan of the alderman's, but was important to the members of the Grensschap as well. It was not that they themselves experienced the area as a no man's land, but it was in this respect that they *were* critical of Maastricht's policy in the past:

"Maastricht looked at itself primarily as a city. As a consequence, her western fringe was neglected or was looked at as an easy location for urban expansion" (the website).

When speaking of policy, the area was described as a 'blind spot'. The positive qualities of the area that had been overlooked by the expansive approach should be given more weight, the group said. They emphasized that they could achieve more by combining their expertise than by protesting against all kinds of plans. The values of the area, according to the members of the Grensschap, did not rule out building development, but should offer a restrictive frame for such developments. They also emphasized links between their ideas about the area and existing government policies. Thus, they wrote that their ideas provided a more in-depth elaboration of the way the area functioned as an 'ecological passageway': an idea taken up in the Nature and Environment plan of Maastricht. They also made a link with the 'Three countries park' (Drielandenpark), a 'development perspective' signed by nine government organizations from three countries to enhance cross-border cooperation on various topics, and they emphasized the role of the Grensschap-area in the European nature network Natura 2000. The participation of officials in the Grensschap was helpful in relation to these efforts to connect with existing policies. The officials knew of the policies and also of the possibilities to

obtain financing for activities developed within the scope of these policies. On several occasions, they provided the group with information on where to place the emphasis in the proposals, and even more so on what to avoid<sup>22</sup>. One official:

“I put pressure on them to make sure that they did not make a spatial plan. That would rub politicians and other planners up the wrong way and then their ideas would not be accepted. (...) The big danger is that they will become an action group”.

The idea of being a platform of expertise contributed to the possibilities for officials to participate. In the Grensschap, there were recurring discussions about the nature of the group. Officials sometimes felt uncomfortable. At times they felt that they had to promote their municipalities' policies, which they did not always agree with. This tension did not go unnoticed and was sometimes the topic of discussion. There was general agreement that it would be wise not to behave like an action group, and that they should be seen as a group with the capacity to think beyond their own backyards. The officials' participation was also highly valued, and the officials had made it quite clear that if it became an action group, this would form an insurmountable hurdle for their continued participation.

In the course of the process however, people observed that the participation of officials gradually decreased. The composition of the group as a whole changed as well. New members entered and members that had participated since the Estafette became less active.

All in all, the Grensschappers thought that by emphasizing the qualities of the area, by giving the area its name and by linking it to other areas, it would cease to be a 'blind spot'. The formulation of an Interreg proposal and subsequent implementation of a project was expected to help achieve that objective.

### *Interreg project*

The possibility to use Interreg to finance a concrete project was put forward by an official. Interreg aimed to stimulate cooperation between European regions, which seemed to fit well with the cross-border character of the Grensschap. In the autumn of 2003, the group started to work on a proposal. The most active contributors to the proposal were a dentist, an artist, a university teacher and a provincial official, who took a consider-

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<sup>22</sup> The word 'art', for instance, according to the involved officials, should be avoided in the Interreg proposal. The officials thought that the proposal would be declined if there was too much 'art' in it. According to them, other sources (than Interreg) would have to be drawn upon if art was too much at the core of the proposals.

able amount of work out of the hands of officials. They did 'the job' of writing the proposal in their free time. In line with their philosophy and in accordance with the advice of participating officials, they chose to formulate projects which they did not expect to be controversial. In any case they did not intend to make spatial claims. The focus was on education and information to make other people more aware of the qualities of the area, both visible and hidden. Various viewing frames or windows ("kijkvensters") would have to inform a wider public of the area's 'stories', which told of archaeological findings, landscape elements, natural values and/or historical events. When budgets appeared to be smaller than initially expected, the municipalities' idea of spreading information by means of a GPS system was dropped from the proposal. The participating officials did not want to push 'their own thing'. What they were enthusiastic about was that citizens had, on the basis of their own knowledge and efforts, obtained 'their own budget' to realize what they wanted. At the same time, work had been taken out of their hands.

For more than a year, members of the Grensschap put a lot of time into preparing the proposal, and for some of them it was too much. As a consequence, they became less active in the Grensschap or gave up their involvement altogether. For some it meant that energy was shifted from participation in a neighbourhood council to investing energy into the Grensschap. In view of the workload, they asked the municipality to provide more assistance. For their part, officials of the municipality were very happy that the Grensschappers had worked so hard on the proposal.

The members of the Grensschap felt that they needed to carry out concrete projects which would enable them to see real results of their efforts. Some also saw the implementation of concrete projects as an opportunity to keep people involved who were not strong on abstract thinking at a regional level. One official suggested that with concrete projects, they could carry out useful practical work, without hampering the broader, more abstract discussions on the area as a whole. In May 2005, a negative decision by Interreg was communicated to the Grensschap however. It was not very clear why the proposal was rejected. The activities of the Grensschap reached an impasse after this disappointing news. Most respondents attributed the impasse to the failure to get the Interreg project proposal approved of, but another project gave rise to mixed feelings as well.

### *The Zouw Valley Study*

The 'Zouw Valley Study' was one of the successes attributed to the Grensschap. There was another side to that coin too, however. The alderman who had been involved with the Estafette was also the one who commissioned a bureau of landscape architects to carry out the Zouw Valley Study. The study was mainly a Dutch affair. While building volumes for housing and industry in the Lanakerveld on the edge of the Zouw Valley had already been decided on, the Zouw Valley Study was meant to elaborate those plans. Conditions in terms of nature, landscape, architectural style etcetera had to be formulated. These would then, it was said, form a long-term framework for any activities in the Zouw Valley. Two members of the Grensschap were invited to participate in the Study. They were added to a group of between fifteen and eighteen professionals, mostly officials from the municipality of Maastricht and contracted experts, with various disciplinary backgrounds. The members of the Grensschap were amazed by the lack of knowledge about the area among these professionals, some of whom came from far away places.

That in itself was an awkward situation for the two 'representatives'.

"There were 20 of us sitting round the table. They're all there in the boss's time, or office time, and they're all paid large fees, I don't know how much. Except for two people who are sitting there free of charge. It may sound ungrateful but like that, and it is not the money that I care about, but it is a bit crazy after all".

The chosen two were content with the bureau of landscape architects that was hired to organize the study. The bureau incorporated most of the ideas of the Grensschap. Even though specific plans for the future of the farmers in the area did not become very concrete and elaboration was 'delegated' to a next phase, the fact that 'agriculture' was taken up as one of the themes in the Zouw Valley Study and that the Zouw Valley itself would be free from building activities, were considered as the merits of the Grensschap. The alderman and the officials emphasized this on several occasions. They emphasized that all urban plans for the Valley from then on had to be judged in terms of the outcome of the Study.

Since it took so little effort to achieve these general objectives, the achievement was hardly recognized by other members of the Grensschap however. For the Grensschappers not represented in the Zouwdal-study group, it remained unclear what the effect of their input had been. One respondent:

"When you have fought for something, you have also achieved something. Now we had to explain continuously to the other members of the Grensschap which of our ideas had been taken over".

In the end, the members of the Grensschap were divided as to the results of the Zouw Valley Study, and were disappointed in how the process had been organized. During the study, the width of the open area in the Zouw Valley had already been reduced because more houses needed to be built in order to make the building activities financially viable. That gave rise to internal strife among some members of the Grensschap: those who agreed to give in and those who did not because they strongly felt that reducing the open space would harm the ecological potential of the area and how it could be experienced as an open valley. The latter were a minority, however.

The two participating members of the Grensschap were disappointed about the course of events. First, they were grouped under the theme of 'agriculture', whereas they wanted to have a greater say in themes like 'housing', so that they could propose their ideas about how to reckon with cultural-historical values in housing development<sup>23</sup>. One day they had seen on the agenda that 'housing' had been put just before agriculture. A Grensschapper:

"We were, of course, as much interested in housing as in agriculture. But we were not allowed to attend the session on housing."

The most significant confrontation during the process was not about matters of substance, but rather about unclear rules of the game, including responsibilities and roles. The Grensschap members were particularly concerned when they read the following message in the newspaper:

"Maastricht is looking for locations for industry and housing, but the city also keeps a green agenda, and tries to protect existing nature values", says Hazeu (the alderman), who has commissioned a study on the future of the Zouwdal. "This study will, in the next 20 years, roughly be the guideline for all building activities in the bordering areas and neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood, represented in the Grensschap Albertkanaal, explicitly had a say in promoting the conservation of nature-historic values" (Dagblad de Limburger, 16 May 2005)".

They now had two concerns. Firstly, they interpreted the message as meaning that the participation of 'the Grensschap' was considered to replace representation of the neighbourhoods. Secondly, they had understood that the study was a substitute for discussions in the neighbourhood and municipal councils. If that were true, then they would lose the traditional channels for opposing decisions. Replacing this traditional type of influence with the 'new' collaboration in and by the

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<sup>23</sup> They emphasized for instance the possibility of integrating historical home meadows ('huisweide') in the new urban structure.

Grensschap was not an acceptable change to the rules of the game for the Grensschappers. The analysis of one of the members of the Grensschap:

“Because the design development was not a consultation process, and no reporting was done, the decision-making process was hidden. Ideas were tabled, and you noticed only later on whether they were implemented or not. Ideas were dropped, and you never heard of them again, or you protested against them and they were implemented after all. At one point a designer from Germany gave a presentation about an urban fringe in a German City (...). The Bureau thought that the idea of that fringe matched their scheme and at the next meeting it was a fait accompli. The consequence of this, namely that the decision that was made 10 or 20 years ago was breached, was not considered. The bureau was thinking in terms of a “zigzag fringe”, so the sport fields were done away with. I think it would make sense to put this up for discussion. But the decision making was not transparent (...) None of the executive was in those design sessions, only officials. (...) In theory, the final decision is made by the executive and the municipal council. Politicians have the last word. But in practice, things are different. A plan is presented as a totality. There is nobody, at least from among the executive, who followed the entire process. The consequences were incalculable. So in fact very important decisions were made by officials, and you can question the democratic legitimacy of that.

The Zouw Valley Study, which once again had taken a lot of time, was a second reason for the waning of the activities of the Grensschap. Disagreement about the contents, and perhaps more importantly, lack of clarity about rules of the game created concerns about the status of the Grensschaps' participation in the study and what that implied for other established participation procedures.

#### *Perseverance required and rewarded*

For some of the members, the energy and time that the Grensschap had taken were reason to become less active or even inactive. For one member of the Grensschap that I interviewed, the decision by the other members to refrain from opposing choices made in the Zouwdal Study was a reason to back out. He wanted the Grensschap to resist more forcefully and challenge the makers of the plan to visit the area and analyse the foreseen results of the plans, as they could be imagined while walking through the area.

While the process had demanded considerable perseverance by the members of the Grensschap, especially after their project proposal was rejected in spring 2005, a success could be celebrated after all in September 2006. When the proposal was approved of by the European Union (INTERREG) after all, the municipalities Maastricht, Lanaken, Riemst, two provinces and a foundation for the conservation of small landscape elements also decided to subsidize it. They granted an amount of 580.000 Euro for the establishment of thirteen informative 'landmarks', the design of a permanent exposition and the restoration of small landscape elements.

Because this time it was taken up in an EU programme that promoted the economic development of cross-border regions, the emphasis in the proposal shifted somewhat to the added value of the landmarks for the recreation or tourism economy. Also the 'windows' were replaced by 'landmarks' because of technical difficulties in realizing the former<sup>24</sup>. A quote from the 'Europa Werkt' website:

"The project Landmarks Grensschap Albertkanaal aims to make the existing footpaths and cycle paths (...) more attractive for tourists, by creating so-called 'landmarks' at special places in the landscape" ([www.europawerkt.eu](http://www.europawerkt.eu)).

This presentation of the intentions of the Grensschap is clearly much narrower than the members' initial much wider ambitions, with ideas of raising awareness of the qualities they perceived in the area, which they were convinced should be protected.

For the members of the Grensschap, however, the approval was reason to celebrate, and after a period of smaller-scale activities, a group from amongst the members started to invest a considerable amount of time and energy in working towards the implementation of the ideas. They were aware that such dedication was not an option for everybody. In summer 2005, before project approval and an even further intensification of activities, one of the most active members said:

"The people wishing to give up are the people for whom the investment of time and thought has become too high. If you come together on a monthly basis, and there are another two to three meetings in that month about various subjects, it's inevitable that some people will drop out (...) I have already mentioned that we are in a difficult phase. We have to ask ourselves whether the Grensschap will still exist in three years time, and whether it should still exist by that time. Nevertheless I think a lot has already happened in terms of networking between the people of the Grensschap and many other people and places. This is about ideas that are rooted both here and there. So this is something that has already been achieved."

The activities of the Grensschap were welcomed by the municipal administration. The acquisition of extra funds for 'green' was one of their main objectives and the Grensschap proved to be capable of achieving that aim. For the members of the Grensschap, although the 'acquisition-activities' involved a considerable workload, at least they could now anticipate concrete results of their work.

This did not deter others from joining in. Every now and then, new members would join the group. The theme of the year 2007 was the elaboration of the landmarks. The members of the Grensschap did not do

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<sup>24</sup> Condensation would appear in between the perspex plates that the windows were reckoned to be made of.

this on their own - A bureau was hired to elaborate the ideas. That, according to one active participant, was the only way to be successful.

“They could do things that were too much for us. Realizing the landmarks involved a lot of administrative work and coordination with various governments, land acquisition and legal arrangements.”

Coordination and administrative work was done by the municipality of Maastricht, supervision in terms of contents was the work of the Grensschap. The members of the Grensschap wrote the texts for the landmarks. When I reminded a respondent, a Belgian official, of the impasse that the Grensschap went through in 2005, she said:

“We had ups and downs. Now we are in a positive phase again. We are working very hard on the Landmarks. We do have influence, not on decisions about whether or not a building initiative is carried out, but on how they are carried out.”

In Belgium, the Grensschap-members were often asked for advice by the municipal administration. These municipalities' doors were also open during evening hours, making it easier for the Grensschap to meet there on a regular basis.

In 2007, four and a half years after the Grensschap came into being; it had still an active role. It facilitated a convenient type of collaboration for the municipalities, mainly because it refrained from action group types of activity. With the decline in activity by neighbourhood and village councils, it had also become one of the few remaining forms of participation.





*Stone-chair as reversed time-machine: stone remains while surrounding landscape changes.*



*Reconstruction of Roman trans-border road\**

\*Two examples of landmarks as they will be created in 2008. The Grensschap commissioned Hans Lemmen ([www.hanslemmen.nl](http://www.hanslemmen.nl)) to design the objects. The projects will be implemented by bureau Air-co and Hans Lemmen.

**Figure 7: Designs two of the landmarks**



*Members of the Grensschap during field excursion at the event in 2003*



*Workshop participants bring their own material about the area*



*Group discussion about qualities of the area*



*Elaborating plans*



*Meeting in the garden of Vaeshartelt*



*Evening walk*

## ***5.5 Interpretation***

### ***5.5.1 Origin of initiative in the context of the existing policy arrangement***

This section summarizes what happened in relation to the first research question: What was the origin of the initiative and how did it relate to then existing arrangements?

The 'interactive event' that led to the formation of the Grensschap was an initiative 'from above'. It had in fact two sources of origin: one at the municipality of Maastricht and at an alderman's office in particular, and another one at a research institute. Both the alderman and the researchers aimed for a greater role for citizens in decision-making about open areas adjacent to and in between cities. Even though the researchers did not call what they strove for 'sub-politicization', it was in fact a version of that. They made attempts to create spaces for decision-making power at other sites than the traditional ones. ANF-officials from a regional directorate, starting from a different motive, connected the researchers and 'the municipality'. An additional incentive for the municipality to participate in the researchers' idea of an 'Estafette' was the finances available from the Ministry of ANF for 'Green in and Around the City'. With the co-financing of ANF, they could organize the interactive event that was meant to involve citizens in policy development to finish 'the green ring around Maastricht'. For the municipality, the event was a rather new undertaking at the time, for two reasons. First, it was directed at citizen involvement in decision-making about a rather large area. Second, no green policy had been developed yet for the area. There were policy arrangements with regard to other sectors that had an influence on the area, mainly those regarding industrial and housing development and recreation facilities. With respect to 'green', the existing policy arrangement so far had focused on other parts of the city. The event would have to become the overture to a broadening of that arrangement to the Grensschap area. Even though the area at that time was often labelled 'a blind spot' by those focusing on nature, agriculture or cultural-historical values, various activities were going on in it. With regard to policy domains such as industry, housing development and recreation, various plans were 'in-the-making' or had already been decided on in the Council and the Municipal Executive, mayor and aldermen.

The interactive event described here came to be *the* occasion at which citizens and officials from both sides of the border became enthused about the reach and the depth of their combined knowledge about the area. In view of their perspective that the significance of the area lay particularly in

the presence of a border and the relatedness of the parts of what they considered and experienced as a whole, they were concerned about the lack of cooperation between the Belgian and Dutch governments so far. This concern led them to organize themselves in the Grensschap Albertkanaal. That was the origin of an initiative that from then on emphasized the members' in-depth experience of and connection with the area. Their multi-faceted knowledge became their vehicle for expressing their feeling of connectedness to the Grensschap area. By means of their knowledge, and especially by joining forces in that realm, they believed they could become a factor of influence.

In sum, the structural conditions in which the initiative came about were created by the search among various actors for new forms of participation. Another condition was the sectoral working approach which caused one part of the municipal organisation to be thinking about 'finishing the green ring' while another was involved in building development in the same area.

### ***5.5.2 Discourse, actors, rules and resources***

This section takes up the second question of the research: How do discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy?

In the previous Biesland-case I described three clearly distinguishable discourses. Those discourses could be attributed to either the existing policy or to the new initiative. That made it possible in my analysis to start from these discourses and subsequently to look for the coalitions that supported them, to identify the rules and resources that were connected to the identified discourses and the coalitions, and the ways the relations between them changed. The Biesland case also illustrated how the initiative moved in the direction of existing policy, but this happened only after a first confrontation of the two perspectives had taken place. In the Grensschap case, specific discourses were more hidden right from the start. One reason for this was that it was the deliberate strategy of the members of the Grensschap not to explicitly oppose against activities that were decided on already; confrontations on issues of content were less actively sought and were even avoided. Secondly, the Grensschap used policy vocabulary to get their plans approved of. This too made the differences between existing policy discourses and discourses related to the new initiative less visible. Moreover, existing policies were placed outside the discussion because the city administration put them forward as preconditions for any other development. For this reason, the Grensschap sometimes even seemed to be an 'extension' of the municipality's services, putting a lot of effort into acquisition of new money for new projects that would not harm other

developments, while these developments were decided on elsewhere and by other persons. Interaction between the Grensschap and the municipalities took place in the framework of individual projects or activities, such as the Zouw Valley study and the Interreg project. It is on the basis of these interactions in individual projects, rather than of an explicit confrontation of initiative and government policy, that an analysis in the scope of the second research question could still be made. This means that in the following, the focus will first be on the Grensschap as such, and then on the interactions between the Grensschap and existing policy in the form of projects.

*Grensschap: a governance innovation*

I would call the Grensschap a governance innovation because of its composition and territorial focus. A network was formed that consisted of officials and citizens. That in itself was an innovation, compared with common practice. In principle, their contacts were not occasional but structural in character. Another innovative dimension of the network was its cross-border orientation and participation: it consisted of people and officials from Belgium *and* the Netherlands.

In terms of the substance of the matter, the Grensschap added a new concept to the discussions about the area. Firstly, in the current situation, discussions about the area *as a whole* were rare. Rather, the focus was usually on individual projects or interventions in the landscape, such as the Dousberg (recreation area) or the Lanakerveld (industry and housing). The Grensschap concentrated mainly on a territory – beyond the ‘backyards’ of individual citizens or the parks or squares in a neighbourhood. There were many reasons for the members of the Grensschap to do this: the cross-border recreational activities and experience of the landscape, the historical events that could not be well understood by focusing on a single spot, the water systems that trespassed boundaries, the ecological values of the area as a connection between different nature areas – all these are examples cited by the members of the Grensschap. The name that they attributed to the Grensschap was symbolic of their way of looking and constituted a discursive act to draw attention to it. The Grensschap also consistently emphasised their vision that building interventions in the area should take advantage of and ‘build upon’ key characteristics of the area. The name for the area and the group, the badge, the logo on it, the new maps and the walks all gave expression to the new discourse that put the Grensschap centre stage and gave the city a supporting role, supplanting the more standard discourse that looked outwards from the city.

*The field excursions: discursive acts, resource and rule of the game*

For the members of the Grensschap, the walks were a means to emphasize their way of looking. The walks can be seen as discursive acts *and* a resource. As a resource, they used the walks to emphasize their views of the area. While looking at the urban environment from within the area, the meaning of the discursive notion of the land as a frame or condition for urban activities could be put across to a wider public in a lively way. The walks were also an excellent means of sharing the resource most emphasized by the members of the Grensschap: their multi-faceted knowledge. The field excursions matched their wish to stay close to the contents, and emphasized their profile as a 'platform of expertise' (rather than an action group). These practices and claimed identities referred to a 'knowledge discourse' that can also be attributed to the Grensschap.

That a comprehensive assessment of a situation could only be made *in the field* was a key 'rule of the game' of the Grensschappers. When that informal rule was disregarded, this gave rise to indignation of some of the members. The field visits were their sources of inspiration, occasions on which they could share their views with others and learn more about the area. When they were asked to explain what inspired them to play an active role in the Grensschap, they all spoke of their attachment to qualities of the area. Through the excursions where they were inspired by other members, they started to see things they hadn't seen before. Actually seeing things in the field was a means of breaking through the discursive code. The field visits, for instance, caused agriculture to appear on the municipal agenda. The maps were also a helpful resource for enabling the Grensschappers to emphasize their views, and so were the 'watching frames' or 'windows' (kijkvensters) that they had proposed in the Interreg project. All of these were not just neutral resources. They gave expression to the discourse of the Grensschap area as a whole and to its invisible qualities, which could only be properly understood by experiencing it from the field.

*At odds with municipal policy practices*

In the foregoing I described the Grensschap in terms of actor coalitions, discourses, resources and rules of the game. In the following I will use the same perspective and focus not on the Grensschap as such but on the occasions on which the Grensschap intermingled in policy practices that were predominantly organized by government bodies. The Zouw Valley Study was one such occasion, and one which was illustrative of the ways in which the Grensschap's discourse was at odds with regular practice. First, the Zouw Valley Study separated off part of the territory that the Grensschap wished to focus on. While it is unrealistic to expect that all the activities of the municipalities would all of a sudden be directed at the

Grensschap area as a whole, the Zouw Valley Study caused a narrowing of focus and diverted the attention of the Grensschappers away from policymaking for the entire area. Whereas the Grensschappers approved of the choice of the bureau of landscape architects, the process also brought to light discursive incongruence. The Zouw Valley study was organized in a sectoral way, which did no justice to the orientation of the Grensschap towards making the Grensschap landscape into a 'frame' for all sorts of interventions. So their way of looking at the area did not break through into the routines of daily policy practice. There were several occasions on which the Grensschap's options were curtailed in advance. It started before the Grensschap was even founded, when the municipal executive of mayor and aldermen imposed restrictions on the outcome of the Estafette. The members of the Grensschap also imposed such restrictions on themselves, when they chose not to make controversial plans.

In other words: the new network brought in a broad, cross-border territorial outlook (a new discourse in which experience-based knowledge of 'the field' was crucial) but it was not able to change practices that were organized in accordance with the age-old 'sectoral discourse', dominated by building volumes or 'patches on maps' (vlekkenkaarten). Also, the Dutch-Belgian collaboration caused awareness among the members of the Grensschap of the different organizational cultures in Belgium and the Netherlands. They started to appreciate the 'open' character of the Belgian municipal organizations. So far, this did not change Dutch practices; the municipal buildings remained closed for instance during evenings.

By means of the Interreg project, the members of the Grensschap *were* able to bring the new discourse into practice on a project basis. The endeavour did not change the rules, but it did bring thirteen designed 'landmarks' in the area, all of which gave expression to their vision on the area. Three years after formulation of the project, it was approved in 2006. Before that, the hard work and the disappointment when the proposal was initially rejected almost led to a premature end of the Grensschap. Their success was equivocal. On the one hand they were able to create thirteen (symbolic) places in the landscape. At these places, people were invited to look at the landscape through the 'lens' of the Grensschap. The long term effect of this may prove significant, though hard to assess at this point, when the 'windows' still have to be built. On the other hand, the members of the Grensschap had also submitted themselves to the constraints of a time-consuming project, which became too much for some of the members, and also prevented them from spending time on other projects.

### *Rules of the game*

For the Grensschappers, being a 'platform of expertise' meant that prior political choices, such as to realize a certain building volume, were not contested, for such an approach was considered as an undesirable action-group type of participation. In the view of the Grensschappers, functioning as a platform of expertise was an *additional* way to exert influence. If they felt they needed to contest something, they wanted to do so outside the new form of collaboration. Therefore, they were not pleased when they got the impression that they would be barred from traditional ways to 'participate'. Participation of the Grensschap in the Zouw Valley Study in particular showed that it was important to provide clarity from the outset about the status of all parts of the participatory process.

Thus, there is a distinction between 'old' and 'new' practices. The Grensschap experience gives rise to the hypothesis that the traditional forms of participation should not be replaced by the new ones. For the moment that a concern was raised that the city administration wanted to replace the old practices with the new ones, the members of the Grensschap resisted. They wished to keep the possibility of the traditional policy procedures, for themselves and for others whom they felt they could never fully represent. So the two practices should continue to coexist.

### *Structuring and stabilization*

After the Estafette, a process of structuring came into being. People organized themselves, met frequently, appointed a chairman from amongst them, and communicated with 'the outside world' through a website. In addition to the lasting 'remains' in the landscape in the form of the thirteen 'watching frames' or landmarks, the Grensschap continued to be invited to provide input for the elaboration of plans such as the golf course and the housing estates.

In terms of the scheme sequence, Structural Conditioning → Social Interaction → Structural Elaboration, that I referred to in chapter two (Archer), the case demonstrates how structural conditioning and social interaction takes place, but in terms of structural elaboration, no conclusion can be drawn yet about possible delayed effects (Pestman's term: 2001).



Structural Conditioning	Social Interaction	Structural Elaboration
Existing arrangement: no overall policy for the area, various expansive activities in an area that has no name. Citizens resist individual plans in an 'action group-like' way.	Emergence of Grensschap discourse and coalition. Interactions in Zouwdal Study and Interreg project. Grensschap tries to change existing situation by focussing on the area as a whole, by avoiding conflict and by showing the special history and 'hidden qualities' of the area.	Grensschap continues to be a partner in policy-making of various kinds of projects. Realization of project may also bring delayed effects, to be investigated in a few years time. Little change of rules and resources.

### 5.5.3 Structural transformations; depoliticization

In this section, the third question of the research will be addressed: Does the case point at sub-politicization, or could other structural transformations be discerned? In Beck's more eloquent words: Could the Grensschap 'move mountains' in the nerve centres of development? The first and most important thing to say about this is that options had been narrowed before the process even started. To stick to the metaphor: mountains had been declared 'no go areas'. On top of the conditional restrictions which were imposed by the municipal executive, the members of the Grensschap *themselves* chose not to try to move mountains (even although one of the planned landmarks was in fact a new hill!), but to try to promote the qualities of the area by bringing in their common expertise, which was based on their frequent encounters in the area. They explicitly wanted to avoid controversy.

Since there are no absolute criteria to determine whether or not one can speak of sub-politicization, I can analyse *directions* and formulate hypotheses on that basis. The Grensschap and its activities can perhaps be perceived as a local manifestation of the trend of sub-politicization in terms of 'building community' and innovation of networks. The Grensschap consolidated a new way of looking at a specific territory. In terms of eventual effects however, it could only do what it was given the space to do. This is why I hesitate to speak of sub-politicization. Perhaps in a few years time the cultural-symbolic work done by the Grensschap by means of the 'watching frames' (later called landmarks) will be effective in changing peoples perspective on the area – which *may* then also influence policy. It may well be an implicit way of spreading a message by making people form an opinion about something that they had not seen in a certain way before. This outcome can not be predicted, however. Meanwhile, because of a lack of substantial influence, the procedures of the traditional representative

system were still counted on as the channel through which to influence politics. So the members of the Grensschap wished to keep that 'exit option' open in case the 'new' form of collaboration did not render sufficient results. Some of them were already using their membership of a political party and the formal possibilities to react to policy plans to influence decision making. In other words, the cases in this study so far point at an *additional* locus of politics which may *add to* the more traditional loci of politics rather than replace them – even if there were tendencies towards this. Also, I think that the lifespan of the 'new' arenas in comparison with traditional arenas deserves more attention in future research, as well as the long-term influence of cultural work such as the "windows".

The possible exclusionary effects of being a platform of expertise should be a topic of future concern as well. Indeed, one man who often opposed the decisions of the municipality and used the formal procedures to make his opinion heard, was doubtful about future membership of the group. As long as their discussions were about knowledge or facts there was no danger. The man knew a lot about the water systems of the area. As soon as discussions were about controversial opinions, the man was a risk of being identified as an 'action group type'. 'Platform of expertise' was in fact a discursive notion which imposed limits on the contents of discussions and – as this example of one individual goes to show – also on membership of the group.

In sum, the present case shows imposed and self-imposed restrictions on the work and influence of the Grensschap. The Grensschap had a role within the boundaries of what was determined as uncontroversial, whether by the city administration or by the members of the Grensschap themselves. It would be going too far, then, to speak of sub-politicization *tout court*. At least three conditions were imposed on the process which invalidate the sub-politicization-thesis for this case:

1. The imposition of preliminary preconditions by the City Administration, that were kept out of the discussion;
2. The strategy of imposing restrictions on addressing controversial issues by the Grensschap itself, thereby excluding people who wanted to 'go further';
3. The wish not to replace traditional procedures with 'new forms of collaboration'.

These conditions bring to light a remarkable ambiguity, for a tendency towards sub-politicization may be paired with *depoliticization*. The three conditions restricted the extent to which influence was exerted 'from below', but it is still hard to ignore the degree to which the Grensschap could realize some of its ideas, with possibly longer-term, less easily measurable implications. This conclusion means that processes that seem to point at a

trend of sub-politicization, for instance through the foundation of a new coalition with new ideas about a specific territory, should be carefully watched for depoliticizing inclinations coupled to that trend.

#### ***5.5.4 Space for policy innovation***

“Society is diverse in ways that come into play directly in the policymaking process. Policymaking begins from these diverse roots and community is as often the outcome as the origin of policymaking.” (Laws and Rein in Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 172).

This section addresses the fourth question about what space for policy innovation emerged in the course of the process. My conclusions here follow naturally from the above line of argument. First I will ‘make up the balance sheet’ in terms of the innovative features of the Grensschap described in the foregoing:

1. Its emphasis on the qualities of the area as a whole, which should be a basis for urbanization, rather than the other way around: this caused the area to reach agendas not *only* as an ‘easy location for urban expansion’, but also increasingly because of its intrinsic qualities related to its openness and its cultural, historical and nature values; agriculture emerged on the municipal agenda. In short: seeing the land not as the fringe of the city but as a centre which should be a frame for urbanization.
2. Its cross-border collaboration between citizens and officials, the way it approached their knowledge as a powerful resource,
3. The ‘cultural work’ by means of which the Grensschappers attempted to change the views of a wider public. Part of this work was the realization of a cross-border educative project that gave expression to the ideas of the Grensschap (later it was formulated in terms of improved chances for tourism in order to obtain subsidies). This project *may* have longer-term socio-cultural influence.

Despite these innovative features, in the relation with existing policy it would again be a step too far to speak of space for policy innovation. There was no real policy innovation. Firstly, as is clear by now, limits were imposed in an early stage on what the Grensschap could have an influence on. Before the Estafette, the alderman involved was restrained by his colleague-aldermen, who put a check on ideas differing from existing plans. By doing this, building volumes in specific locations were placed outside the discussion or ‘participation process’ beforehand. These were brought in as a ‘given’. The key decision-makers about these givens were not participants in the game being played, either. The Grensschappers adhered to an integrated discourse, or, in their own words, a holistic view of the area.

However, their ideas on industry and housing were not given a chance to penetrate sectoral decision-making about housing and industrial development. Space for policy innovation was permitted only within the confines of those policies. Secondly, the members of the Grensschap themselves made a point of proposing policy change only to the extent that it could be accommodated by existing policy. Thirdly, even though there were discursive changes, these were not accompanied by changes of practice (the Zouwdal Study, which was about the Zouwdal only, involved mainly professionals, did not address the area as a whole, and was divided into sectoral fields of attention). Fourthly, the focus came to lie on projects rather than policy. These took a lot of time at the expense of time available for broader policy-making activities.

The case shows that offering citizens opportunities to have a say about developments in an area requires a change of bureaucratic routines. Frequent encounters, often 'in the field' and after working hours, demand different working schedules for officials. Participatory work also requires 'listening abilities' instead of presentation skills. In one of his subsequent initiatives, the alderman tried to change some routines. He said:

"Our first product in the Caberg-Malpertuis project was a process document. It contains rules of the game on how to deal with each other. Here we have established agreements on things such as listening to each other with respect, and on working hours of officials'.

Results like these also form a part of space for policy innovation and constitute a delayed effect of experiences such as those with the Grensschap. In this example, a rule of the game was changed that made it possible for officials and citizens to meet more often and listen to each other.

In short, the Maastricht case was about the emergence of a new coalition and new discursive notions. However, existing flows of resources and rules of the game supported another, economic discourse that curtailed space for policy innovation right from the start. In the end, even the project that the Grensschap had formulated to realize a concrete expression of their ideas in the field had to be translated into economic terms in order to get approval. Important decisions were made in other domains, by actors who were able to set their conditions in advance of any influence by the members of the Grensschap. The Grensschap was hardly able to communicate with the coalition related to that policy arrangement, which continued to be far more influential. The stakes of developers and the sectors responsible for the economy of the region, were represented in the process that the Grensschap went through in the form of the preconditions (rules of the game) that the

municipal executive imposed on the dialogue with and within the Grensschap. Thus they became influential, but absent actors, representing an influential, but depoliticized issue. New discourses and actor coalitions could come into being but resources and rules of the game remained largely connected to an existing policy arrangement that was dealing with the same area, but performing on another stage. The future will have to show whether the new network and the 'windows' in particular could become a powerful resource that could mobilize other people to exert political pressure to safeguard the values that the Grensschap had placed on agendas.

## ***5.6 The relational dimension and my own positionality***

### ***5.6.1 The relational dimension***

"emotions should not be suppressed or 'explained away, but we should try to get to grips with them" (Van Stokkom 2002: 383). (Translation by MB)

The Maastricht case unveils other aspects, besides discourse, actors, resources and rules, that played a role in the interaction between initiative and existing policy. Examples are the fact that the people were able to start building up trust and familiarity with each other at the 'Estafette-event', and the admiration and respect they felt towards each other when they shared their knowledge about the area during the field excursions. Another example is the admiration for the leaders of the group expressed by a majority of the respondents. The leaders' network capabilities and good understanding of political and administrative affairs were mentioned in several interviews<sup>25</sup> I would say there is more than 'resources' at stake here. Of course, the knowledge and understanding of political and administrative affairs is a resource. But the admiration expressed by respondents refers to something else – an emotion that can not be 'accessed' or allocated. It is more about the 'chemistry' between people. Feel for the game, endurance, trust, respect, anger: all these are emotions that played a role in the process of getting organized and interacting with existing policy. They represent something more personal on the one hand and there is often a social-relational side to them as well. In the Grensschap story, the alderman paid attention to the relational dimension when he emphasized that his officials should not develop their plans in advance of interaction with citizens (because "the plans would then already become their babies"). Personal traits such as these, which may be referred to as identification,

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<sup>25</sup> Compare Van Stokkom, 2002: 362-386 and 2003: 153 – 165: Van Stokkom focuses on informal aspects of interactive policy making, notably affective and charismatic aspects.

feelings of ownership, or competence, are located at a deeper psychological level. Both the psychological and the relational are levels which deserve more attention if the objective is to understand more of the relationship between local initiatives and existing policy. The concepts that I focused on in my study so far do not seem to do sufficient explicit justice to them.

Without these relational capacities, the members of the Grensschap would probably not have organized themselves, or not have lasted long. Some authors call these attributes 'human resources' (Healey 2006) or 'human capital' (Innes and Booher 2003). I prefer to place them in a separate category to distinguish them from institutionalized 'resources'. They are different from the resources which were described so far in relation to policy arrangements, such as the availability of financial resources or of knowledge. They are positioned at an interpersonal or relational level. In the interaction between a policy arrangement and local initiatives, they are important conditions. In the Grensschap case, the formation of the Grensschap and its performance were certainly not the result of these relational capacities only, but on the other hand it is likely that little would have happened after the Estafette event if participants had not 'clicked', or if no-one had taken the lead in follow-up activities. The Grensschap case suggests that before any enduring influence on government policy can be exerted, positive experiences in the relational domain need to be present *first*. But these can only emerge when opportunities are created to really meet. The Estafette was such an occasion, but the area and the many field visits and the collaborative work on the Interreg proposal were examples as well. This suggests that these relational capacities can be resuscitated by an institutionalized 'rule of the game' that implies the creation of opportunities to meet each other, preferably in a specific area that creates a common feeling of connection to that area. In view of this, it also becomes clear why a practical matter such as a possible discrepancy between the 'working hours' of a group such as the Grensschap and those of officials, and the opening hours of municipal buildings, should be discussed and acted upon.

We have not yet mentioned the role of coincidence: that which could not be planned in advance, such as the almost simultaneous occurrence of a) the chemistry between people during the Estafette event, due to which the Grensschap came into being; b) the active participation of a provincial official who happened to know a lot of subsidy channels; and c) the 'green' alderman from Maastricht, who actively promoted a more active citizenry. Coincidences and the way these were used seemed to play a role *in relation to* the socio-relational dimension. Some people were better able to 'smell' opportunities to get where they wanted to go.

In conclusion, one theoretical framework is often not enough to get to grips with complex situations such as the ones I studied. For example, the above points at the additional relevance of social-psychological theories.

### ***5.6.2 Positionality***

Rather than substantive ideas, ideas on how to design an interactive event were the starting point of our involvement as researchers in the Maastricht case. Our idea was that the event would have to be the start of a decision-making process in which local knowledge and ideas would become the cornerstone of plans. Thus, in Maastricht it was the researchers' intention to facilitate in starting up a dialogue between official policy makers and citizens, and then leave the follow-up process in the hands of local actors. This short-term involvement was rather different from our position in Biesland, where we played a more long-term role. There, we had for instance mediated decision-making at national and European level in particular. In Biesland, we had also been much more part of the initiative than in the Grensschap case. As far as the Grensschap was concerned, we were commissioned to support in writing a proposal for European funding of the ideas, but our role remained restricted to that. The situation also had to do with the 'privatized' position of the research institute. Activities of the researchers were always directly linked to the availability of funding, and indirectly to our own efforts made to acquire such funding. In Biesland, we had been far more active in this respect than in relation to the Grensschap<sup>26</sup>.

Our restricted role in the Grensschap case implied risks. How could we know that the initiative was not just another event for the sake of 'participation' that did not lead to longer-term collaboration in decision-making? In this particular case, there was an active alderman taking responsibility for follow-up, who was re-elected<sup>27</sup> when his first term was finished. But this was on the Dutch side. On the Belgian side, re-election of an alderman was perhaps not as important, as there seemed to be a more open culture anyway. Aspects like these certainly require further investigation.

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<sup>26</sup> Process-oriented work is increasingly becoming a field of expertise among Wageningen researchers. A similar trend can be observed in consultancy agencies. Not surprisingly the growth of this field of expertise runs parallel to the practice by municipalities and other government agencies of contracting out process facilitation work

<sup>27</sup> In the Netherlands, aldermen are not directly elected by citizens. In this case, the political party that the alderman represented obtained enough votes to be able to keep the alderman.

As far as our role was concerned: would process facilitation by the municipal officials themselves not have created a firmer embedding of the project in the municipal organizations? To some extent, this risk could be addressed by intensively preparing the event together with the officials. But the confines of a budget also implied for instance that we had to rely on the municipalities with regard to the question of who was invited. We could not verify whether certain groups would be left out, for instance. Our disappearance from the scene after the event meant that we could not take responsibility for follow-up activities. On the positive side, it also implied that the participants from the area (alderman, officials and citizens) had to do without our mediation in the aftermath of the event. In view of the fact that they would have to deal with each other in the future anyway, that was a good development. Our role remained restricted to the preparation of a good two-day programme that was likely to deliver results. With hindsight, it cannot be said that the contents of the programme 'created' the Grensschap, which I consider the most important output of the event. The event was also the occasion on which some of the participants met each other for the first time – which in itself may have been a major factor in their getting organized.



## Chapter 6: From opposition to collaboration in the Loonsche Land

### *6.1 Introduction*

The Efteling case provides another example of local actors undertaking an initiative to make a difference to the physical appearance of a specific territory. Key 'local actors' in this case were the Efteling, which is the Netherlands' busiest and best-known theme park, and two nature organizations, namely Natuurmonumenten, which is a national organization with 913.000 members in 2007, and the Brabantse Milieu Federatie (BMF), a provincial branch of a network of twelve provincial environmental organizations. In former times, the Efteling and the nature organizations had primarily been enemies, opposing each other in court when the Efteling wanted to build accommodation on part of their land. After years of strife and deadlock, however, they chose to start to cooperate. In this new situation, they still had to cope with government bodies and their policies, of course. The role of the researchers was different from the other cases – here, they were hired by the theme park mainly because of their knowledge of landscape and ecology, while the theme park itself took the lead role in organizing and facilitating the process of plan development. The case also differed from the other two because the plans entirely concerned the theme parks' own private land. Nevertheless, activities on that land could not remain a purely private affair, mainly because most of it was part of either the national or the provincial ecological network. The plans needed to be evaluated in terms of existing policy, especially since they included building activities.

Section 6.2 contains a description of the area, with the aid of pictures and maps. This is followed by a summary of operative policy in section 6.3. Section 6.4 tells my story of what happened in the interaction of initiators and policy, and in 6.5 I will interpret the story once again by means of our questions:

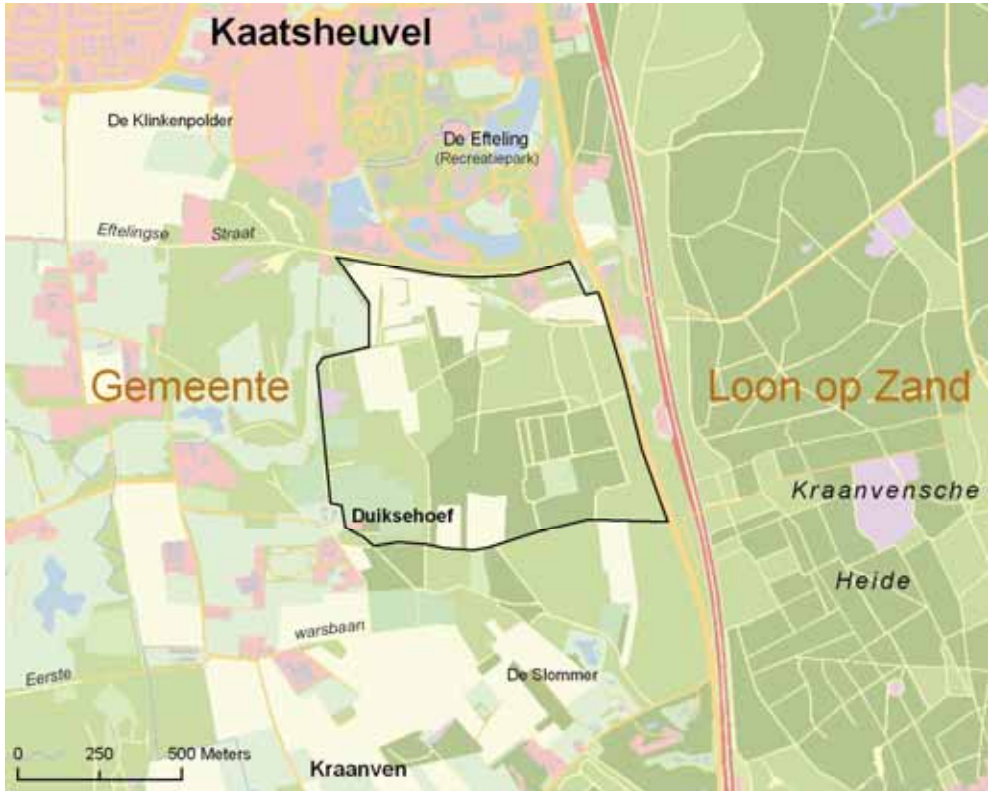
1. What was the origin of the initiative and how did it relate to then existing arrangements?
2. How do discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy?
3. Does the case point to sub-politicization, or can other structural transformations be discerned?

4. What types of space for policy innovation emerged as a consequence of the interactions?

## ***6.2 The area***

The Efteling is a famous theme park in the South of the Netherlands, in the Municipality of Loon op Zand, near the city of Tilburg. Having started as a sports park in 1933, the Efteling became a 'fairy tale' theme park in 1952. The larger attractions such as the roller coasters are visible from a distance. The land owned by the Efteling foundation covers a larger area than the theme park itself, and also contains a golf course, a large car park, a former bungalow park in the forest called 'the Kraanven' (21 hectares), several other plots of land, and the sixty hectares of 'the Loonsche Land'. It was the 'Loonsche Land' that was the focus of the new collaborative effort. The Efteling had had various plans for the 'Loonsche Land', none of which had been realized. Local people used the area for activities such as walking their dogs or jogging. It is a diverse area in which one can still make out the remnants of the former agricultural landscape, with wooded banks, small fields and sandy roads. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many fields were planted with oak forest, used for its tannin in the growing tanning industry. With the introduction of synthetic tanning products, the oak wood was not needed anymore and the area passed out of use, except from a few fields of corn which were still being planted by neighbouring farmers. A large part of the area was then planted with birch trees. In the first half of the twentieth century, these provided for wood for the paper industry and timber for the mining industry (for supports in mining galleries). Later, invasive species like American bird cherry ('forest pest' in popular speech) gained ground and prevented other species from growing. The area in its present state was described by ecologists in the research team as 'worn' and 'neglected'.

On two sides of the Loonsche Land, there are nature areas: 'Loonsche and Drunense Duinen' (Dunes) in the East, and 'Huis ter Heide' in the Southwest. A provincial highway separates the Loonsche and Drunense Duinen from the Loonsche Land. To the South there are mainly farms, most of them intensive cattle farms. However, most of the farmers in this area expect to have to sell their land because of provincial policy decisions not to designate this area for this kind of farming. Much of the farmland has been handed over to Natuurmonumenten, due to nature compensation policy (mainly for the ring road around Tilburg). The largest population centre in the municipality Loon op Zand is Kaatsheuvel, located to the North-West of the Loonsche Land and the theme park.



Alterra Top10smart 2006

*Map 5: The Loonsche Land*



© Eurosense BV DKLN-2006

*Aerialphotograph 3: The Loonsche Land*



*Exploring the field*



*Cornfield and remains of a hedgerow*



*Open patch in the forest with heather*



*Workshop 4<sup>th</sup> July 2004*



*Celebrating a next step*



*Photoshopped cover of the report*

### ***6.3 Operative policy***

In contrast to the other two cases, decision-making about the plans for the Loonsche Land did not depend on European level policies. Provincial and national policies did play an important role, however. Part of the Loonsche Land was part of the Main Ecological Structure, a spatial structure of protected areas. The entire area was part of the Provincial version of the ecological network. Therefore, building activities were not allowed, in theory. Exceptions could be made, however, if there was a “demonstrable and overriding societal importance”. In this case, the request to build should be accompanied by a plan containing measures to compensate for ‘losses’ of nature, in an attempt to prevent an overall loss of nature values. ‘Compensation in terms of amounts of hectares’ was prioritized over ‘compensation in terms of quality of nature’. For instance, every ‘lost’ hectare of forest of an age in between 25 and 100 years, needed to be compensated by a factor of 1.66. This was partly an exercise on paper, because the compensation rule concerned the designation of an area. In other words, the issue was how it was labelled in the municipal and provincial zoning plans, rather than what kind of nature would actually exist in the area. There was also a preference for the compensation area to be located in the vicinity of the area that was to be built on and, in principle, outside ‘nature areas’ designated as Main Ecological Structure.

The Forest Law, dating from 1961, imposed limits on tree-felling activities. The law required advanced notice of all felling activities, and that a felled tree should be replaced by a new tree, or compensated for in another location.

The Flora and Fauna Law, which was at last operative from 2002, aimed to protect plant and animal species in their natural environments. Building activities in open space required a formal exemption in the scope of the Flora and Fauna Law. An application for such an exemption had to be accompanied by an overview of actual nature values, effects of planned activities and the projected nature compensation.

The Loonsche Land was not a designated area in the framework of the EU Habitats or Birds directives. However, the adjacent area “Loonse and Drunense Dunes” was a Habitats directive area. This meant that the possible influences of building activities in the Loonsche Land on these dunes, had to be predicted and, if required, compensated for.

The municipality of Loon op Zand had to incorporate building activities and all other physical transformations in their municipal zoning plan. The

municipality considered the Efteling as an important 'motor' for the local economy. It therefore usually supported activities of the Efteling that contributed to employment opportunities.

Expansion policies of the Efteling itself were based on the assumption that it was vital for the future of the theme park to increase its numbers of visitors. At the time of writing, the park received about 3,5 million visitors per year. Competition with other parks was fierce: every theme park was trying to stay one step ahead of the others. The Efteling opened a new attraction almost every year. However, they did not think this was enough to keep them ahead of the competition. So the 'Efteling Hotel' was opened in 1992, and to accommodate more visitors and cater to a wider range of tastes and budgets, plans were made to build apartments on the adjacent land owned by the Efteling foundation. These plans had first been tabled in the eighties but only the hotel had been realized so far. Travel distances and times were considered a barrier to attracting more visitors, and facilities for staying overnight were seen as a solution to that problem. The management of the theme park expected that providing on-site accommodation would improve their chances of attracting people living further afield. In the view of the Efteling, such new markets were essential for them to 'survive' as an economically viable park.

## ***6.4 A story***

### *Tree houses and legal procedures*

Ever since the Efteling's plans to build recreation apartments had seen the light of day, they had attracted a lot of attention. 'Droomrijk', as one of the plans was called, came out in the media at an early stage in the planning and decision-making process. The news led to various kinds of protests. Protests came from organizations such as 'GroenFront', Brabantse Milieufederatie (BMF) and Natuurmonumenten: three quite different types of organization. The 'Groenfront' is an internationally active action group. One of its strategies is to build houses in trees in order to prevent the trees from being felled. In the case of the Efteling, Groenfront created the 'Entenwoud', referring to the books of Tolkien. Groenfront-activists lived in the Entenwoud tree houses for part of the week for about nine months. Their action received a considerable amount of (positive and negative) attention in the regional and national media.

Natuurmonumenten, one of four official nature organizations in the Netherlands, generally focuses on the management of nature areas. When the Dutch government acquires land for the realization of the Main Ecological Structure, the land is handed over to one of four nature organizations, of which Natuurmonumenten is one. At the time of the



research, Natuurmonumenten had close to a million members. BMF, a provincial umbrella-organization of 130 provincial nature and environment organizations collaborates with governments, business and the public to achieve its goal of a sustainable society. But when attempts to collaborate are not successful, it takes legal action. In the case of the Efteling, Natuurmonumenten and the BMF cooperated closely - they worked together by filing legal protests against the plans. Their main criticism was that the required plans for nature compensation, which were attached to the building plans to comply with the provinces compensation policy, were not adequate to compensate for losses in terms of nature values. The documents in which they made their case contained lengthy explanations of the nature values of various involved elements of the area. Discussions focussed on the ecological value of fields of maize, which were described by the province and the Efteling as polluted dumping-places of pesticides and fertilizer, and by the nature organizations as an important food source for badgers. The discussion about the ecological value of the field of maize was important for the Province. They were afraid that it would create a precedent if the field were indeed pronounced valuable in the final judgement: the province North-Brabant contained a lot of such fields and officials foresaw problems if compensation could be exacted for all development activities on them.

A newspaper article of April 2003 reports:

“Efteling building plans stumble over nature compensation (...) The province North-Brabant, which had approved of the plans, considered the claims of the ‘Brabantse milieufederatie’ and Natuurmonumenten completely unreasonable. For the building of the accommodation, only 9 hectares of forest were to be felled, according to the province. As compensation, the province of North-Brabant wished to replant 41 hectares of forest. The milieufederatie and Natuurmonumenten demanded 81 hectares compensation however” (ANP, 24 april 2003).

Clearly, the province took sides in favour of the plans of the theme park. In their view, the provincial compensation requirements had been met, and so the nature organizations would have to refrain from protesting. The municipality sided with the Efteling as well; the theme parks’ contribution to the local economy was important enough to strengthen the economic position of the company. Possibly as a consequence of that, there was no reason at that time for the Efteling to engage in negotiations with the nature organizations, except perhaps out of politeness. Looking back, an employee of the nature organizations Natuurmonumenten said about that:

“If we had had open discussions earlier, then we would probably also have reached agreement earlier. The way in which the Efteling, the municipality and



the province related to each other at that time, however, gave rise to rigidity. When there is a will, the chances of success are greater if you try to keep governments out of it”.

In autumn 2003, the Council of State annulled the case between Efteling and BMF, not because one of the two parties was announced to be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in its claims about the claimed amount of compensation hectares, but because procedural errors had been made. This decision naturally implied that building activity had to be delayed again for about two years. The legal procedure had to start all over again, and the Groenfront activists dismantled their tree-houses.

An important step towards breaking the impasse that the legal procedures had created was a decision to collaborate on the basis of a new plan, rather than take legal action. A covenant was prepared, to consolidate the rules of the game.

*A breakthrough: a change of approach and language*

In May 2004, the Efteling, Brabantse Milieufederatie and Natuurmonumenten entered into a covenant which summarized how they were going to bridge the differences of opinion of the past. What preceded that crucial step? The covenant did not appear out of the blue, for several reasons. Most important, nobody was really satisfied with the situation, which would only mean a further delay of a final decision. This created insecurity about who would win and who would lose, which was unsatisfactory in itself, and most of those involved wanted to come to a solution that would not create winners and losers. Now that the struggle had been going on for such a long time, the parties were almost ‘forced’ to think of alternatives. A report by archaeologists from the bureau RAAP about the ‘hidden’ stories about the area’s history which were covered by just a thin layer of sand and at times still visible, led the Efteling’s director of project development to think of a different approach. To ‘realize beds’, would still be the most important objective of the Efteling, but they would also invest in the enhancement of nature values in a wider area, especially to uncover these stories and make the wider area attractive for the visitors. That, in his view, would also distinguish the Efteling from other well-known accommodation parks, such as Landal and Center Parks.

Moreover, there was a more general trend towards seeking cooperation with other actors. In the context of the ‘Uitvoeringsprogramma tussengebied Kaatsheuvel-Tilburg,’ the three organizations, together with others, had already launched a dialogue to realize projects in the field of tourism and recreation. The Efteling had sought partnerships with societal organizations in other situations as well. In 2002, The Efteling opened up

the Pandadrome, an attraction which it established together with the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF). For WWF, the attraction (a three-dimensional animation movie) was an opportunity to reach children and their parents and to try to make them more aware of ecological risks and the work of WWF in this field. The intensified contacts between Natuurmonumenten, BMF and the Efteling should also be placed in the context of this more general trend of building up partnerships – as should the increased contacts with organizations such as the archeological bureau RAAP, and Das and Boom (an active nature organization protecting the badger and its habitat - small-scale agricultural landscapes with small fields and nature elements such as twine hedges). Not surprisingly, the new coalitions between Efteling and societal organizations were not just a matter of charity. On several occasions, the Efteling emphasized that the financial benefits of collaboration were still their point of departure. The new ideas, even if not yet fully worked-out, were discussed with Das and Boom and the archaeologists. They helped to further elaborate the ideas, and their support was crucial. Later, the Efteling's director of project development said that if Das and Boom had not supported the idea, he might not have pursued it.

Likewise, the strategies of nature organizations had changed. In general, they were more inclined to look for coalitions with private enterprise. They realized that their past strategies had often not brought about the desired results. This trend could be observed more generally among nature and environmental organizations in the Netherlands at that time – and still today.

The province also chose to take a different role after the decision of the Council of State. The executive of the province invited the three parties Efteling, BMF and Natuurmonumenten to the Provincial Office. In the meeting, he urged the parties to work on a solution together. The province, he said, would stay at a distance from then on, so that at the end they could form an 'independent judgement' about the outcome of the dialogue.

After enthusiasm was aroused among Natuurmonumenten and BMF as well, the three parties decided to make a covenant. In the covenant, the Efteling and the nature organizations agreed about the maximum number of hectares that would be built, about the conditions that needed to be taken into account such as compensation requirements, about the style and character of the buildings, and about the organization of the follow-up process.

The covenant:

“Parties commit themselves with this covenant, to make a joint effort to achieve an optimal result in terms of nature development which, at the same time, goes along with an economically feasible plan to realize accommodation and landscape design” (Covenant Efteling Verblijfsaccommodatie en Natuurontwikkeling dd 12 mei 2004, translation by MB).

This new approach implied changes in the policies of the three partners. All of them made compromises. The Efteling adjusted the number of apartments to be built: the number of projected beds was reduced from 3600 to 2100. In their turn, Natuurmonumenten and BMF decided to conditionally assent to building development within an area that was a designated nature area and to refrain from further legal action as long as the plan was realized. Just as the initiators at the Efteling had to defend their new approach to the shareholders, who had to gain confidence in the financial viability of the undertaking, the nature organizations had to defend their new policy within their organizations. What the latter feared most was that the example would provide a precedent for other building activities in nature areas. They therefore emphasized that the accommodation should be realized on the fields of corn and not destroy ecologically valuable parts of the area. The fear of precedents played a role both before and during this new ‘phase’ of collaboration. As far as precedents were concerned, there was another version of the story as well. The consultant who was commissioned by the Efteling to do the preparatory work for getting the plans through policy procedures said:

“BMF demanded too much of the Efteling. They are getting much more compensation than required according to provincial policy. That is a dangerous development. In another example, I experience now that the BMF is doing the same – asking too much and at the same time threatening to file legal complaints if their demands are not met.”

However, from the signing of the covenant on, both the directors of the two nature organizations and the relevant director and personnel from the Efteling defended the road taken and did not mention such excessive demands or their potential adverse effects on future initiatives.

The covenant made mention of two ‘phases’ of building activities. The first phase, located to the South-West of the theme park, consisted of 16 hectares. The Efteling and the nature organizations laid down in the covenant how they would deal with compensation requirements for the development of these hectares. These 16 hectares would have to be compensated according to the provincial compensation policy. A simple sum explained that 16 hectares times 1,66 would need to be compensated, plus 5

hectares times 0,33 of an adjacent forest patch that would probably be 'disturbed'. That would make a total of 28,4 hectares which needed to be compensated. The covenant included the exact lots that would serve for compensation, totalling 29,8 hectares, 1,4 hectares more than required (Covenant 12 May 2004). This was a quantitative approach that was partly 'compensation on paper'. In this case for instance, giving up building claims that had been previously approved but never realized, was considered as compensation. In physical terms, most of the 'compensation-hectares' for the first 'phase' of the plan consisted of 'the Kraanven', a deserted park with 42 holiday homes, at 1,5 kilometres from the theme park itself. The 42 holiday homes had been demolished at the end of the eighties. The quality of the forest in the Kraanven was higher than that of most of the forest in the Loonsche Land. The right to build and exploit 180 such holiday homes was still operative at the time of the annulment of the compensation plans by the Council of State. Later the cancellation of a permit to build, and the simultaneous designation of the area as 'nature area' rather than 'recreation area' in the municipal zoning plan, was agreed on as compensation (for phase one). Meanwhile, this did not change the physical appearance of the area.

The approach to the second phase, located to the South East of the theme park, was rather different. For this phase, a plan still had to be elaborated. The covenant stated that for the second phase, 'bureau' Alterra would be commissioned to advise about the design of the area, and that the same bureau would give a final, binding judgment on the nature values. The reputation of this institute for ecological affairs made it a trustworthy partner for Natuurmonumenten and BMF as well. The first contact between the Efteling and Alterra came about through a director of the World Wildlife Fund. He knew of the work of the institute and when he heard about the Efteling's plans to realize accommodation in an ecologically sound way, he brought the researchers into contact with the Efteling's director of project development. Their visions on the potential future of the Loonsche Land appeared to be very compatible.

The covenant was signed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2004, one day before the director of the Brabantse Milieufederatie resigned. Relief about the new approach was conveyed in the BMF's press release:

"In the common plan that was presented today, the quality of nature is put first, instead of sticking to the letter of the rules and regulations ('rekenregeltjes')"  
([www.brabantsemilieufederatie.nl](http://www.brabantsemilieufederatie.nl), 17 May 2007, translation MB).

According to the press release, the departing director made a point of having the covenant signed before his departure. In a press release of his organization, he said:

“We have had many meetings with the Efteling and there were considerable differences of opinion. With this covenant we can close that chapter. We are positive about the future and we are convinced that there are opportunities for nature/landscape and appropriate recreation in the entire area” ([www.brabantsemilieufederatie.nl](http://www.brabantsemilieufederatie.nl), translation by MB).

In the same press release, the deputy director of Natuurmonumenten at that time was equally positive about the covenant. His emphasis was on the ability of parties to look beyond their own interests:

“Because the parties, as good neighbours, were able to look beyond their own interest, a much better plan has come into being. (...) In this case it is not just ‘Longneck’ (a well-known attraction of the Efteling) who has stuck out its neck, but the board of directors of the Efteling as well!” (ibid.)

The Chairman of the Board of the Efteling was also given the floor. He was a bit more cautious:

“In the course of the meetings it became clear to us that we had to let go of the original plans for ‘Droomrijk’. We are therefore making new plans. First the feasibility of these plans will have to be assessed within our organization. Then we will have to go through juridical procedures. The covenant is a good point of departure, but it still offers no security for the realization of the plans” (ibid.).

The covenant was endorsed by both nature organizations in the process that followed, despite changes of leadership at the BMF. BMF made an arrangement with Natuurmonumenten so that the latter could represent the former, for instance in the project group that would be established to supervise the elaboration of a plan. When explicitly invited, BMF did participate in the meetings, however. All parties saw the covenant as a solid basis for creating a ‘win-win’ solution in which nature development and increased opportunities for recreation and business development could go hand in hand.

In the covenant, it was stated that the BMF and Natuurmonumenten would:

“refrain from the submission of complaints (‘zienswijzen en bedenkingen’) and from entering appeals against spatial plans such as referred to in this covenant, as long as the Efteling operates within the limits laid down in the covenant with regard to the plan development” (ibid.).

The parties also agreed to hold discussions among themselves if 'third parties' (private or public) in any way tried to impede or seriously delay the realization of the plans.

It was not always clear who took the lead in convincing the Efteling and the nature organizations to establish a dialogue and consolidate agreements in a covenant. According to one account, it was the member of the Provincial Executive responsible for the issue who initiated the revival of the dialogue between BMF and the Efteling, just after the rejection of the nature compensation proposal by the Council of State. In another account, the departing chairman of BMF had played a vital role, since he wanted to come to a conclusion before his resignation. The Efteling emphasized that *they* urged him to give himself this 'farewell-present'. Also, the journalist who reported most often on the Efteling urged the member of the provincial executive to call for a dialogue in a prominent editorial article. Lastly, the Ministry of ANF said that they too had recommended dialogue.

Perhaps it was the deadlock that everybody wanted to break that provided the most important incentive to start to think of creative solutions and to adopt a different language. When that created an opening, all parties reported being glad that the lengthy legal procedures seemed to belong to the past, and they all emphasized that a compromise had been made that they were very positive about. The Efteling could at last continue with all the necessary procedures, elaborate the plans further and set about convincing the board of shareholders. It was financially attractive that nature compensation could be done on their own property, without having to purchase additional land. They also saw the advantages of creating a landscape that would be attractive for visitors. Therefore the investment in the land on which they would *not* build, served more than just the purpose of realizing accommodation.

### *The making of a new plan*

In line with the ideas which had been incorporated in the covenant, the researchers started creating a plan that would combine the best of both worlds – helping both to preserve the natural and the historical values of the area, and to enable a profit-making theme park to build accommodation for tourism purposes. They tried to create a link between the Efteling's tradition of fairy-tales and stories and the 'real' history of the Loonsche Land. At first the researchers were seen more as researchers who were able to assess ecological values than as possible designers of a landscape that would tell a 'story'. The researchers stayed 'on location' for a week to interview various stakeholders and to get a feel for the area. In the interviews, the Ministry of ANF emphasized that it was important for them that Natuurmonumenten and BMF would support the plan. From both

sides, the officials involved told the team of researchers 'just to make a good plan which would gain the support of the nature organizations'. The provincial officials for their part pointed at the legal provision in their nature compensation policy for making creative exceptions to compensation norms as long as nature would be better off.

The work on the premises of the Efteling allowed the researchers to be in frequent touch with the personnel involved at the Efteling, the commissioner of their work. At the end of the week, they presented their first ideas. By that time, they had the contours of a plan that was compatible with the covenant, mainly because they had been inspired by the field visits and the stories of two archaeologists who had done in-depth research in the area and knew a lot about its history. Both during and after this week, the signatories of the covenant and the researchers kept in touch about the plan.

During the period of plan development, the Efteling brought together a 'sounding board group' on three occasions. The group was composed of the signatories of the covenant, as well as of all the other government parties involved, the archaeologists of RAAP and Das en Boom.

The researchers elaborated the ideas which had been summarized in the covenant: restoring the varied cultural landscape of wooded banks, sandy roads, heather and meadows. They proposed conserving the remains of beech lanes and a beech forest the size of a football-field, as well as the century-old oak coppice, which would need to be restored by replanting. Beyond this, a lot of work would need to be done in order to keep the landscape in its historical state, and not let it fall prey to natural processes like those that led to the forest's current neglected state. Suggestions included letting a flock of sheep graze the heather and grass meadows. The heather would replace the exhausted forest that characterized much of the area at the time of the project. A shepherd would look after the sheep and once tourists started to visit the area, could tell them about the area and the local folklore. The picture resembled the closed cycle of a mediaeval farming system. These ideas were derived from the 'Farming for Nature' idea described in Chapter four with reference to the Biesland case (include a diagram of a closed cycle). The sheep would provide for manure for the meadows, the grass would be the fodder of the sheep. The wooded banks would provide fuel for the houses. The visitors might maintain the wooded banks by cutting the branches and burning these in their fireplaces. Reintroducing heather was an important element of the plan, and would require the felling of a considerable part of the forest. The accommodation itself would only be realized on the cornfields which were currently heavily fertilized.



**Figure 8: Drawing of closed nutrient cycle**

The plan strongly emphasized the coherence of the area with the neighbouring Loonsche and Drunensche Duinen in the West and Huis ter Heide in the Southeast. This was in accordance with the ideas of Natuurmonumenten and the BMF, who aimed to restore heather in these areas too. When it was finished, the plan did gain the support of the signatories of the covenant.

From outside the team, the organization Das en Boom voiced its criticism at one of the steering committee meetings. Das en Boom focused on the role of the badger and the landscapes that the badger required. Das en Boom proposed felling far more trees than the plan did. In the steering committee meeting, they even referred to the plan as a 'weak-kneed compromise'. The plan was adjusted after discussions on the prepared maps (which were multi-interpretable and could also be seen from an angle more in line with the ideas of Das and Boom), a visit to Das en Boom by one of the researchers and the designer of the map, and perhaps most importantly, careful support by the two nature organizations which had signed the covenant. More woven fences were added to the plan and some more of the existing forest was replaced by heather. The colours on the map were adjusted in order to make the transformation of forest into heather more visible. Interestingly, the changes made the plan even more contestable in view of formal policies: more trees would need to be felled. There seemed to be no cause for concern, however, because the parties involved were enthusiastic.



The Efteling organized a meeting to present the ideas to provincial decision makers. In this meeting, the provincial delegates were once again optimistic about the chances of approval, as long as there was a convincing account of the effects on nature and how these would be compensated, in line with their policy. It had already been decided that the researchers would add a separate chapter to their report about the consequences of the plan for nature values.

Natuurmonumenten made clear its enthusiasm about the plan as well. When I asked a representative of Natuurmonumenten how he felt in Spring 2007, as the plan was about to be realized, he stated

“It is a story that is hard to retell. The activities of the Groenfront for instance, which had nothing to do with us, in a way helped push to find a positive outcome. Now they also look at the plan as *their* success. And the badger who suddenly appeared in the area! That was a co-incidence that some thought we had organized, but which was really that, a co-incidence that nevertheless reconfirmed that it was important to make a plan that was good for nature”.

#### *Confrontation with existing policy – translation into operative policy*

Even though government parties had also claimed to have been the main instigator of the new approach, some of them still expressed their worries about policy directives which they feared would not be met. The member of the provincial executive voiced his concern about the plan because it went *further* than requirements in existing policy. Wasn't it possible that the nature compensation would be *too* much? The Efteling reacted by stating that provincial policy offered a 'minimum limit' for compensation, and did not mention the provinces' view that the nature organizations had demanded too much. Besides, officials of the province, who had become enthusiastic about what they saw emerging, pointed again at the possibilities for making exceptions offered by existing policy. Nevertheless, the participants in the meetings and the respondents in the interviews focused consistently on the terms of the forest law and nature compensation policy. With respect to the first two laws, which were in force nationally, the Ministry of ANF gave the province greater responsibility. As far as nature compensation policy was concerned, this division of responsibilities made sense to all parties. The province of North-Brabant was proud of its nature compensation policy, which was more elaborated and set stricter targets than the nature compensation policies of other provinces (Kuindersma et al. 1999). With respect to the Forest Law, however, the division of responsibilities were less clear. In an interview at ANF, it appeared that the Forest Law was assumed to be incorporated in the provincial nature compensation policy. During the process, stakeholders from the province, the Ministry, and the nature organizations

emphasized that the Forest Law was old and outdated. Initially, it was frequently cited as a possible 'threat' to the aim of converting forest into heather. The Forest Law's main principle was that wherever trees were cut, they should be replaced by the same number of trees in an adjacent area. But in this case, the Efteling, Natuurmonumenten and BMF agreed that this was not desirable, since a forest monoculture was exactly what they did not want here. Rather, they wanted to restore heather, as part of a diverse, small-scale landscape consisting of different elements. BMF and Natuurmonumenten defended the plan as enrichment of the nature values in the area. They also continued to emphasize that the argumentation behind such plans should be solid, and that it should not be seen as a 'precedent' for other building activities in nature areas or for other felling operations. BMF adds, in their first reaction to the plan, that

"it should be very clear that BMF only accepts encroachments within in the Main Ecological Structure in cases where both the ecological values and the landscape and cultural-historical values which return after realization, are greater than in the present situation" (Written reaction to the plan by BMF, July 2005).

The Ministry of ANF initially chose to stay at a distance. In view of the budgetary cuts and decrease of personnel, they said that they would leave involvement with individual projects such as these to the province. Nevertheless, aware of the obstacles that the Ministry could raise in a later stage, the Efteling persisted in trying to get in touch with ANF. They succeeded in getting the Ministry on board at a 'policy workshop' organized in summer 2005, when a concept of the plan was finished, with the objective of identifying possible obstacles and agreeing upon the actions needed to overcome these obstacles. The initiative for this meeting came from the Efteling, but all the stakeholders were present. The province even sent four delegates. To emphasize the importance that the Efteling attached to the workshop, the director of the Efteling opened the meeting and participated in it.

At the workshop, it emerged that it was not clear who should take action with respect to the Forest Law, due to a recent transfer of responsibilities from the Ministry of ANF to the province. Meanwhile, the Forest Law had been discussed in several meetings and had been presented as a potential barrier to the plan. The necessity of replacing every felled tree by a new tree was once again played down. Both Ministry and provincial officials adopted an 'exploratory' attitude at this workshop however and tried to find ways to help each other to take the procedural steps needed in order to move on. As one policy official of the province said at the workshop:

“The provincial nature compensation policy is meant for the realization of ‘red’ developments in ‘green’ areas. The replacement of green with another type of green is another thing.

Looking at the contents of the plan, it seems that there are sufficient arguments to convince decision makers about the amount of nature compensation taking place in relation to the building development. For the second type of transformation, we need to establish new policy and here the Forest Law may create problems” (4 July 2005).

The openness at the meeting contributed to an atmosphere in which policy became ‘just’ a hurdle that needed to be taken in a collaborative effort. One of the proposed solutions was to ‘split up’ the plan into two parts – one for the realization of houses on the former maize fields and a second one for the transformation of forest into heather. The participants did not expect the first part to pose big problems – the number of ‘beds’ was reduced and housing development would be restricted to the (polluted) corn-fields.

In the end, it appeared that the problem could be solved: the maps of ‘nature target types’ that the province made could be adjusted and what was at present indicated as ‘forest’ would need to be adjusted into ‘heather’. Also present at the July 2005 meeting was the consultancy agency which was specialized in spatial planning and other policy procedures and which advised the Efteling about its applications for permits, changes of municipal zoning schemes, and the argumentations behind nature compensation. Their reports would always elaborate in legal and quantitative detail how the plans would match with government policies. They contained precise estimations of, for example, hectares to be compensated, species that would probably be affected and numbers of visitors that could be expected. During the meeting, one of the consultants presented maps and calculations to show how the obligation of nature compensation would be met. It led the discussion in the direction of the way of thinking implied in nature compensation policy, and the corresponding language needed by the policy officials to get the plans through their organizations.

For the researchers, the meeting in July 2005 was their last activity at the Efteling. It was a positive ending, and a cautious expectation was expressed by some of the participants that the plan might be implemented earlier than originally expected. On the other hand, the meeting had also shown that the new language that had brought the parties together could not replace the language of hectares and legal requirements. Every detail of the plan would need to be translated back again into the conditions and language of established policy in order to get the plans further. After the meeting, the researchers finished their report. For the time being, it had to be kept ‘under embargo’. The most important reason was that the Efteling itself still needed to present it to their board of Commissioners. Offering

holiday accommodation was a new economic activity for the Efteling, it was argued. The board of Commissioners still needed convincing of the qualities of the plan.

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Meanwhile, the agreements made at the meeting in July 2005 were carried forward. As I already mentioned, on the 'nature target types' map of the province, the forest was indeed replaced by heather. The other required changes, such as the amendment in the municipal zoning plan, were dealt with as a revision of that plan. In September 2006, the media reported the agreement between the Efteling, Natuurmonumenten and BMF about the building of apartments and luxurious bungalows in exchange for nature compensation. It was announced that building work would start on phase one of the recreation facilities, with the working title 'Bosrijk', in 2007.

A considerable amount of (costly) work still needed be done however. Whereas the agreements made at the workshop were smoothly dealt with, two other hurdles came as unpleasant surprises. First, new legislation on particulate matter put a stop to all building activities in the province of Brabant. From January 2005 onwards, all countries in the European Union had to meet standards which had been agreed upon at European level. These standards related to the deposition of particulate matter caused by increased traffic once the accommodation was in use. This appeared to necessitate computations which, according to the Efteling's legal advisor, were first not clear, then gave results that were too high, were then repeated and the problem was suddenly solved. This delayed the process for a year. A second hurdle appeared to be the policy on 'odour nuisance, which included so called 'odours circles'. That put a weapon into the hands of a local pig farmer who feared that his opportunities to expand would be limited by the recreational activities on neighbouring land. Calculations were made to assess the amount of accommodation which could be built under the policy which included a maximum level of odour nuisance, and would need to protect leisure-seekers in the accommodation. The calculations amounted to approval for building one third of the planned number of residences, far too little to make the undertaking financially attractive for the Efteling. The pig breeder still threatened to oppose the change of the municipal zoning plan, but he was bought out by the Efteling, so that the rules with regard to odour nuisance were also met. The submitted municipal zoning plan did not provoke any further reactions and was approved of.

To avoid turmoil before all the hurdles had been taken, the Efteling, BMF and Natuurmonumenten had hoped to avoid exposure in the media in the autumn of 2006, and to bring the 'news' together, in a joint press

conference. However, they were pre-empted by a journalist present at a meeting at the Efteling about financial affairs, who went to press.

The building of accommodation in phase two would depend on the financial results of phase one. As far as phase two was concerned, the 'green part' was discussed with a farmers' organization (ZLTO) that might be able to play a role in managing the land, and the flock of sheep in particular. The European Centre for Nature Conservation, a European networking organization with its office in Tilburg, was asked to look into the possibilities for obtaining European subsidies for that part of the project. At the time of writing, these discussions were still of an exploratory nature. For the Efteling, the prior implementation of the green part of the plan had the advantage of allowing the hedgerows and heather to develop before guests started coming. It also made it possible to phase the tree felling and avoid attracting too much negative attention from people who did not know what was going on, employees of the Efteling said.

## ***6.5 Interpretation***

### ***6.5.1 The origin of the initiative***

The collaborative initiative that was consolidated in the 2004 covenant had its origin in a commonly felt need to finish with the long-lasting legal procedures that had characterized the interaction between the Efteling and the nature organizations for such a long time. The costs of these legal procedures were high and it was frustrating for both the Efteling and the nature organizations that the Council of State dropped the case in the end because of procedural errors. Thus, no positive results were achieved for any of the parties. The nature organizations could not be sure that anything good for nature would result in the long run and the Efteling could not pursue its plans for accommodation on its premises. A new process was predicted to take another two years.

In the process, nature compensation policy in particular was interpreted in different ways by the rivals. The nature organizations claimed that the Efteling needed to compensate for far more hectares than the Efteling had planned for in its compensation plan. Thus, the initiative originated in a legal struggle about differing interpretations of existing policy and the widely diverging physical claims of the opposing parties. A deadlock ensued in the continued absence of a decision by the legal institutions. Everybody wanted a way out and when an idea was launched that provided for such a way out, the parties agreed on a covenant that set the conditions for it. That decision marked a break with earlier confrontations between the

Efteling, the nature organizations and the government's policy-making institutions. The way emphasis on quantitative standards in the regulations did not stimulate stakeholders to think of solutions that might disregard the quantitative norms, and yet be beneficial to all concerned. This experience of legal battles and land claims points at a process of juridification and a connected requirement to quantify plans and projections that was, in the end, counter-productive. It did, on the other hand, give rise to a new type of cooperation.

### ***6.5.2 Discourse, actors, rules and resources***

This section takes up the second question of the research: How did discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy?

Various discourses can be discerned in the above story, at various levels. I will concentrate on two which I find crucial to a better understanding of the interaction of the new initiative with existing policy. I call the first discourse the 'nature compensation discourse'. For instance, every hectare of forest (of a certain age) that was developed for accommodation needed to be replaced by 1,66 hectare of nature.

This nature compensation discourse, on paper or otherwise, is still firmly embedded in provincial and national policy. Paradoxically, it has its counterpart in the economic discourse that focuses purely on the economic advantages of accommodation development. In this case, the compensation discourse gave rise to fierce opposition between actors representing building activities and actors representing nature. It 'made' each of them think in terms of their own interests. For a long time, the compensation idea was reproduced in this struggle because the hostility that characterized these interactions militated against the finding of collaborative approaches which might make a win-win solution possible. With a court decision still pending and the process on the verge of being repeated all over again – in other words, with the situation only getting worse – everybody wanted a way out.

The discourse that provided such a way out was more integral and qualitative in character. It addressed the area as a whole and got its inspiration from stories behind the landscape. The change of language even led the parties involved to look beyond the 60 hectares belonging to the Efteling at the advantages of and for that larger area. 'Economy' and 'nature', were no longer viewed as contradictory or incompatible. It boiled down to the imposition of ecological conditions on the building of apartments and it also emphasized the overall improvement of the area in

terms of nature values and cultural history. This second discourse implied a new rule of the game: commitment to a covenant, which meant a change of mentality to thinking in terms of cooperation instead of conflict.

The shift from operating through legal procedures to engaging in face-to-face discussions and to commitment to a covenant implied a different way of looking. In terms of contents, both parties had to take on a broader outlook and widen their perspective to include the perspective of their former enemy, without giving up their own point of view. Thus, the Efteling no longer 'just' promoted its building plans, and the nature organizations no longer 'just' focussed on quantitative compensation of nature values, although each party kept their primary interests and concerns, thus keeping their positions clear. In the light of the new idea and their adoption of the covenant, the former opponents both now needed to think of options for combining nature development with the building of accommodation. This shift from thinking in terms of litigation towards thinking in terms of cooperation can be called a *discursive* shift. It entailed a change of rules of the game, actor coalitions and allocation of resources. Where conflict had dominated, cooperation now became the key word for the new approach. Even if their aims (such as the realization of beds and the protection of nature values) remained the same, the participating actors were aware of the need for flexibility in order to open up a way to create a new plan that was different.

At various points in the process, the stakeholders seemed to be caught between two stools: the compensation rules and the new perspective. Adopting the two languages, one for interacting with the local actors and one for trying to get the plans accepted in their own organization, did enable them to realize the plan in the specific situation of the Loonsche Land. On the other hand, it also meant that the approach that had transformed the former enemies into collaborators did not give rise to wider policy implications.

It remains to be seen whether in the course of the years the new discourse and the accompanying practices will remain an incident or will become more widely embedded in the policy-making institutions. Whereas area-oriented approaches building on collaboration between various public and private parties were gaining ground, the fundamental principles of the Nature Compensation discourse, whose built-in bias towards claim-making behaviour had triggered the confrontational approach, continued to hold sway. The most remarkable aspect of this is perhaps that there was so little discussion about the enabling and constraining effects of compensation policy. Fear of setting precedents played an important role in this.

Those officials who had been involved in the plan making intensively enough to start to see the new form of collaboration as a solution to earlier deadlocks found themselves in two worlds. Most of them did what they could to make the initiative possible within the limits of existing policy. In an evaluative discussion one of the Efteling directors mentioned this as a crucial success factor:

“You have to carry on and look for officials who actually like the new plans. Then they start to look at possibilities. Mostly people are more likely to contact politicians, but in my experience you have to find the right officials who are willing to communicate and to turn doors that are left open into wide open doors”.

As already indicated, what the officials could not do was to ‘raise’ the level of the discussion from that of one specific case to a debate on some of the fundamental points of departure of the policies themselves, in which precedents or ‘exceptions’ simultaneously form a way out *and* a danger.

The above gives rise to the following overview, in terms of the scheme: structural conditioning → social interaction → structural elaboration.

Structural Conditioning	Social Interaction	Structural Elaboration
Existing arrangement: nature compensation primarily by means of quantitative approach. The arrangement is a confrontational one – it brings with it spatial claims and rivalry about those claims.	Coming about of new discourse and new coalition. Former enemies commit to new idea which is eventually ‘stabilized’ in a covenant. It is a means of changing the situation at t=1. The qualities of the area as a whole start to play a more important role and parties make attempts to get to an integrated solution.	While the covenant is implemented for the most part, the question remains what systematic implications will come of it. The reason why I am doubtful about this is that the new plan, encompassing the new discourse, is translated back into the t=1-discourse in order to be implemented. It depends on whether there will be fundamental discussion about how existing rules relate to the new discourse and about potential consequences of the new approach for policy and policy practices.



### ***6.5.3 Sub-politicization***

The question whether this case is a manifestation of sub-politicization can be answered from more than one angle. To illustrate this I wish to quote from a newspaper article in which a member of the provincial executive expressed his perspective on the initiative by the Efteling, BMF and Natuurmonumenten after they had entered into the covenant and started preparations on the making of a new plan:

“ With their decision about the creation of new nature South of the Efteling, both parties, according to [the provincial executive], went further than the democratically developed nature compensation policy of the province. “Since BMF did not succeed with us, they tried to get their way by other means”, the executive for spatial planning said (...) in a debate with the BMF director (...)

According to [the provincial executive], after losing the case at the Council of State, the Efteling calculated how long a new hearing would take and how much it would cost. “The company compared these costs with the costs of an agreement with BMF. The outcome of this calculation was a covenant between both parties. If this becomes a trend, it will erode democracy” The BMF director was of the opinion that this way of reasoning was nonsense: “At the Efteling, we have achieved a wonderful result for nature and landscape” (Brabants Dagblad 10 September 2004).

Clearly, this member of the provincial executive saw the new coalition and the way it operated as an undemocratic undertaking because ‘deals’ were made that led to outcomes that were different from those that would have followed from sticking to (democratically developed) official policy. On the other hand, he had chosen to stay at a distance himself, and had stimulated the parties to come to an agreement by themselves “while taking into account the rules”. This raises a couple of questions. One question is: what alternatives did they have for breaking the deadlock they were in? After all, voters were not likely to be any keener on new and costly procedures for taking the case to the highest public court, the Council of State. Nor had established rules such as the one stipulating a 1,66 level of compensation been subject to a democratic vote. As a representative of democratically established policy, the member of the provincial executive criticized the parties to the covenant for having offered *more* compensation than was officially required. While he described this as an undemocratic act, it could also be perceived as a matter of competence. Was the province still in control or had the lead been taken over by the new coalition? A second question, then, is whether the case therefore exemplifies a trend towards sub-politicization. The process remained largely an internal affair. From the signing of the covenant onwards, the three parties remained silent to

the outside world about what they had agreed on, for several reasons. The main one was that the actors from the Efteling wanted time to present the details of the plan to the shareholders and the board of commissioners. They were also keen to avoid further action by Green Front activists. On the one hand, then, there is reason to suggest that private actors took charge from below. Yet, on the other hand, their practice was not very open to other interested parties.

A further consideration is that, even though BMF and Natuurmonumenten are donor organizations, their internal participation procedures are still limited. With this in mind, it would be going too far to speak of the case as a manifestation of sub-politicization, insofar as sub-politicization is understood as a democratizing trend. On the other hand, in line with Beck's concepts, we can say that by entering into a cooperative relationship, the three organizations 'shaped developments from below'. They prevented continued legal rivalry and committed themselves to a common plan.

The Efteling case is also an interesting example when viewed from the perspective of depoliticization, the structural process that I hypothesized about in relation to the previous cases. One possible indicator of depoliticization was the way in which, as I have indicated, the planning process was a relatively 'closed' process, with a limited number of actors involved. For this reason, what had in fact already been decided and laid down in the covenant in spring 2004, only reached the public in autumn 2006, due to the intervention of a journalist who released the news before the three parties had organized their intended common press conference. A second sign of depoliticization was the lack of debate in official policy-making arenas about the possible wider policy implications of the entire process, including the way in which the compensation discourse had given rise to deadlock. On the contrary, the contents of the plan had to be translated into existing policy terms in order to be accepted by the policy-making bodies.

#### ***6.5.4 Space for policy innovation***

As in the Biesland and the Grensschap cases, with their quite different actor coalitions and spatial configurations, a picture emerges in the Loonsche Land case of a policy arrangement which is dynamic and stable at the same time. The seeds for policy innovation were sown in the direct interaction between the private company, the Efteling, and the non-governmental organizations. Initially, they exchanged the compensation discourse for a more integral discourse and invested in research, and in dialogue with parties such as archaeologists and Das and Boom. They started to work on the basis of their own rules of the game (the covenant

and the statements in the covenant about how to deal with conflicts for instance). However, this practice was not applied to thinking about wider policy implications - it could not be raised from the level of one innovative project to that of a debate about policy innovation. In terms of discourse and actor coalitions, eye-catching shifts took place. The Efteling and the nature organizations moved towards each other by expressing their trust in and commitment to a solution that would be satisfactory for both. Their communication was no longer about who 'won' or who 'lost'. The change in the contents of the approach was accompanied by a change in *their* rules of the game, embodied in the covenant. Disputing each other through court was replaced by a more harmonious approach. Officials from the relevant policy-making bodies, the province in particular, also played a constructive role in getting the agreement to a successful conclusion.

As stated, the simultaneous occurrence of these changes *and* the hitherto little-debated basis for institutionalized rules, has not yet been problematized. In terms of space for innovation, this has meant that the space granted did not reach further than the discretionary space that officials made use of to foster this initiative, in this specific territory.

## ***6.6 The relational dimension and my own positionality***

### ***6.6.1 Socio-relational factors***

The institutional analysis that I presented in the foregoing surely leaves parts of the "Efteling" story untold. For instance, the greatest creativity and positive expectations surfaced when people met and started to share their stories about the area. I experienced this personally through our cooperation with the archaeologists. Through them, we were able to look at a history of the Loonsche Land which was hidden beneath the surface. Their enthusiasm, the connections that some of the researchers could make with features of the landscape that were still partly visible, and the encouragements to invent an attractive story for future visitors, brought the area to life. This experience and the positive reactions to the ideas it engendered formed the basis for the plan. The territory itself and the way it contained its story (in this situation mediated mostly by the archaeologists), seemed to play a substantial role in making people enthusiastic. The 'click' factor, and the feeling of trust that accompanied it, created a context in which people were willing to step off the barricades that they had occupied for quite some time during the period of legal battles. Processes like these, which may be summarized by the term *place*, are difficult to translate into numbers or other objective data. Nevertheless they were important catalysts for the creation and continuation of a new

approach. The place or the 'territory' became a binding factor, without which the ideas would probably have remained vague and uninspiring. Therefore, in addition to discourse, actors, rules and resources, there was the dimension of *place* that operated in the interface of local initiatives and existing policy. I can be more precise about *place* now, as the other two cases also revealed the importance of a *real contact* with each other in the field. By *place* I do not mean the physical location but the emotions that a place may engender when people are put in touch with a territory. Thus it is very much a relational concept. People may be moved by the own experiences that are consciously or unconsciously evoked by a place. Or they may be enthused by the history of a place and by how it relates to their present-day ambitions.

Just as in the other cases, there were coincidences in the Efteling case which facilitated the process; one example was the sudden appearance of a badger in the area. By its presence, the badger gave unintended support to the nature organizations. Everybody knew that it had brought building activities to a halt on several occasions. Organizations like 'Das and Boom' had successfully used the species and its protected status in European nature legislation to prevent building activities in areas where the badger had been spotted. The nature organizations therefore felt that the badger came to support them, to remind all parties that if the results of the plan did not represent an improvement for nature values, they always had the option of bringing up the badger. Crucially, however, they did not express this feeling during the process, to avoid cooling the relationship. For their part, the Efteling did not threaten to use their own fallback option: the permit to build on the 'Kraanven' site, a former recreation area. Choices like these also contributed to 'keeping the spirit' of the process. They are examples of the socio-psychological factors we should bear in mind when trying to understand why initiatives develop as they do.

### ***6.6.2 Positionality***

What I found most difficult to accept in this case was the initiators' choice to keep the process closed. Even though we supported the new approach in which building development and nature development were not seen as conflicting by definition, and even though we were excited at playing a role in the transformation of the process from antagonistic to collaborative, we were less positive about the closed character of the process. In the other two cases, we had an explicit aim of making the research process itself more interactive, and attached considerable value to the openness of the research. In relation to the Loonsche Land, we had to adopt a rather different role. The confines of the assignment and the related budget did not leave much space for our own ambitions. We engaged in it nevertheless,

and with hindsight, I do not regret that. In such situations perhaps we should not judge the research so much by whether it has contributed to democratization as by whether it has been detrimental to it.

At the start of the project, I was also skeptical about the way we as researchers were actually 'used' by the Efteling and the nature organizations to underpin their point of view. Would we be 'used' to create opportunities to build in a nature area? We discussed this in the team. My personal evaluation is that it is not a bad thing to be 'used' as a researcher, as long as you do not do things that go against your own principles. Thus, with hindsight, perhaps we should not ask ourselves 'what is the risk of being used?' Instead, we could ask ourselves, 'do we agree to being used and what will we do if we do not agree any longer?'



## 7. Comparison of the cases

### *7.1 Introduction*

These were three very different cases, but they all involved initiatives which focused on a specific territory. They also all involved a confrontation with established, mostly sectoral, policy. The confrontations surfaced sooner or later in the decision-making process, in different ways and with varying intensity. My wish to know more about these confrontations was largely aroused by what I perceived as a remarkable tension between, on the one hand, the ubiquitous pleas for a greater role of private actors in policy development and, on the other, the sometimes seemingly insurmountable hurdles which still needed to be taken to further develop such initiatives.

In order to understand these confrontations better, the concept of ‘space for policy innovation’ was introduced in chapter two to point at the range of possibilities arising when, as a result of their interaction with local initiatives, established policy arrangements, ‘opened up’ to policy options which they had previously excluded. I explained that space for policy innovation reaches further than discretionary space. The latter implies an idea of ‘government’ in which the state is the primary locus of policy-making. ‘Space for policy innovation’, on the other hand, enables us to start reasoning from initiatives which had *not* yet developed into formal policy or policy arrangements, and then to assess whether they eventually had broader policy implications. By tracing relationships between actor and structure (operationalized by the dimensions of discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game) and how these relationships developed over time, I was able to describe how new coalitions went about realizing their ideas.

This chapter will be geared to exploring what the three cases had in common, and in what ways they differed, in terms of the research questions. While these findings are grounded in the local specifics of each individual case, the comparison will result in the formulation of hypotheses about the conditions that may promote or hinder the development of space for policy innovation – or, in other words, the import of local initiatives for possible wider policy implications. These hypotheses can serve as the subject of a public dialogue and input for future empirical research. This chapter will therefore address my fifth research question: What are enabling or impeding conditions for the emergence of space of policy

innovation? By getting a better insight into these conditions, and by opening them up to public debate, I hope that a fruitful policy learning process can come into being that lives up to the claims that private actors are playing a bigger role in finding solutions for spatial issues in specific areas.

The dynamic development of the initiative through the interaction with existing policy could be summarized by means of Archer's scheme: structural conditions → social action → structural elaboration. This scheme elaborates the duality of actor and structure in chronological terms. Structural conditions form the context in which the initiatives originated (my first question). Social action is what happens next, in the interface of these initiatives and existing policy. Social actions in this interface can be analysed by means of the interrelations between discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game (my second question). Structural elaboration is what happens when a policy arrangement 'opens up' to the initiative, so that the latter can be 'scaled up' to established policy-making domains and the rules and resources related to them, in particular. At that final stage, the initiative can become more than an individual case or an 'exception' and set a precedent for wider use in other areas as well. I use the term 'space for policy innovation' to describe the extent to which this happens (my fourth question). The third question, about sub-politicization and other structural transformations emerges in the first, second *and* the third part of Archer's scheme. Sub-politicization, for instance, may be identified as a structural transformation that partly explains how an initiative came into being (my first question). Sub-politicization or any other structural transformation may also operate at the micro level of society, and manifest themselves in social interactions. In conclusion, it may emerge in the cases as a structural elaboration of social action – that is, rules and resources may be altered to give impetus to or reconfirm sub-politicization or any other structural process (my third question).

In the remainder of this chapter, I will compare the cases in terms of each research question in turn. Section 7.2 deals with the origins of the three initiatives. Section 7.3 looks at the confrontation of the initiatives with existing policy, in terms of discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules. Then section 7.4 compares the cases in terms of 'sub-politicization' and looks for other 'structural processes' that seem to have played a role in the interactions between local initiatives and established policy. Section 7.5 compares the types of 'space for policy innovation' that came out of these interactions, and section 7.6 reconsiders additional factors that I came across in finding explanations for the nature of these interactions. Finally, section 7.7 addresses the fifth research question about the conditions for



the emergence of space for policy innovation. In order to fuel debate, these are presented in the form of hypotheses.

## *7.2 Origins of the initiatives*

In all three cases, new actor coalitions were formed. These laid the foundation for the formulation of the joint initiatives. The initiatives originated from the wishes of local actors to make a difference to 'their' territory, and were generally related to a growing awareness among the initiators that the existing sectoral policies formed an obstacle for them to approach the areas as integrated wholes. The partnerships grew and intensified in the course of further elaboration of the ideas.

Despite the differences, the initiatives all came about in relation to government policy: either because there was a felt need to develop the policy further (Grensschap), or because varying interpretations of existing policy had led to a paralyzing struggle rather than collective action (Loonsche Land), or because existing policy was experienced as too narrow to allow for what the initiators wanted (Biesland). It is not easy to find one common denominator among the policy domains that these initiatives were related to, because the initiatives did not spring from a sectoral policy, but from specific territories. What the involved actors shared was a concern about that specific territory, even though the nature of their concerns varied considerably. Once they met and established more than superficial obligatory contacts, once they really got in touch and got to talk about the area and about what they thought was needed to make it a better place, things got moving, in spite of their divergent interests and points of view. It was on those occasions that actors showed themselves to be perfectly capable of thinking far beyond their own backyards. This study highlighted four structural conditions that made it possible for these initiatives to emerge.

One marked characteristic of the conditions under which the three initiatives came into being has already been mentioned: the sectoral working approach that characterized policy arrangements so far. In the case of Biesland, the sectoral orientation that had been dominant tended to divorce agriculture from nature; in the case of the Loonsche Land, building development and nature were seen as conflicting interests requiring quantifications of 'losses' and calculations of compensation; and in the case of the Grensschap, building development and 'green' (be it nature, agriculture or cultural history) were still different worlds in the municipal organization. From the perspective of the initiators, whose ideas involved

an integration of several topics and represented areas 'as a whole', these divisions did little justice to their vision of desirable developments.

A second characteristic of the conditions that 'pre-existed' and shaped social action was the claim-creating incentive built into operative policy, giving rise to a culture of claims and a fear of creating precedents. Targeting specific quantities of hectares for the realization of 'nature', specific 'building volumes', and specific nature target types had led to lengthy procedures, especially in the Efteling case (in the context of the related and equally quantitative compensation policy), and also in the Biesland case (in the context of targeted acquisition of agricultural land for the realization of the Biesland forest). This approach had done little to inspire people to seek common solutions, giving rise instead to conflicting claims.

A third condition which pre-existed these social interactions had to do with the involvement of contract researchers or, for that matter, other third parties. In all of the three cases, research or process facilitation work was contracted out in the form of 'projects'. This was done either by one of the initiators (the Efteling, and the Municipality of Maastricht) or by government bodies involved after acquisition by the researchers (most notably in the Biesland case). This phenomenon of contracting out part of the work is a recognized trend that has been theorized about by several authors (Allen 2005). In the cases studied here, the 'research' projects, of which 'process facilitation' was often an important part, contributed to setting the three processes in motion. Some authors nowadays emphasize the policy bias that contract research institutes have run into because of their dependence on funding from government policy institutions. However, the cases chosen here point at the use of such a 'resource' by private actors as well.

The fourth relevant process was the growing attention for increasing the involvement of citizens, societal organizations and private enterprise, though this did not apply in all cases. In one case, participation was an explicit ambition of the municipal government, or at least for one alderman. At a very early stage in the policy development, he and his officials brought about the founding of the Grensschap by organizing the interactive event at which it took place. Their initiative fitted within a more general trend or 'structural process' of finding new ways to involve citizens at an earlier stage than was usual in the first generation of participation methods in the seventies (see chapter one for a summary of three 'generations' of participatory approaches). This represents the fourth structural condition that promoted at least one of the initiatives.

The table below summarizes the main processes that provided the right conditions for the emergence of the initiatives.

<p><b>Cases</b></p> <p><b>Conditions</b></p>	<p><b><i>Biesland</i></b> Agricultural enclave in urbanized 'Randstad'. Agricultural land surrounded by parks/ forest and urban texture</p>	<p><b><i>Grensschap</i></b> Urbanizing area, consisting mainly of agricultural land, but with upcoming industry and housing across the Dutch-Belgian border</p>	<p><b><i>Loonsche Land</i></b> Private land of a theme park, neglected forest with some meadows and surrounded by agricultural land and nature areas</p>
<p><i>Main sectoral policies operative prior to the new initiatives</i></p>	<p>Greenstructure policies to realize coherent 'green structures'</p>	<p>Various building operations taking place in the area</p>	<p>Nature compensation policy</p>
<p><i>Past tradition of claim-making (juridification, quantification)</i></p>	<p>Various attempts to acquire land from agriculture for nature development. Urban expansion seemed to have come to a halt</p>	<p>'Building volumes' were set and agreed on.</p>	<p>Legal procedures in which opponents attempted to prove that their plans were 'right' in the terms of compensation policy</p>
<p><i>Contracting out work to researchers</i></p>	<p>Long term, in contents and process. Funded by Ministry of ANF and Province after continuous fundraising/ acquisition efforts by the researchers and local officials. Researchers took part in the initiative and facilitated raising it to provincial and national level.</p>	<p>Short term, more in process. Funded by Ministry of ANF and municipality. Researchers 'designed' interactive event that led to foundation of the Grensschap.</p>	<p>Short term, more in issues of content. Design of the plan to work out the covenant that the theme park and nature organizations had agreed on. Funded by theme park, one of the initiators.</p>
<p><i>Type of 'interactivity'</i></p>	<p>Citizen participation was not a primary objective but developed in the course of time – in the shape of the 'Friends of Biesland' and as a part of the research process. It resulted from activities in the area to influence policy making.</p>	<p>Citizen participation was a <i>point of departure</i> in process-design (participation initiated 'from above') and an explicit wish of the municipal authority.</p>	<p>The initiative was about the collaboration of a private business-actor and societal organizations. There was little direct citizen participation. Aside from the initiators, there was an action group resisting against building activities.</p>

### ***7.3 Stability and dynamics***

The conditions under which the initiatives were launched influenced the social interactions that followed. In the previous chapters, I described the social action at the interface of initiative and existing policy at length, with reference to the dimensions of discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game. In particular I looked at the ways in which these dimensions were interconnected. I was especially surprised to see how manifestations of some of the dimensions were highly dynamic, while others appeared to be conspicuously stable. I shall underline this point with a short recapitulation of the cases in terms of the interaction of discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game.

In the Biesland case, a new coalition came into being in relation to an alternative discourse. I labelled it the 'Biesland' discourse because of its orientation to a specific territory. More than in the present policy, the alternative discourse gave expression to the integrated quality of the area as a whole. That more integrated approach, which was mainly based on the establishment of a 'zero-input' farm, implied that farmers were to be financially rewarded for their societal activities in terms of nature conservation or landscape management. Not so much because of its contents as because of the way it was projected to be financed and the way it was perceived as a substitute for land acquisition, the new farming system gave rise to a long decision-making process that extended right up to the European level. The approach did not tie in with the internal market discourse, which imposed strict conditions on 'state' support to farmers (by any government, at any level). So even if there was support for a certain approach at the local level, it would still give rise to lengthy European procedures. Also, a national green structure discourse in which nature was perceived to be still best managed by one of four professional nature organizations added force to the internal market discourse, and vice versa. For some time, the 'internal market' and 'greenstructure' discourses on the one hand and the 'Biesland discourse' on the other hand could coexist, and so could their supporting coalitions. However, the attempt to comply with established rules and to adapt the established allocations of resources gave rise to an almost unworkable number of bureaucratic procedures. Thus, *through connected rules and resources*, both discourses stood in the way of a greater role for farmers in landscape and nature management, especially if it was to be integrated in the farm enterprise.

The coalition around the idea became ever stronger and included people at all levels. The Friends of Biesland were established, the Minister gave his support to the idea, and local administrators at the highest level showed

their enthusiasm. They arranged to finance the implementation of the approach. The national parliament became involved and submitted ministerial questions at crucial moments. Nevertheless, resistance continued at the national level and from the legal department at the provincial level as well. Rules which were not directly related to the integrated approach were referred to as barriers to the implementation of the ideas. After a lengthy process, the local initiative was approved of. It remained incidental, however, and possibilities for implementing similar approaches in other areas were still closed off. In other words, the discourse was now endorsed by a growing coalition and could exist alongside the 'traditional' discourses, but there was no change in the rules of the game or in the allocation of resources. The latter continued to cater for the discourses that formed a part of existing policy.

In the Grensschap case we observed a similar incongruence between the space for other discourses and discourse coalitions on the one hand, and the stability of rules and resources connected to coexisting discourse on the other hand. A new coalition emerged, with new ideas on how the area in between the municipalities of Maastricht, Riemst and Lanaken should be perceived, designed and managed. This coalition and its ideas were accepted and even endorsed by some actors from the existing policy context. The Grensschap became a showpiece of cross-border, citizen-government collaboration. New, European resources were accessed to realize a project that gave expression to the Grensschap discourse. The members of the Grensschap were careful, however, not to create controversy. Their in-depth knowledge of the area was assumed to slowly influence decision making in a beneficial way, which meant for them that dimensions such as cultural history, water and nature values would become crucial for decisions about building development. Fighting against building development would, in their view, turn them into an action group. They thought that this was undesirable, especially since that would hinder cooperation with municipal officials.

The gap between policy sectors remained, however. The ideas of the Grensschap did not cross the dividing line between the 'green' and the 'economic development' sectors, whose decisions they seemed not to be able to really influence. Decisions had been imposed on them in their very early days (when the alderman's wish to involve citizens by means of an interactive event was curtailed in terms of possible outcomes by a decision of his fellow aldermen), and the pattern continued throughout the process. The new coalition, the language that the members of the Grensschap developed among themselves to discuss the area, and the resources allocated to the Grensschap by a European program, *coexisted* with that which predated the Grensschap. The 'old' and the 'new' arrangements

remained separate worlds that existed peacefully alongside each other. This situation could continue as long as the members of the Grensschap could realize meaningful projects while it was 'business as usual' in the other 'world'. Decisions to build still took place in distinct realms. The Grensschap may have been a showcase model and it did realize successes due to the vigorous work of its members; yet routinized proceedings were not altered or even confronted, and nor were the rules of the game in the sectoral discourse that valued the area for its potential for building development. The projects that the members of the Grensschap were successful in realizing were situated outside routinized practice. The overall picture is similar to that of Biesland, with discursive space and related coalitions emerging on the one hand, while the traditional discourse remained strongly buttressed by rules and resources that appeared to be as 'steady as a rock' on the other hand.

Finally, in the case of the 'Loonsche Land', former enemies decided to sit around the table and adopt another approach than the one that had not got them anywhere so far. The new approach was not just a 'new instrument' with which all parties could expect to continue to get the same results for themselves. A new vision on the contents of plans was needed as well. The parties adopted quite a different language to the one used during their legal battles in court. Nevertheless, when their ideas needed to be judged in terms of existing policies, they were translated into a language reflecting the norms and criteria of those policies. While the particular project was likely to be implemented in the end, the wider policy implications, particularly for the rules related to operative policies, remained undebated.

This comparison demonstrates how new discourses and coalitions were formed in the three cases, whereas rules and resources continued to support the coalitions behind discourses which were firmly embedded in government policies and practices. A change of discourse appeared not to bring with it a change of institutional practices.

There is something about the actor coalitions that I did not yet mention in the three short summaries. In all cases, elected politicians stood at relative distance, while appointed executives (mayor or aldermen, members of the provincial executive, the Minister) played a crucial role at specific moments by placing an area on the agenda (the alderman in Maastricht), by granting an initiative pilot status (the minister of ANF in relation to Biesland), raising regional funds to finance an initiative (the aldermen, the member of the executive of the Water board and the member of the provincial executive in Biesland) or by promoting *and* denouncing the formation of the new partnership (the provincial executive in the Efteling case). However, politicians were not absent and it is conspicuous that in the Biesland and

the Grensschap cases they did play a crucial role at crucial moments, especially when the whole exercise appeared to get derailed or when a breakthrough needed to be enforced. Most importantly, the option of having a say through the traditional representative system was kept open by the initiators involved. In the Biesland case, members of the National Parliament played a more prominent role by asking parliamentary questions, which served to get middle-level officials at the Ministry of ANF moving, while irritating them at the same time. The general view of the initiators was that as long as the politicians were kept well-informed, they could always be approached if necessary (Biesland, Maastricht). The formal representative system and the known formal participation procedures were, so to speak, their 'exit options'. If their influence did not materialize in the 'new' way, they could still use the other channels.

The three examples of local initiatives were each successful in their own way insofar as their ideas led to concrete results in the specific areas for which they were intended. However, they had little wider impact on mainstream policy discourses and practices, and before the ideas (or elements of them) could be realized, major moves needed to be made in the direction of mainstream policy. At first sight, the emergence of new coalitions and discourses, and the coexistence of 'new' and 'traditional' discourses and coalitions gave the impression that there would be significant opportunities to deliberate about existing policy and consider alternative policy options in a collaborative effort. However, an analysis of the ways in which initiatives and government policies interacted over a period of time suggested that the discursive space created by the new coalitions did not bring about a change of rules and resources connected to institutionalised discourses. The latter continued to dominate, forcing the initiatives to make moves in the direction of this 'institutionalized mainstream'.

#### ***7.4 Sub-politicization and other structural processes***

The three cases suggest that it is important to apply the concept of sub-politicization more precisely, so as to do more justice to its various manifestations. My initial question in Chapter 2 was whether what happened in the cases pointed at a trend towards sub-politicization, or at other structural trends. As I look at it now, a more pertinent question would have been whether the concept of sub-politicization could be refined on the basis of the cases. In the remainder of this section, I will first deal with the first part of the question about sub-politicization and identify the various ways in which developments in the cases were, indeed, increasingly being shaped from below (as Beck phrased it). I will then turn to the second

part of the question: the extent to which other structural processes manifested themselves in the cases.

A comparison of the cases suggests the need to refine the concept of sub-politicization. The point is that sub-politicization, which Beck related to the increasing role of global social movements responding to the side-effects of the 'first modernity', is often associated with democratization. *If* sub-politicization implies democratization *tout court*, then the term cannot be applied to these cases. For, while in each case new territory-oriented coalitions and organizations were formed that attempted to influence policy-making processes, broader public participation appeared to be limited in every case, albeit to different extents. The most open coalition was that in Biesland. As far as the Friends of Biesland were concerned - even though it originated from an elitist Service Club, it was deliberately transformed into an organization open to more civil engagement than is generally the case with Service Clubs themselves. The evening meetings at which activities were elaborated and planned were well attended. Also, the researchers' explicit aim was to give form to and implement monitoring and evaluation of the activities in collaboration with anyone who ever felt connected with the polder and was willing to give an input. And yet, participation was restricted to a limited group. The organization it took to get more people involved was expensive for the researchers, while the activities of the Friends of Biesland depended on the input of the Friends' secretary, whose post was vulnerable as it was funded by annual provincial subsidies.

The Grensschap as an organization was relatively open, but due to its focus on 'expertise' and its rejection of people with an action group mentality, it also excluded people, however implicitly and even unintentionally. New members mostly found their way to the group via existing members, who sometimes approached potential members. Partly because they were far too busy preparing their landmarks project, they did not pretend to have the capacity to represent, or allow for the direct participation, of a lot of people in their activities. It may have been their awareness of these limits to their capacity that led to their alarm when a newspaper article suggested that their input would replace the known formal participation procedures.

With regard to the Loonsche Land, the process remained rather closed from beginning to end. In comparison with the pre-covenant period, it became even more closed after the nature organizations and the Efteling had joined forces because their documents were kept secret for a long time.

Based on these observations, one axis of sub-politicization represents a gradient from open forms of sub-politicization to closed forms of sub-

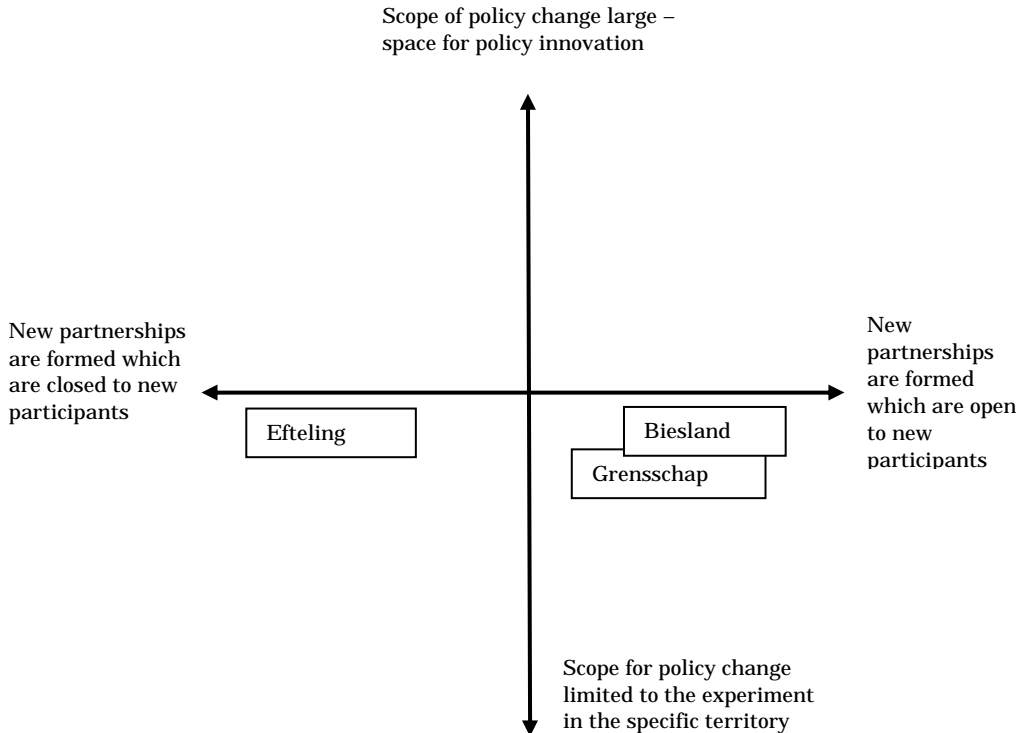


politicization. I prefer to introduce this gradient, rather than to exclude a range of initiatives that shape society from below but which are not totally inclusive. The 'open – closed' axis challenges analysts to describe to whom the initiatives are open and to whom they are closed, and perhaps also how this developed over the course of time.

The vertical axis represents the position of the three initiatives vis-à-vis traditional governance practice or, in other words, the existing policy arrangement. At one end of the axis, the scope for policy change is rather large, at the other end it is small, for instance because it takes the form of an 'experiment' or pilot, restricted to the level of the specific territory that the initiative was about. This change *may* eventually lead to a more significant change, but it may also not come off. On the one hand, the formal status of the initiatives as 'pilot projects' won them a place on policy agendas. On the other hand, singling out an initiative as a 'pilot' also made it possible to exclude it from debate about the transformation of mainstream policy. In this study, the special status of a project did *not* lead to a greater scope in the form of a change of rules or resources. Thus, the cases induce scepticism rather than optimism about the significance of such status.

The horizontal axis, therefore, is about the democratic character of the initiative, and the vertical axis is about the scope of the initiative in terms of its impact on policy change. Along the vertical axis, I placed *all three* initiatives towards the 'limited scope of policy change' end of the scale because they had to shift their terms of reference in the direction of mainstream policy before they could get any further, and because their impact *and* their difference from the existing arrangement were hardly subjected to deliberation. In fact, reflexivity in this sense did not materialize.

I wish to emphasize that the positioning of initiatives and the labelling of the four parts of the figure should ideally be done in a dialogue with the relevant stakeholders. Unfortunately I have not so far been able to do so. It is likely, for instance, that actors from the relevant areas would mainly focus on the results of their efforts in the areas themselves. That would probably position them nearer the higher end of the vertical axis than my own assessment, for which I also took into consideration the wider policy implications of the local initiatives. Besides in the Grensschap case such an analysis is likely to have different results in Belgium than in the Netherlands.



**Figure 9: Types of sub-politicization**

So far, this section has presented a comparison of cases in relation to the sub-politicization thesis. But there were also other conditions that can reasonably be argued to have had a significant influence on the interaction between local initiatives and existing policies. As will be shown, however, these are not unrelated to the sub-politicization thesis.

Two conditions stand out. The *first* is that of Europeanization and the multiple levels at which decisions needed to be taken before the initiatives got any further. Unexpectedly, the European level played a role in all three cases: most conspicuously in the Biesland case, in the Grensschap case because of the subsidy that made the realization of their project possible, and in the Loonsche Land case when Europe made a surprise appearance at a later stage in the process when its directive on particulate matter had to be accommodated. So in two of the three cases 'the European level' and the way that was dealt with formed an obstacle, while in one case it was a source of funding to realize regional ambitions. It is important to

emphasize the relation between Europeanization in the three cases and a *second* process: regionalization. The fact that the people from the region related to a specific territory and organized themselves around that territory, points at a local orientation and willingness to invest time and energy in it, and in the policy processes related to it. Europeanization and regionalization, seemingly opposite trends, both appeared to be at work in the three cases. It is interesting to relate both these processes to sub-politicization. We saw how, in two of the three cases, European rules, related to a strong European discourse, led to lengthy decision-making processes dominated by arguments about issues that seemed far removed from the essence of the initiatives. Instead, they focussed on the outcomes of complicated model-based computations that had little to do with the initiative. The fact that the initiatives were 'drawn' into this corner suggests very little resemblance to sub-politics, in which politics is direct and society is shaped from below. Instead, European rules and their 'voice' at national level had taken over and moulded the initiatives into lookalikes of European and national rules. Viewed from this angle, the process of decision making on the plans (design and management) of three territories pointed at depoliticization rather than at sub-politicization. On the other hand, the regionalization trend implied that initiatives for specific territories had a strong mobilizing impact on a variety of people or organizations, who engaged directly in the making of plans for these areas. In the three cases, various types of actors organized themselves in new formations in order to get to grips with these territories in ways that matched their preferences. (To what extent these new formations or coalitions were also manifestations of new forms of democracy is another question, which I discussed in the above.) People tried to influence developments outside the formal channels (although the formally elected did occasionally play a role!). So regionalization in itself brought with it opportunities to create new political arenas which challenged people and organizations to get involved in policy making about specific territories. In this sense, it *did* bear a resemblance to a process of sub-politicization. In the three cases studied here, I found a form of sub-politicization which was relatively open in two cases and closed in one case, while the scope of all of them was limited in terms of structural elaboration. Looking at situations in which decisions about the local initiatives had to be taken at remote levels which were beyond the control of these coalitions, the sub-politicization thesis seems to remain valid at the local level but not at the level of national and European policy making.

I will now discuss four other structural conditions that contributed to the contexts of my three cases. Then I will make up the balance and draw a conclusion on the sub-politicization thesis.

In addition to Europeanization and regionalization, the cases provide evidence for a third, fourth, fifth and sixth structural process at work in the interaction between initiatives and existing policy. The *third* process is juridification, and the quantification it entails. This can be seen at work in all three cases: in the various procedural hurdles in the Biesland case (e.g. the comptability law, the state support test and the computations required to pass it, nature target types, and the impossibility of establishing regional organization); the laborious undertaking of submitting the proposal in the Grensschap case; and the compensation procedures in the Efteling case. The processes for obtaining approval in the context of European legislation were highly juridical and procedural. Discussions between officials who were formally responsible for reaching decisions were no longer about the motivations for starting up the initiative or about its substantive relation to institutionalized policy (that is, about the landscape and its characteristics, about how these would be served best and about how various dimensions of the landscape could be related to each other) but focused on computation rules and procedural requirements built into existing policy.

Juridification is related to the *fourth* structural process: sectoralization. This was already mentioned in relation to the 'origin' of the initiatives: sectoral policies were in fact an important *motivation* to come forward with other, more integrated proposals for the areas. But it also influenced the subsequent interactions between initiatives and existing policies. Importantly, the sectoral standards incorporated in existing policies caused reformulations or 'shifts' of the contents of the initiatives in the direction of the sectoral policies. Sometimes the initiators felt under pressure to conform to the terms of such policies even when this was not explicitly put forward as a precondition. In relation to Biesland, an example would be the European internal market standards and the nature target types which were put forward by officials as a 'conditio-sine-qua-non'; in relation to the Loonsche Land, there was the way the claim-making consequences of standards were taken up in compensation policy and the Forest Law; and in relation to the Grensschap there was the way in which the sectoral decisions of the housing- and industry-domains were put forward as a unchangeable pre-condition to involvement of the Grensschap. Nevertheless, the initiatives transcended established policy sectors in all three of the cases, as the initiatives involved several dimensions of life, rather than one sector. The interaction with state actors was however 'narrowed' to sectors, precluding any serious debate about the integrated character of the proposed alternatives. Both the juridification and sectoralization were continuously present, in spite of the initiatives that represented a different discourse. What is more, both processes appeared to run counter to sub-politicization and to point instead at a process of depoliticization.

The fifth and the sixth structural process are also interrelated. The *fifth* process, 'distantiation'<sup>28</sup> is not perhaps as widely discussed and elaborated as the other processes that I mentioned so far. Discussion on European legislation, for instance, took place at a distance from the areas, by officials that did not know the areas and its actors. In line with their organizations' rules, these officials were not to be too intensively involved. Even within the Netherlands, there was a tendency that officials would 'stay at distance', to 'facilitate' regional processes, often as part of official policy, especially at the national level. In fact, those who eventually took decisions about the initiatives were at a greater distance and did not take part in the new networked forms of collaboration. Eventual 'go' or 'no-go' decisions appeared to depend on them. I have mentioned it already, but I repeat the point because I think it is important: the three cases revealed that the further policy officials were from the initiatives, the more resistance they put up.

Viewed from the perspective of the local initiatives, the frequent changes of personnel, especially at those levels, appeared to be a complication in terms of building up mutual trust and a bond with the area. This introduces the *sixth* process: personalization. The cases also showed that those officials who had been involved for longest played important roles in getting the processes further. In all three areas, an emphasis was placed on getting people to really experience the various qualities of the areas. We promoted this as researchers, but the principle was just as strongly advocated by the local actors. Particularly in the Biesland and Grenschap cases, field visits were actively used to deliberate about the essence of the ideas and to show how various aspects of the plans were related. The field visits were also expected to have a mobilizing effect: regional stakeholders believed that decision makers would more easily understand the area and the plans once they had actually been there and experienced its qualities. It was expected that such visits would also influence their decision making, especially when a government institution's sectoral approach seemed to do no justice to the multi-faceted situation in 'the field'.

In sum, the cases do give reason to suggest that decision making processes were more easily carried forward when there was real contact and exchange of opinions. Importantly, their increased personal involvement had a positive impact in two of the three cases

Thus, in all three cases new coalitions were formed among private *and* government actors to get the initiatives further. A key observation in

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<sup>28</sup> Note that 'distantiation' means something else than Giddens' term 'time-space distanciation'.

current governance literature, the trend towards the blending of government and private actors, is thereby reconfirmed by this study. However, the study also enables us to be more specific about the details of this collaboration between government and private actors. It was clear that, aside from the Efteling case, collaboration with government officials mainly came about because of the *personal* time and energy that officials put into the projects, in their leisure time. In the Grensschap and the Biesland cases, the personal zeal and consequent input of public officials were the impetus behind key events. Their 'double roles' as officials and as engaged citizens sometimes caused unease, but at the same time they appeared to have become vital for the further development of the initiatives, and it was also for this reason that the partnerships could grow into something substantial<sup>29</sup>.

When the six processes (or seven, including sub-politicization) are looked at again, it appears that the theory needs some further refinement. We need to look at how the processes are interrelated, and seem to be at work at multiple levels and in various combinations. An eighth structural process needs to be accentuated: depoliticization, which may be situated at the same level as the sub-politicization which I started with, and was a striking feature of all of the cases. The cases revealed how a combination of Europeanization, sectoralization, juridification and distantiation led to a failure to discuss the heart of the matter: the essence of the initiatives and how they differed from mainstream policy. On balance, depoliticization was more prominent than sub-politicization in these processes, although two of them – regionalization and personalization – seemed to contribute to sub-politicization at the local level.

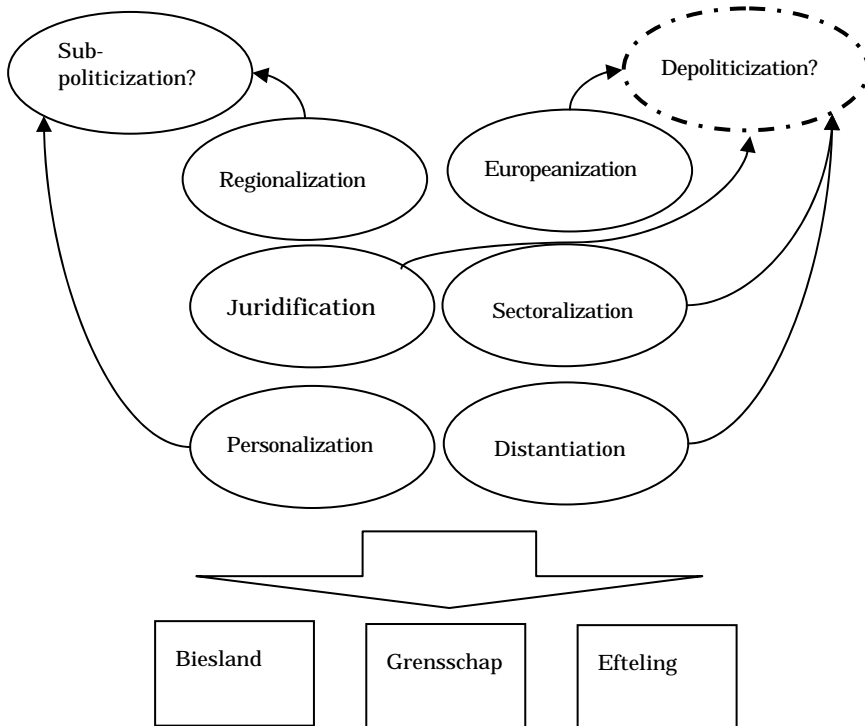
In sum, the cases I studied reveal a complex web of interference by structural processes. Examples include a process of Europeanization or multi-level governance and the related depoliticization processes, and another process of increasing opportunities for sub-politicization through regionalization. Two of my cases point at the dominance of the first process over the second. This complexity makes it increasingly difficult for local parties to create space for their initiatives in relation to existing

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<sup>29</sup> This observation casts a different light on the terms 'top-down'/'from above' and 'bottom-up'/'from below', a juxtaposition that I was inclined to depart from when I started this study. 'Bottom-up', to point at initiatives that come from outside government, does not reflect the blend of personal efforts by several types of actors connected to the initiatives in order to work away at getting them to relevant decision-making levels. I therefore prefer to speak of 'local initiatives' instead of 'bottom-up initiatives'.

arrangements, leaving aside the question whether their area-specific initiatives were picked up for consideration of their potential wider policy implications. Even if European subsidies promoted a local initiative in principle, then the process of obtaining these subsidies, as the Grensschap' case shows, is complicated and time-consuming, and mainly takes place beyond the influence and comprehension of local actors.

The figure below summarizes the structural processes and indicates by means of arrows the supposed interrelations between them, as described in the above.



**Figure 10: A complex of structural processes**

In terms of Archer's scheme, I concentrated in this section on manifestations of the ways in which social action was influenced by structural conditions.

Although opportunities for structural elaboration have already been touched on in the foregoing, in the next section I will concentrate on the second part of the equation: the relation between social action and the structural elaboration that can take place in the form of 'space for policy innovation'.

## *7.5 Space for policy innovation*

In chapter two, space for policy innovation was defined in relation to 'structural elaboration'. Space for policy innovation refers to the possibilities arising when existing policy arrangements 'open up' to policy options which had not been possible so far. It is the enabling space created when the existing order or 'temporarily stabilized' relations between actors, resources, rules and discourse are challenged and/or changed.

All three cases give expression to significant innovative potential at the local level. In the three cases, coalitions were formed around discourses which were significantly different from the discourses that had formerly dominated the policy making affecting the areas. Perhaps most importantly, the specific territories stood centre stage in the orientation of the new coalitions. New discourse coalitions could be discerned that cut across a variety of groups and organizations at various levels. Local officials, and at times national parliamentarians or even a Minister, used their discretionary powers to help the initiative further. The discursive potential that was created, however, could not be translated into space for policy innovation.

We may yet see 'postponed effects' of activities such as the creation of "landmarks" in the Grensschap area, and these should be the topic of future research. However, for the present, the cases demonstrated few wider policy implications.

A focus on particular resources might lead to different conclusions: in all the cases financial or knowledge resources were mobilized and granted in order to realize part of the initiatives in the specific territories. My point, however, is that the established ways of applying mainstream resources and rules were not changed or even reconsidered in the light of the initiatives. A fear of precedents prevailed. Although their longer-term impact cannot be predicted, this turned the initiatives into relatively isolated undertakings. Resources had been granted, but one could say that they were granted as exceptions that prove the rule. Of course, rules do not easily change overnight, especially when their tentacles reach into many levels of decision making. That the implications of the initiatives were hardly a topic of deliberation, however, shows that the potential to create space for policy innovation was restricted to the new discourse coalitions that concentrated on the specific areas. And even there, the potential was curtailed by the (at times self-imposed) adaptation of the contents of the initiative to the rules – even to rules that were fundamentally at odds with the initiatives.



An important explanation for the lack of space for policy innovation was the fact that, in several ways, the debate about the meaning of the local initiative for policy-development was not politicized. I do not consider this 'depoliticization' as some structural force that was imposed on the process from outside, leaving actors no possibility of even attempting to politicize the essential issues. Nevertheless, depoliticization was what happened in the selected cases, and it contributed to the lack of wider policy implications for the time being.

## ***7.6 Other explanatory factors***

In the cases, other dimensions than discourse, actor coalitions, rules and resources were identified as crucial for understanding and explaining the stability or dynamics of a policy arrangement. These were mostly summarized in the case chapters as 'socio-relational factors' and as 'coincidental factors'. Although these factors could be subsumed under other dimensions such as actors, or resources, I wish to draw special attention to them as a 'fifth dimension' of their own. Their presence might suggest that no one theory will provide an all-encompassing explanation for the stability or dynamics of a policy arrangement. Other theories and frameworks, possibly from disciplines such as social psychology, pedagogy or communication sciences, can also help us understand these factors.

Here, I wish to refer to some episodes in the cases which *could* be connected to one or more of the dimensions, but which I considered so crucial to the progress of the initiatives that I think they deserve explicit attention. The first one that caught the eye was perseverance. It was remarkable how people persevered with their initiative, even in the face of years of waiting and repeated setbacks. Without their persistence, the initiatives would probably have come to a premature end, before decisions had even been reached. Others have referred to these capacities as 'human capacity' or 'capital' and 'resources' (compare Healey 2006). This puts them in the same category as resources such as finances or knowledge. While the latter are mostly referred to as institutional resources, I prefer to see phenomena such as endurance as something with a different character, and operating at a different level. Other examples are trust and empathy. Even though there was an institutional dimension to them in the sense that they could only evolve when there was real contact between people (and the rules of the game hindered this at several occasions), I see trust and empathy as more than just capacities of actors or resources that can consciously be drawn upon. Trust and empathy may grow or diminish in the course of interaction. In the cases that I studied, they were important for keeping the local initiatives and their interactions with existing policy going. Also, the

feelings of connectedness with the areas, especially when the land was not the property of the stakeholders, were a crucial factor in getting and keeping the initiatives going. Where resistance occurred, it was related to feelings of 'not invented here'. This was yet another phenomenon that I find difficult to position in terms of the institutional terms of the policy arrangement approach. In all three cases, these sentiments came up in the policy-making organizations at various times. They are important for my research question, because they partly explain why some of the processes were so tough.

Yet another, not to be overlooked, explanatory dimension which was identified in all three cases was coincidence. As was explained in the preceding chapters, change in the policy arrangement was largely determined by coincidental meetings or events. How can coincidence be accounted for by means of the dimensions of discourse, actor coalitions, resources or rules of the game? Complexity analysis may offer useful insights for elaborating on this highly unpredictable aspect of policy processes, which - despite its elusive character - partly explains why a process was either hampered or promoted. As Owen (1995) states:

"If the policy process and policy networks are so difficult to break down in any useful way how can analysis be made manageable? Complexity analysis is not one 'theory' but a number of interlocking theories and may offer interesting possibilities for utilising established political theories in new ways".

I suggest drawing on other theories and cooperating with other research disciplines in order to elaborate on these factors in future research.

## ***7.7 Conditions impeding or enabling space for policy innovation***

This section deals with the fifth question of my research. What are the enabling or impeding conditions for the emergence of space of policy innovation? My suppositions, or assumptions, with regard to these conditions are based on what was observed in the three cases. They are categorized by means of Archer's time-sequenced scheme that was presented and elaborated in chapter two.

<p><i>Structural Conditions in which local initiatives originate</i></p> <p>There is significant potential at local level to come to innovative ideas about how to design and manage specific territories, even when the latter reach beyond the nearby street or park. NIMBY has wrongly received too much attention.</p> <p>The sectoral organization of various existing policies gives rise to new ideas because local actors focusing on a specific territory cannot solve their problems by means of sectoral policies and are therefore challenged to develop alternative, more integrated options.</p> <p>Specific territorial spaces and the ways by which people feel attached to these, offer great potential for mobilizing people to come up with their own solutions and designs, even if their interests are very different.</p> <p>Like policy makers, local initiators increasingly mobilize 'formal research' as a source of empowerment for their ideas.</p> <p>The initiatives emerged in a context of generations of participation policy which had not significantly empowered local actors. In spite of claims belonging to a third generation of participation theories, which observed a trend of dispersion and displacement of participation, 'displacement' can not be confirmed by this study. Traditional democratic procedures remain an important precondition for local initiators to get their ideas realized.</p>
<p><i>Everyday social interactions (in terms of discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game) between local initiators and actors representing established policy</i></p> <p>Although local initiatives may convince a wide array of actors to adopt a new discourse that emphasizes the qualities of areas as 'integrated wholes', rules and resources supporting the established sectoral or economic discourses and their coalitions remain unchanged.</p> <p>Incongruence of change of discourse on the one hand and stability of practices on the other hand can largely be explained by a process of depoliticization.</p> <p>Depoliticization is a greater force than sub-politicization.</p> <p>Multi-level governance in general and Europeanization in particular imply considerable obstacles for the realization of territory-related initiatives 'from below'.</p> <p>The sub-politicization thesis is problematic in the context of Europeanization (except when local actors can make use of existing EU rules to reinforce their point of view).</p> <p>The 'not-invented-here' syndrome in bureaucracies is an irrational and outdated obstacle to the promotion of local initiatives.</p> <p>Establishing 'distantiation' in the policy process causes depoliticization of that process and as such forms an obstacle for the creation of space for policy innovation.</p> <p>Discursive space relating to specific territories is created and sustained by new, challenging coalitions that reach across various levels.</p>

Chances for continuation of an initiative are significantly enhanced when officials start to devote personal time and energy to a project.

Real contact and exchange of arguments in the areas themselves are under pressure from a policy of 'distantiation', while they are important for establishing understanding between initiators and other policy actors.

Endurance and social-relational factors are essential to keep an initiative going in its confrontation with mainstream policy.

*Structural Elaboration in terms of Space for Policy Innovation*

A process of depoliticization, taking place in different ways, prevents local initiatives from leading to wider policy implications.

The creation of 'space for policy innovation' 'from below' is avoided by means of the creation of exceptions to the rule (pilots etcetera.) that are not deliberated more widely.

Cultural work of new territory-oriented groups (such as the Grensschap and the Friends of Biesland) represents a new type of political action with a long-term effect on decision-making which needs to be investigated.

The three cases offered a rich base of data for descriptions and explanations of what happened at the interface of local initiatives and 'temporary stabilized' policy. The above table summarizes the conditions that promoted or hindered the creation of space for policy innovation. They included 1) the structural conditions in which the initiatives came about, 2) the social interactions taking place once the initiatives and existing policy needed to find a position in relation to each other, and 3) the eventual 'structural elaboration' of the meaning of those confrontations into changed rules or alternative distributions of resources that would endorse the new discourse, or at least into a dialogue about such changes.

Most importantly, the cases show that, in spite of the energy, personal commitment and creativity that went into them, the three innovative initiatives have so far had limited wider policy implications. Government actors declined to create space for policy innovation in a wider sense than the uncontroversial experimentation that was cautiously allowed on a local scale. This puts a question mark over the various pleas for a greater role of citizens or other private actors in the spatial policy domains. What is the worth of such pleas if the conditions that hinder these groups from playing a greater role remain unchanged? I will get back to this in the next chapter, which contains the conclusions of my research regarding theoretical repercussions, my own positionality and wider socio-political relevance.

## 8. Conclusions

### *8.1 Introduction*

This study was embarked on with optimistic expectations about the ambition and capacity of local actors such as city dwellers, civil society organizations and businesses to improve the planning, design or management of specific territories. Indeed, in the cases that were studied here, the ambitions of local actors went beyond the level of ideas; they made considerable efforts to make a real difference to the territory that their ideas were about. However, this study uncovered a complex set of conditions that either enabled or hindered the realization of these ideas. The tension between the richness of local initiatives, on the one hand, and the limited capacity of various government organizations to deal with that richness, on the other, is all the more remarkable given the historical context of decades of participatory projects and “interactive policy making” ambitions, *and* various present-day calls for new forms of partnerships between governments and private actors. This irreconcilability gave rise to an uneasy feeling and formed my main motivation to take a closer look at three situations that involved confrontations between local initiatives and established policy. I wanted to know what was achieved over the years and what was not, and – particularly – to understand the processes involved.

In chapters four, five and six, I outlined the course of events involved in three initiatives by mainly private actors, directed at three specific territories. The stories were mainly based on my participation in the cases as a contract researcher, and also on subsequent interviews, document analysis and group discussions.

Two of the three initiatives had a clear history of conflict. Despite these histories, local actors appeared to be highly creative in proposing solutions for ‘their’ areas. Their plans came about in a mutual dialogue and developed over the course of time. It was therefore as informative to follow the processes and the currently ongoing changes in the contents of initiatives and relevant policies, as it was to find out more about their history.

In chapter seven I dealt with each research question in turn by scrutinizing the three cases once more, in a comparative manner. In the next section, 8.2, I will summarize the theoretical insights yielded by a comparison of the

analyses of the three empirical situations. The section will be subdivided into the following parts:

- a. the meaning of the four dimensions of discourse, coalitions, rules of the game and resources, for the analysis of interactions between local initiatives and established arrangements
- b. analytic dualism: a realist approach to bringing a time dimension into the analysis;
- c. sub-politicization and depoliticization and still more structural processes
- d. the way in which the above conditions enabled or constrained the formation of space for policy innovation
- e. a missing dimension: the role of socio-psychological and relational factors

In section 8.3 I will reflect on my own positionality as a contract researcher in the three cases, before presenting the potential wider societal implications of the research in section 8.4.

## ***8.2 Theoretical reflections***

### *a) The relations between dimensions of a policy arrangement*

Policy arrangements were defined by Van Tatenhove et al. as the “temporary stabilization of the contents and organization of a policy domain” (Van Tatenhove et al. 2000). The authors operationalized contents in terms of discourse, and organization in terms of actor coalitions, rules and resources. I described what happened in the three cases by means of these four dimensions and concentrated on their interrelatedness.

Such an approach may perhaps seem inappropriate in a study whose focus was not a policy domain but the *interaction* between *not* yet stabilized initiatives and ‘established’ policy. For one thing, the studied interactions between initiatives and existing policies were not primarily about a *specific* ‘policy domain’. Rather, by focussing on specific spatial areas, the initiatives pertained to *various* domains. On top of that, it was unsure whether the interactions between the initiatives and established policy would indeed give rise to a situation that could reasonably be called a ‘temporary stabilized’ policy arrangement. Indeed, it was possible that the initiatives would die an early death and not stabilize at all. So the question whether an initiative would indeed give rise to renewed ‘temporary stabilization of contents and organization of a policy domain’ was left open to the outcomes of empirical analyses. What remained, however, was the expectation that an understanding of the initiatives and their interactions with established policy could be enhanced by adopting the ‘lens’ of the four dimensions, and particularly by looking at how they are related.

The analysis of the interactions between local initiatives and government policies over the course of time revealed that the discursive space that the new coalitions *were* able to create, did *not* bring about substantial change of rules and resources. In other words: practices of discourse and coalitions could be reshaped, but this was not accompanied by a reshaping in terms of resources and rules of the game. In the following I will speak of 'elasticity' and 'inelasticity' to refer to the possibility or impossibility of reshaping practices.

On the one hand, there was the possibility for new discourses and discourse coalitions to co-exist with established discourses and coalitions. If there was a certain definable 'discursive space' in the three cases, that space proved to be elastic. On the other hand, the rules and resources related to established discourses proved to be of limited elasticity. As a result, the options that seemed to become possible in terms of changes of vocabulary and coalitions did not translate into alternative options as far as rules and resources were concerned. This asymmetry in the elasticity of the different dimensions meant that the initiatives did not penetrate policies. Their alternative view of territorial development and management could not therefore be applied more widely.

I have chosen to use the word 'elasticity', in spite of the fact that its use is largely confined to the field of economics, because it expresses the idea of including scope for options for alternative action. Thus, in the cases, inclusion of alternative discourse and new discourse coalitions appeared to be possible. It was as if these dimensions could be 'stretched' like an elastic band to hold more options. By contrast, other elements of social interaction, the structural mobilization of resources or the reformulation of rules, proved to be largely inelastic. This asymmetrical degree of elasticity prevented the initiatives from having wider policy implications. It also forced the initiatives to make moves in the direction of the 'institutionalized mainstream' in order to comply with the rules and resources of the existing discourse. Discursive latitude, therefore, remained a temporary thing because of this asymmetrical situation. The elastic band returned to more or less its previous form. Of course, we wanted to know how and why that happened. Since the research focussed on the interactions between local territorial initiatives and the established policy that pre-existed the initiatives, it was important to bring a time dimension into the analytical framework. The next section summarizes how that was done.

#### *b) Bringing in a time dimension*

One of the sources of inspiration for the policy arrangements approach was Giddens' 'structuration theory' (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2004). The main point of structuration theory is that neither agency nor structure dominates

over the other. Giddens' message was that in order to understand change or stability, the interrelationships between actor and structure needed to be at the heart of the analysis. "The constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality" (Giddens 1984: 25). His idea was a reaction to the prevailing dominance of 'either/or dualism' in sociological theory. Dualistic approaches would explain change or stability by foregrounding agentic *or* structural power, but not their interrelatedness. Those who are emphasizing the capacity to change of individuals or organisations are generally called voluntarists, and those emphasizing the (mostly restrictive) conditions imposed by structures are called determinists (Archer 1982, Arts 1998). In terms of the object of this research, Giddens' plea means that the processes determining whether a local initiative is realized, and whether it results in wider policy implications, cannot be explained by either deterministic reasoning (such as orthodox Marxism), *or* by voluntaristic approaches. So far, a useful theoretical backbone has been found instead in structuration theory and its operationalization in the policy arrangements approach (including, as chapter two elaborates, the interaction between agentic and structural properties at the level of day-to-day interactions in policy arrangements as well as the interaction of those day-to-day interactions with wider structural processes).

Like Giddens, Archer seeks to understand and theorize about the interrelations between actor and structure, rather than to overemphasize the influence of either one of them.

"Both the 'morphogenetic' (Archer's approach, MB) and 'structuration' approaches concur that 'action' and 'structure' presuppose one another: structural patterning is inextricably grounded in practical interaction. Simultaneously, both acknowledge that social practice is ineluctably shaped by the unacknowledged conditions of action and generates unintended consequences which form the context of subsequent interaction" (Archer 1982: 456).

However, she objected to conceptualizations of agency and structure that were limited to their relation to one another; one example was the way the notion of 'duality of structure' was applied. Her main objection here was that it would implicitly make it impossible to analyse how their interrelationship evolved over the course of time. So inseparability or, in other words, a 'collapse' of these concepts would prevent researchers from investigating precisely that which the whole undertaking was about: getting to grips with the interrelationships between agency and structure. For that reason, Archer proposed to 'separate' actor and structure, in order to make them researchable. She called this '*analytical* dualism'. Archer's main motivation for doing this was to bring in the time-dimension (Archer 1996). Analytical dualism would enable us to look at actor and structure as



essentially separable categories, and to investigate how pre-existing structures conditioned present-day interactions, and how present-day interactions would be structurally elaborated. I found analytical dualism of great value for elaborating the policy arrangements approach, precisely because it brings in the time dimension. By separating the constituent parts of the approach (the four dimensions, as well as the distinction between policy arrangements and structural processes), their interrelationships could be revealed. The scheme Archer proposed consists of: structural conditions ( $t=1$ )  $\rightarrow$  social interaction ( $t2 - t3$ )  $\rightarrow$  structural elaboration ( $t=4$ ). The scheme is iterative: it is continuously repeated. That which is structurally elaborated forms in turn the structural conditions for social interaction in a subsequent phase. I used this as an additional analytical scheme for ordering my empirical findings, for I assumed that it would help me to achieve a balance between attention to the more deterministic (i.e. structural conditions  $\rightarrow$  social interaction) side of the equation, and attention to the more voluntaristic side (i.e. social interaction  $\rightarrow$  structural elaboration), without losing sight of the time factor i.e. how they influence each other over time.

In terms of the research questions, structural conditions shed light on the origins of an initiative: the subject of the first question. Social interaction could be specified in terms of the social interactions taking place at the interface of initiative and existing policy, and in terms of the four dimensions of a policy arrangement. This was the focus of my second question. The third question, about structural processes, covers the entire spectrum  $t=1 - t=4$ . It is about the structural processes that pre-existed the interactions between local initiatives and established policy, about how these processes manifested themselves in those interactions, and about whether they were likely to change, even if only to a limited extent, as a result of those interactions. Finally, structural elaboration was addressed within the scope of this study by narrowing it down to space for policy innovation: the subject of the fourth question.

An example illustrates this: Europeanization was present as a structural force in the way it conditioned the interactions between local initiatives and established policy. In concrete terms, 'Europe' provided sources of funding and imposed requirements on government subsidies. Europeanization pre-existed interactions in these cases. Local actors were not always knowledgeable about this condition, however, and became aware of part of its influence only *during the* process of trying to realize their ideas. Europeanization was reproduced in the course of the process because actors reckoned with the rules and resources imposed and provided on behalf of 'Europe'. In one case, attempts were made to alter, however marginally, the contents of the European rules, and even although results were limited, the

single acts of some individuals may have contributed to setting the stage for later, wider structural changes.

By means of Archer's scheme, the initiatives could be placed in the context of policies that pre-dated the social interactions that I was 'witness' to in the three cases. The scheme also helped to relate these social interactions to the question of what kind of structural elaboration could be observed in the cases. It brought a temporal dimension into the policy arrangements framework that made it possible to analyse how actor and structure interrelated over the course of time.

*c) Sub-politicization and depoliticization in a complex of structural transformations*

Beck's sub-politicization thesis was highlighted in chapter one and two to point at a structural force that was considered relevant and likely to influence the interactions in the three cases. While the first and the second research question respectively addressed the origins of the initiatives and their everyday interactions with established policy, the third question focused on whether the cases do actually demonstrate that society was increasingly being shaped from below. Was politics increasingly taking place outside the representative institutions of the political system? Or were other structural forces more important? The cases in this study revealed that the answer to those questions cannot be answered by a straightforward yes or no. Rather, several structural forces were found to exist alongside each other and to influence the interaction between initiatives and existing policy in multifaceted ways. These cases therefore showed that, rather than one dominant force, a *complex* set of interrelated structural forces, occurring at different levels, both conditioned and resulted from social interactions. A second conclusion was that sub-politicization appeared to go along with the opposite trend of depoliticization. Thirdly, sub-politicization was shown to be of less importance than depoliticization. These three major conclusions will be summarized in the following.

I have used a number of abstract terms – regionalization, personalization, Europeanization, juridification, sectoralization and distantiation, and at another level, sub-politicization and depoliticization – to identify certain aspects of the complex set of structural processes which were observed to influence the interactions between local initiatives and established policies. Obviously, there are many more at work. However, these were the ones which emerged in the cases and were considered relevant to the research questions. These processes could reasonably be assumed to have pre-existed the interactions between local initiatives and established policy. They did not appear out of the blue but, in Archer's terms, formed part of previous

cycles of structural conditioning, social interactions and structural elaboration. It was not possible within the time-frame of this research to translate interpretations of the manifestations of these processes into projections about their 'structural elaboration'. An example of such a projection would be: Distantiation (referring to the growing distance in the cases between local initiators and formal policy decision makers) will constrain the creation of space for policy innovation for local initiatives even more in the future. What was possible was to formulate assumptions that could inspire further research in other cases and stimulate policy debates about distantiation. Such suppositions or assumptions were proposed in chapter seven. An example is: the establishment of 'distantiation' in the policy process forms an obstacle for the creation of space for policy innovation. Such an assumption may lead relevant policy makers to re-evaluate their ever more widespread policies of 'steering from a distance'. It may also lead to discussions about the desirability of giving 'remote' European rules and the officials representing those rules significant influence in decision making about the fates of local initiatives, especially if these officials cannot know the local situations in which these initiatives originated. The term regionalization was used for the way people in the cases showed considerable willingness to invest time and energy in an area and often identified with it to increasing extents. The term personalization was used to refer to the instances in which people started to relate to the territorial initiatives on a personal basis. In addition to their professional roles, they aimed to influence decision making and what happened to 'their' areas on that personal basis.

A second major conclusion is that at the level of sub-politicization, the analysis unveiled parallel processes of sub-politicization *and, contradictory as it may seem*, depoliticization. Of these two, the latter even appeared to be more influential than the former because it severely limited political discussions outside the formal representative system about the essence of the initiatives and the question why their translation into policy was considered undesirable. Sub-politicization and depoliticization were situated at another level than the other structural processes. In accordance with the sub-politicization thesis, for instance, personalization and regionalization contributed to the emergence of new forms of politics outside the traditional democratic system, or in other words, to sub-politicization. On the other hand, Europeanization, juridification, sectoralization and distantiation appeared to contribute to the opposite. These processes gave rise to a situation in which the ideas that formed the heart of the initiatives, were no longer at the heart of decision-making process once the initiatives 'arrived' in the 'world of established policy'. Europeanization, for instance, caused complicated computation rules about the maximum permissible compensation for loss of income to dominate

decision-making for years in one case. Yet that was not what occupied the minds of the people in the area. There were clearly two worlds, dealing with the same area and determining 'together' what was to happen, but far apart in terms of preoccupations and visions of what would best serve the public good in a specific area.

A third conclusion from the studied cases is that the forces giving rise to depoliticization were actually stronger than the forces leading to sub-politicization. An important feature of the process of depoliticization was the gradual transformation of initiatives into 'lookalikes' of established policy. The possibilities for adjusting to operative procedures became the initiators' chief preoccupation, not because it was their prime objective to comply with those procedures, but because they felt they had no other choice. The point is that differences of underlying ideas and values remained implicit during these processes. Meanwhile, the shift of focus to already existing rules and to standard ways of distributing resources reproduced established policy in a subtle way. The asymmetrical elasticity of the dimensions surfaced again; at first sight, a culture of openness appeared to exist, and discourses and discourse-coalitions co-existed, but on closer inspection it appeared that the established discourse coalitions 'overruled' the new ones. That was so mainly because already institutionalized discourses and their connected coalitions were buttressed by rules and resources that the new discourse coalitions could not alter.

It is important to note that depoliticization means something else here than an absence of the 'elected' (see also Van Tatenhove 2006, referring to Duyvendak). Importantly, members of the representative system did play a role, particularly in the Biesland case, where even members of the national parliament promoted the initiative. In this context, then, depoliticization does not mean that the traditional political procedures stopped playing a role; indeed, established policy had come about exactly via these routes. Depoliticization needs to be understood as the lack of fundamental debate about the essence of the controversies, resulting in the exclusion of divergent ideas from debates. It refers to the *absence* of sub-politicization. Fundamental political debate about the contents did not take place in the formal representative system, nor did it take place in the supposed 'new places of politics'. While the contents of the initiatives shifted in the direction of existing policy, there was no discussion about what these shifts meant in terms of attention for some issues at the expense of others, or in terms of the inclusion or exclusion of specific actors. The inclusion of farmers in substantive and thus long-term forms of nature management, for instance, continued to be a non-option after the Biesland process. Long-term approaches incorporating farmers in substantial nature management ran counter to the mainstream line of thinking, which consisted of an

emphasis on the 'free' operation of the internal market and related prevention of state aid that would distort competition. It also ran counter to the idea that nature was best managed by nature organizations. The excluding effects of these two lines of thinking have not so far been politicized. Therefore, it may help to unveil the more hidden dimensions of power in these complex webs of interrelations to make explicit what discourses 'European policy' represented, how they coalesced with influential frames at national level, how they differed from the discourses implied by the initiatives, how the respective discourse and their coalitions were or were not supported by rules and resources, and what possible outcomes of a confrontation between these arrangements could imply in terms of inclusion or exclusion. A normative result of this study, therefore, is a plea to put these issues back on political agendas. For in the cases that I studied, these agendas were mainly dominated by the procedural, bureaucratic practices that needed to be overcome to get the initiatives further. Despite the input of locally active officials, often in their personal time, the increasing distance between local initiators and other influential officials remained problematic. At the middle level of bureaucracy, the combination of rules geared to 'steering from a distance' and frequent shifts of personnel also mitigated against any real contact between these middle-level officials and local initiators. It is therefore hardly surprising that it remains to be seen whether the initiatives will have wider policy implications, even if they are realized at a local level.

The fact that depoliticization was observed did not exclude the presence of forces that promoted sub-politicization. On the basis of the cases, I would like to suggest that various types of sub-politicization can be distinguished. I proposed a scheme with two axes, each representing a continuum. One continuum ranges from open variants to closed variants of sub-politicization. Beck's examples are representations of the open variants: everybody can participate, for instance by choosing not to buy Shell petrol as a protest against the dumping of the Brentspar platform in the North Sea. Examples such as the Biesland community and the Grensschap are located somewhere in the middle of the continuum. While no groups were explicitly excluded from the arrangements, the emphasis that the researchers or the local stakeholders placed on everybody's potential to bring in expertise was experienced by some people as an obstacle to joining in the activities. They did not perceive what they knew about the places as 'expertise', which they associated with 'scientific knowledge'. The Efteling example represents an even more closed process. While the theme park and the nature organizations gained influence by making agreements with each other, they sought limited public and media exposure of their undertaking, in order to prevent protests. The second continuum ranges from a large to a limited scope of ambition for policy change. The three initiatives

investigated here aimed for a realization of ideas in specific territories. But for that to happen, policies applicable to wider areas needed to be changed. Despite the differences, all the variants imply that society is increasingly being shaped from below. However, applying these continuums suggests that it is important to look at the scope of the initiatives and their varying degrees of openness, and also that these change during the process. This leads us to a perspective on sub-politicization which takes into account other forms of politics outside “the institutions of representative opinion-formation”, forms which are not entirely open to individual participation (such as the mass consumer actions that Beck referred to), and which may have a limited scope, as ‘limited’ as a specific territory just beyond the level of a backyard or a neighbourhood park. In relation to depoliticization, the next step – beyond the scope of this research – could be to distinguish between variants as well.

In sum, initiatives coming ‘from below’, evolving from other sources than the formal representative system, have to deal with the simultaneous occurrence of sub-politicization *and* depoliticization. Awareness of these forces, operating by way of the above-mentioned structural transformations, may help to focus conscious efforts on the mitigation of their effect, namely preventing new coalitions and new discursive notions from leading to reconsiderations of established rules and allocated resources. Placing substantive matters back on agendas can forestall a silent shift of attention in the direction of procedural matters.

#### *d) Space for Policy Innovation*

The above summarized how, in this research, the interactions of the three initiatives with existing policies were analysed in terms of their origins, and in terms of the dimensions of discourse, coalitions, resources and rules of the game and their interrelationships. It then dealt with structural processes which were assumed to have an impact on these interactions. My fourth research question asked what space for policy innovation resulted from all of this. Interestingly, it was at the junction of social interaction and structural elaboration (the latter was understood here as ‘space for policy innovation’), that the influence of the initiatives remained limited, although we do not know what delayed effects may occur in the future. So far, structural elaboration in the cases consisted of reproduction, rather than transformation or innovation in existing policy. That is, although new discursive notions had been embraced by new actor coalitions, the initiatives that these notions were part of gradually shifted in the direction of existing policy, sooner or later in the process.

*e) The socio-psychological and the socio-relational*

Socio-psychological and socio-relational aspects were found to be important in all three cases. These two aspects, the first denoting what takes place *between* people and the second denoting personal characteristics with relational effects, such as humour or expressiveness, deserve more explicit attention than they have received so far. For instance, the personal drive and perseverance of initiators help to explain why the initiatives endured. People got to know each other well, and were able to overcome disappointments through dialogue and empathy. Factors such as personal contacts, the trust that could arise because of direct communication, were essential. Where did their perseverance, which sometimes seemed almost limitless, come from? It would be too simplistic to reduce these factors to the capacities of actors or to 'human resources'. These terms would turn this part of the story into something institutional or instrumental, which would do insufficient justice to the unregulated, spontaneous side of it. This dimension bears more resemblance to processes of identification. When people felt connected to an idea or to each other, they were also able 'to go for it', to exercise patience, and to persevere. A similar process of identification was observed with regard to established policy and its representatives. At various moments, officials allowed exceptions to 'their' policy, but only insofar as the mainstream could remain unchanged. The initiatives could take place, but only within the limits imposed on them by the 'mainstream' rules of the game. These limitations on change were voiced most clearly by legal experts and policy officials at the middle level, who identified with their 'world' of rules and discourse. A good example is the 'not invented here' idea, which officials themselves gave as an important factor in the delay. Processes of identification contributed to the continued existence of two worlds – which remained worlds apart.

There is an institutional side to elements such as identification and trust<sup>30</sup>. In the three cases, trust could only grow when there was real contact between the actors involved. However, crucial decision-making officials often did not know the local situations and were also hampered in getting to know the situations better, not just for the above-mentioned reasons but also because of the rapid turnover of personnel. An institutional question of topical interest comes up: if it becomes more and more difficult for government officials to attend to local processes, and to be present in the field - if there is, in other words, a process of 'distantiation' going on, how can trust then come about or be restored?

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<sup>30</sup> Various authors write about the role of trust in policy processes: Van Stokkum 1997, Rothstein 2000, Egestad 2002, Van Ark and Edelenbos 2003, Putnam 2004, Eshuis 2006, Edelenbos and Klijn 2007.

Here a picture emerged of 'two worlds': one of 'the field' and the concrete problems of the local situation, and one of the rules and organization that the middle-level officials knew well.

The cases demonstrated how difficult it was to bring the two worlds together, even when there appeared to be (political) support from higher levels in the administration (up to the ministerial level in one of the cases). The question that could not be answered in this research is whether more frequent direct interaction between middle-level officials and the local situations would have changed the course of events and whether, as my findings suggest, this would have led to a more productive reciprocal learning experience.

In view of the foregoing, I suggest further study of what I called the 'relational dimension' in the future. On the basis of a review of literature and additional empirical investigations, it can be further refined and theoretically underpinned. An assessment can then be made of the relevance of this dimension for the understanding of policy arrangements, or, such as in my study, the interaction between local initiatives and policy arrangements.

### *Conclusion*

In this section I summed up how, by using the elements of the policy arrangements approach of Van Tatenhove, Arts and Leroy, and Giddens' structuration theory as sensitizing concepts as well as Archer's time-ordered scheme, a tool could be developed that addresses

- a) The relationship between structural transformations, especially depoliticization, and the interface of local initiatives and established policy; and
- b) The relationships between the four dimensions, which uncovered asymmetry between the elasticity of discourse and coalitions and the inelasticity of rules and resources.

In themselves, the concepts were rather open, which facilitated the grounding of the findings in the three empirical situations. The comparison of cases in chapter seven gave rise to further substantiation. At this point, the findings from the three cases could be used to 'fill in' the concepts. Based on the three empirical situations, I presented a set of assumptions in chapter seven. These assumptions related to the conditions that further or hamper the creation of space for policy innovation for the realization of local territorial initiatives. The assumptions require further research and attention from local stakeholders and (other) policy makers.



### *8.3 Positionality*

I emphasized in the case chapters how contract researchers had agency. That situation created possibilities for experience and for learning ‘from within’. It also gave rise to dilemmas, in particular with regard to the aim of democratizing the research. Moreover, there are methodological challenges which still need to be tackled. In the following, these three topics (learning from within, dilemmas and methodological challenges) will briefly be discussed.

#### *‘Learning from within’*

My position as a contract researcher set limits on what could be done, and it also created possibilities. On the one hand, being ‘hired’ by funders who were dealing with concrete problems in concrete situations, allowed me to experience from close up the social processes going on in those situations, to see how actors tried to influence policy-making, and to get to understand their lines of argument and preoccupations at different stages in the process. It also helped me to get a feel for their emotions and their ways to relating to each other. For example, it enabled me to gauge the value of their perseverance and mutual trust. Having experienced the frustrations (sometimes even personally) of repeated and sometimes inexplicable delays, it was easier than it would be in a one-off interview to talk about these events and feelings with the people involved. But it is not easy to combine contract research work with the reflective work required to make analyses such as this one. I found that the complex realities of contracted projects, in which many projects are usually carried out at the same time, offers little time and peace of mind to get round to in-depth analyses of the micro-dynamics of how things worked. While doing the hectic project work I was mostly ‘living from day to day’. It required a lot of energy to make switches from one type of activity to the other. The fact that the projects involved various stakeholders from different levels (citizens, officials, administrators, politicians), with their own, at times unpredictable meeting schedules, made it impossible to plan in temporary breaks, in order for me to concentrate on academic work. In such a situation, although it might be more expensive, working in pairs can be recommended for the sake of academic depth and reflection. This should be facilitated by funders and research institutions. I am convinced that, if done like this, grounding research in day-to-day experiences in concrete projects has many advantages (as indicated above) which are still underrated and under-explored. It is precisely the position of working ‘in the mud of policy practice’ (Hajer 2003) that challenges the researcher to find alternative techniques. These deserve to be elaborated in greater detail in the future, especially in research environments such as that of Wageningen University

and Research Centre. Policy-oriented contract researchers and academics can apply their respective qualities to mutual benefit *and* add value to our research in terms of contributing to democratization – a field in which I think there is a lot of room for improvement.

*Dilemmas of democratizing research*

Acting as contract researchers also brought dilemmas with it. Ambitions to ‘democratize’ research, for instance, were not automatically in line with what funders wanted. Due to local circumstances, they sometimes preferred to avoid increased public attention. Where funders did promote or at least tolerate involvement by citizens, for instance in setting up monitoring and evaluation, they sometimes showed little involvement themselves and stayed at a distance. “Just make sure that the nature target types are evaluated”, they said, without consideration of the option that *their* policies could benefit from the findings of citizens. Pointing out the disadvantages of their absence from the start might have made them less willing to fund the participatory research, reducing the chances of connecting the wishes of ‘the public’, researchers and policy makers. Situations like these generate a risk of diverging expectations of this interactivity in the research process. Funders and policymakers may, in the end, ask for different information than that which local people consider important. On the other hand, engaging in an activity while staying aware of the risks may also be the only way to confront these problems and discuss them as soon as they emerge. This is another task for the researchers. Ambitions and dilemmas such as these deserve more explicit discussion between funders, researchers and local stakeholders. In such discussions, simple issues such as the timing and location of meetings need to be agreed on. Evening meetings nearby may be a pre-condition for volunteers to participate in their free time, but would require a different work schedule for policy officials coming from elsewhere. More general issues such as expectations of the democratization of research for policy development also deserve a place on the agenda of such dialogue. This will help to clarify the position of the ‘formal’ researcher, whose attempts to democratize research often lead to such seemingly simple dilemmas as the above.

My examples are not textbook cases of democratized research, but we tried to work towards it in two of the cases and were successful to limited extents. The first step towards this aim was to acquire research funding for projects that were not so much geared to implementing the details of operative policy as to formulating alternatives in collaboration with local stakeholders. In my view, this should receive a lot more attention than it has done up to now, and the conflicts it will entail need to be faced. This will not happen as long as most policy research still continues to focus on (formal) policy implementation, creating a bias against policy ideas coming

from other actors. This does not tally with the aim of democratizing research, and it is researchers themselves who are in the best position to try to change this. This task deserves to be taken up by researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds.

#### *Methodological challenges to action researchers*

As indicated in chapter three, this research under-utilized the possibilities for involving peer professionals in reflecting on methods, interpretations and preliminary conclusions (peer debriefing), and for systematically documenting raw data, interpretive steps, methodological choices and other notes on the process of research (audit trail: Guba and Lincoln 1989, Erlandson et al. 1993). It is in this respect that I expect that intensified cooperation between contract researchers and researchers at universities can considerably improve the quality of our researches. This cooperation should at least involve a critical analysis of the role of the contract researchers in 'real-life projects', such as the ones discussed here. In the context of this research, an obvious question would be to what extent contract researchers themselves could have prevented the contents of the initiatives from gradually conforming to mainstream policy. This could be followed by a second question: "is that desirable"? Such questions can be raised within a 'reflective sparring partnership' that makes it possible to develop the kind of peer debriefing and audit trail that matches our methodological ambitions. Making explicit ones positionality and how that may possibly have an impact on a situation should also be part of such reflection. Lastly, such discussions should not of course remain a scientific 'tête-à-tête'. The desirability question in particular is as relevant for other stakeholders as it is for researchers. I believe that there is still a lot of unexplored potential in such working relationships.

### ***8.4 The Need to Reconnect***

In the introduction to this study, we distinguished three generations of thinking about how citizens could more actively participate in policy making. The first two generations were based on the idea that participation could supplement the existing political system. Practices following these lines of thinking were generally labelled 'consultation' (inspraak) in the sixties and seventies (often accused of having little impact on the influence of the political elites), and were more recently dubbed 'interactive policy making' (equally blamed for being 'one-way-traffic' and giving right of way to plans that had already been decided). A third generation takes a more radical turn. It does not label specific kinds of procedures or working methods, but considers a multitude of initiatives as possible manifestations of sub-politicization. It places politics both inside *and* outside the

traditional representational system. Politics is shaped *in* policy making processes, and not everything is decided in advance in the formal political system.

I chose to focus on three local initiatives which were geared to improving the management and design of specific territories. I believed that this would offer a better understanding of 'where we stand' in terms of the participation of private actors than would have been gained from an examination of participatory projects that had mainly been initiated 'from above'. How successful were these (mainly) local initiators in realizing *their* ideas? Obviously, the answer to this is not a categorical 'successful' or 'unsuccessful'.

Perhaps what stood out more than anything else was the creativity of these local actors, along with their commitment, their continuous searches for face-to-face contact, and (above all) their perseverance. On all these points, they surpassed expectations. Some officials also tried to facilitate decision-making by whatever means available to them, including making use of personal contacts. However, most of the bureaucracy, especially at the middle-level, stayed in their own world of established rules and restrictions ('it was not invented here'). They identified with that world, while the local actors identified with their territories.

In view of these diverging identifications, it was not surprising that officials in the Biesland case wondered: "Do we do all this for just one farmer". In a similar vein, the alderman in the Grensschap case asked "What if there were a hundred 'Grensschappen?'" And in the Efteling case, the ANF official said "We can not invest time in specific projects". All these officials were expressing their conviction that it would be impossible to attend to processes like these if there were more of them. This conviction helped to prevent the initiatives from opening up a debate about possible wider policy implications, and therefore also helped to reproduce existing policy. This raises serious doubt about three generations of pleas for a greater say for private actors: If initiatives such as the ones investigated here were not weighed up against mainstream policy as an alternative or additional option, then it would appear that policy-making is still the one-way traffic that it has so often been accused of being.

To cope with these competing identifications and to find ways to bridge the distance between these two worlds requires leadership and, at a minimum, more explicit attention. The people from the areas in my three stories continued to try to bring decision makers to 'their' places. It was their experience that they could best tell their stories at those places, where they were better able to convey what their ideas meant to them. However, their

attempts were often in vain, especially when those making the final decisions were concerned. The research field of Social Spatial Analysis focuses on the multiple meanings of specific territories for various groups of people and on the ways in which these meanings are translated into action. By revealing the conditions under which such translation did or did not occur, Social Spatial Analysis can also play its part in systematically elaborating what is needed to bring the separate worlds of local initiators and government decision-makers together.

In any case, the cases offer sufficient argument to believe that there is a considerable amount of innovative potential at the local level, not just in terms of the contents of ideas, but also in terms of abilities to cooperate and cope with conflict, capacities to form empathic relationships, willingness to invest personal time (by local level officials as well) and eagerness to learn.

This positive side of the story is followed by a major and troubling 'but'. The complexity of the institutional environment and the power of processes such as Europeanization, proved to reach far beyond the influence of the initiators.

Especially when restrictive 'European' rules were concerned, there was a wide gap between the contents of the original ideas for the three territories and the contents that were the subject of the final decision making. Legal conditions needed to be met and procedural steps taken in order to get any further with the ideas. In terms of representational democracy, this does not seem to pose much of a problem. After all, these procedures and rules are its very products. In the end, however, they left little space for local innovative initiatives, and this is problematic, especially in terms of aims to promote participation.

Decision making in the context of these rules took a painfully long time, and required an unbelievable amount of perseverance by the initiators. These lengthy decision-making processes no longer addressed the essence of either the initiatives or the rules. The procedural, juridical reasoning that went on was often incomprehensible to the initiators, for whom it was hard to understand why these processes took such a long time. The contents of the initiatives were not weighed against the essentials. To varying extents and in various ways, the final decision making had become cut off from the original contents of the ideas. They were 'worlds apart'. There had been some politicization at the moment of initiation of the local ideas, but they got depoliticized again during the highly procedural parts of the processes. Moreover, in the course of these lengthy processes, the question of wider policy implications was no longer asked.

In Dutch politics and the media, discussions on European democratization have so far mainly focused on the role and powers of the European Parliament. It is clear from the detached ways in which 'Europe' played a role in the cases, not just at the level of the European Commission but at national level as well, that this discussion should be much broader in scope. The pleas for a greater role of citizens and private enterprise in planning and decision-making processes about specific territories, proved to be hardly realistic in the context of the imposition of requirements formulated at the EU level, limiting considerably what could be done at the local level. Especially when agriculture was concerned, there appeared to be a great tension between calls for greater local influence, and operative bureaucratic policy practices dictated 'from above'. Questions such as whether such consequences of a European political system were desirable, and what alternative options there were, were not debated, however. There appeared to be a lack of awareness of the discursive dominance of EU lines of reasoning (following World Trade Organization rules), how these were taken up at other levels, and of the consequences of this in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Keeping these structural issues off policy-making agendas soon will lead to negligence of local innovative potential.

The situation described above precluded the establishment of the right conditions for creating new political spaces in which people could openly speak and deliberate about the heart of what the initiatives were about, and in which trust could slowly be built up.

Therefore, despite generations of 'participation policy' ever since the sixties, a key question remains: How established arrangements deal with what was not invented within 'their domain', especially when it concerns wider policy implications of local ideas? The cases highlighted here underline the continuing validity of that question.

In contrast to the optimistic expectations at the start of the research, this is not a very optimistic conclusion. However, it is of course possible that the interactions that gradually intensified and shaped coalitions will open doors to more fundamental involvement at later stages. Perhaps there *will* be delayed effects of the ways local actors organized themselves to get things done. That is for the future to tell. We must not just sit back and wait for that future, however. What is badly needed is active direction of dialogue about how structural forces such as Europeanization, distantiation and juridification affect the scope for local actors to realize their own ideas about a specific territory. Inspiration for this could be found in examples such as the future collaboration between the Efteling and the nature organizations, the wider impact of the 'cultural work' done in the Grensschap, and the future role of the 'Friends of Biesland' and their

activities in research processes. Politicians and policy makers should start to work on how such territorial initiatives could actively be 'taken up' in the context of structural forces such as Europeanization and distantiation, rather than restricted to a pilot or experiment. They should also, at the very least, start to ponder how to politicize and democratize decision-making about such initiatives, and, above all, how to seize opportunities for collaborative reflection on their possible wider policy implications.





## Summary

### *Introduction: Interactive – two-way traffic!*

Governments often express the wish to involve citizens and civil society organizations more closely in policy development. This applies as much to spatial planning as to any other policy area, and to issues which go beyond the scale of a street, square or park in the neighbourhood: issues such as who will manage green space in the future, and how; issues such as how the relationship between city and countryside can be strengthened. Governments attach various labels to these ambitions, such as: 'interactive policy development', 'co-responsibility' and 'new division of roles between governments and society'. But what are their full implications? Both governments and researchers tend to look at this issue from the government's point of view, emphasising how interactive processes can be used to increase support for established policies, and how this can lead to more effective and efficient implementation. Many studies look at 'interactive projects' initiated by governments, and often concentrate on the limited influence of citizens and their subsequent disillusionment.

This research approaches the issue from the opposite direction, focusing on innovative initiatives by private actors which target the management of green space in the urban-rural interface. The study looks at the confrontation between these initiatives and established policy, and asks what the conditions are for getting such initiatives off the ground. The research is based on the assumption that genuinely interactive policymaking must be a matter of two-way traffic. The research analyses three situations in which non-governmental parties tried to realize their ideas for the design and /or management of green space in urban areas. This study asks what influenced the development of both the policies and the initiatives.

### *The Case Studies*

The first case – Biesland – concerns an agricultural enclave situated in the midst of the towns and recreation areas of the Randstad, in the West of the Netherlands. There is only one active farmer left in the area, and together with researchers, civil servants and a few local residents, he worked out a concept of 'nature-oriented' farming. The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (ANF) reserved budget for this. What is more, he promised early in the process to finance half of the plans, provided that the other half would be financed by regional parties. He also stated that the

European Commission should approve payments to the farmer before further steps could be taken. Indeed, the initiative was supported financially by regional administrators and politicians. However, the process got stuck in Brussels and there was a danger of its progress being blocked in 'the region' as well. So how did this initiative get as far as it did, and which obstacles proved surmountable and which did not?

The second case – Grensschap – involved a group of residents who organized themselves as 'the Grensschap' following an 'interactive event' which the municipality of Maastricht and the Ministry (ANF) asked a group of researchers to organize. The Grensschap group aimed to influence the land use in a green zone between the Dutch municipality of Maastricht and the Belgian municipalities of Riemst and Lanaken. The Grensschap proved to be more than just a flash in the pan. For years, Dutch and Belgian residents collaborated with a few civil servants to organize various activities. So what kinds of changes were the members of the Grensschap able to make to municipal policy plans, and on which fronts did they encounter bottlenecks? Where did they find the inspiration to persevere?

In the third case – the Loonsche Land – the theme park 'the Efteling' and two nature conservation organizations reached an agreement about the development of a joint land use management plan, which was spelled out in a covenant. The initiative came about after years of conflict between these parties over the building of accommodation in an area of woods and fields bordering the Efteling theme park: conflict which led to legal cases that went right up to the Council of State. So were the initiators able to carry out their new ideas? And what are the broader implications of this initiative?

These three cases have several things in common. They all concern innovative initiatives at the interface between such different policy domains as urban planning, cultural history, recreation, economics, agriculture, and nature. Although they go beyond the level of a street or neighbourhood, all three case areas are relatively small-scale: the Efteling area is seventy hectares; the Biesland area is one hundred hectares; the Grensschap area is a couple of hundred hectares. All three initiatives came primarily from private actors, although the government played a role in the ensuing processes and there was a complex network of communication channels between citizens and/ or civil society organizations, businesses, politicians, managers, researchers and civil servants. Another thing the three cases have in common is that all the initiatives involved some sort of conflict with established policy.

There are also a number of differences between the three cases. They had different origins, for example. In the Grensschap case, citizens met each other through an ‘interactive event’ organized by the Municipal Council and the Ministry. In the Biesland case, collaboration grew up via a ‘chance’ encounter between a farmer, a volunteer and some researchers. And in the Loonsche Land case, a private party and some civil society organizations wanted to break an impasse when facing the prospect of yet another long-running legal battle. There were also differences in the roles played by researchers, who might act as researchers, or as process facilitators, or as a combination of the two. The different initiatives also had an impact on different policy domains and were subject to decision-making processes at different levels of government. For example, agricultural policy is very much steered by the EU, while cultural history and spatial planning are largely regional and national affairs. It is the differences between these cases as much as the similarities which make them a rich empirical source for determining which circumstances can enable a confrontation between an initiative and established policy to lead to policy innovation.

### *Theoretical starting points*

This research makes use of the policy arrangements approach developed by Arts, Van Tatenhove and Leroy. This approach aims to elucidate change and stability of policy arrangements by analysing the interaction between everyday policy practices and the overarching structural processes of ‘political modernization’ such as individualization and Europeanization. Every day policy practices are described with reference to four dimensions: discourse (which relates to content), actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game (all of which relate to organization). The assumption is that these four dimensions can help clarify how change – or indeed stability – comes about in a policy arrangement. In this research, the dimensions are used as ‘sensitizing concepts’, which means they provide guidelines as to what to look at, but do not impose narrow definitions. A policy arrangement is defined as a temporary stabilization of the substance and organization of a policy domain. The approach tackles policy development from the point of view of a number of interactions:

1. between actor and structure;
2. between content and organization;
3. between discourse and practice; and
4. between everyday practices and structural processes.

The relationships between them are looked at from the point of view of an ‘analytical dualism’, which will be explained in the following.

### 1. Actor and structure

The sociologist Anthony Giddens' claims that too many attempts to explain social change have focused on the behaviour of actors, or on the potential and limitations that structures (such as rules and resources) provide or impose. He asserts that these possibilities or impossibilities come about through an interaction between the two, and that there exists a 'duality of actor and structure'. Neither the actors nor the structures are omnipotent. There has been serious debate as to the feasibility of researching the interaction between actor and structure: if they influence each other so much, how can we distinguish between them? And what becomes of the time dimension if actor and structure cannot be differentiated in terms of time? Margaret Archer has a solution to this, and proposes applying an 'analytical dualism', treating actor and structure as distinguishable, in order to be able to analyse the relationship at all. In two ways, the policy arrangements approach elaborates the duality of actor and structure: in terms of the four dimensions which together form everyday policy practices, and in terms of the interaction between these everyday policy practices and structural processes, which will be elaborated in the following (4). In this thesis I use these concepts and Archer's approach to arrive at an understanding of initiatives which are not yet institutionalized, but which do confront established policy.

### 2. Content and organization

The relationship between content-related and organizational aspects is also important, as indicated by the definition of a policy arrangement.

'Content' is translated into 'discourse' because 'discourse' suggests that content implies a point of view: whether in policy or through a local initiative, the social reality is given meaning. Such content is therefore not objectively 'true', but is a social construct. Policy is packaged in words which conceal versions of reality, as well as opinions on what should be done to change that reality.

In defining the concept of 'organization', I also make use of the concepts used in the policy arrangements approach. I see 'organization' in terms of the dimensions of actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game. Actor coalitions are people or organizations who join forces around a certain discourse – in other words, a 'discourse coalition'. The concept of 'resources' encompasses for example money, knowledge or number of members: all the resources which can be used to achieve a goal – something which can be very difficult, if not impossible, if there is a shortage of resources, or if a certain group lacks access to them. The 'rules of the game' are the formal

and informal rules which influence the process and are used by the actors in all their activities.

### 3. Discourse and practice

Discourse entails more than just words: it also involves practices. This understanding of discourse, not just as a linguistic concept but also as something institutional and practice-related, makes it possible to pursue an enquiry into the meanings, the hidden conceptual frameworks and the consequences of these for institutional practices, as well as into the way these practices influence the conceptual frameworks in turn. The interaction between discourse and practice therefore constitutes a third relationship which is significant in this research.

### 4. Practice and structural processes

The duality of everyday practice and structural processes is discussed here in terms of Ulrich Beck's sub-politicization theory. According to Beck, it is in the context of the present-day risk society that sub-politicization takes place. In Beck's own words, this means that "There are even opportunities for courageous individuals to 'move mountains' in the nerve centres of development". Centralized management takes a back seat, and consumers can wield an influence through their spending power, as they did for example during the discussion about the Brent spar oil rig. Other observers speak of political displacement or dispersion. The formal representative system that we know of old is no longer the *only* political arena; instead, political ideas start to emerge from many other places as well. In this thesis, I examine the three cases in the light of this posited political development. How do the three cases exemplify sub-politicization? Or are there also other structural processes that influence the outcomes of the interactions between local initiatives and established policy?

#### *Aim, questions and method*

In short, the main aim of the research is to expand our understanding of innovative, local initiatives by (mainly) private actors, and their interactions with established policies. This is pursued by means of the presented conceptual points of departure.

Specifically, the concepts discussed feature in this thesis in terms of five research questions:

1. What was the source of the initiative and how did it relate to established policy?

2. How do discourse, actors, resources and rules of the game manifest themselves over time, in the interaction between initiative and existing policy?
3. Does the case point to sub-politicization or can other structural transformations be discerned?
4. What types of space for policy innovation emerged and how can they be characterized?
5. What are enabling or impeding conditions for the emergence of space for policy innovation?

My own experiences in various contract-research projects laid the foundation for this PhD research. These projects were commissioned by government institutions (national government, province and municipality) and (in one case) by a private company. In terms of methodology, my study consisted of various elements: participation in meetings, following the exchange of e-mails, frequenting kitchen-table discussions, talking during occasional car rides and the constant exchange of phone calls all gave insights that allowed detailed descriptions of what had happened, of emotions accompanying key events in the process and of strategic thinking of actors involved. Because of this, I often felt like an 'anthropologist in the field' who was, at the same time, involved in the process of change. I also did desk-work, consisting mainly of analysis of documents and websites. In two of the three cases I did in-depth interviews to add to what I had experienced in the field.

### *The main results*

In spite of the differences, there turned out to be a few striking similarities between the three cases. The most salient of these similarities is the way these cases reveal the great potential for innovation among private parties – a potential which is far greater than you would think if you listen to pessimists who emphasize the role of NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) behaviour by local residents. Their initiatives related to issues going well beyond the borders of their back yards, and getting them onto the agenda and ensuring they were carried through required a lot of stamina, creativity and adaptability. Without this, it would not have been possible to obtain the necessary authorization and financing. In contrast to the question often posed within government as to 'how to stimulate support among citizens for policy implementation', these examples suggest that the real issue is 'how to involve governments in realizing the wishes of coalitions of private parties?'

In the following, I will summarize the results of the study in terms of the above-mentioned research questions.

*The origins of the initiatives*

In different ways, these initiatives all stemmed from the wish to approach the design and management of a public space near a city in a manner that was not possible within the terms of existing policy. Two of the three cases had a history of years of unresolved conflict. In the Biesland polder case, there was an impasse over the conversion of part of the polder into forest, a plan which formed part of the plans for 'Randstad green structure' (Randstadgroenstructuur) and the 'green-blue streamer' (Groenblauwe slinger). The farmer and a nature conservation volunteer believed that they could create a natural environment that would be attractive to city-dwellers themselves, and did not see the need to buy up agricultural land for forest development. In the Loonsche land case, there was a conflict between the Efteling and nature conservation organizations over the building of holiday accommodation. A legal battle was fought right up to the Council of State, contesting the harmful impact of the building plans and the accompanying compensation rights and obligations. In the Grensschap case, there was no one clear conflict, but there was a general dissatisfaction among a number of residents, civil servants and an alderman about the lack of a coordinated approach to the Western city boundary of Maastricht, an area which also borders the Belgian municipalities of Lanaken and Riemst. In other words, these initiatives did not come about in a policy vacuum, but in reaction to a policy.

Moreover, this study has revealed the need for greater subtlety in differentiating between government and non-government. Civil servants who are involved 'in the field' were particularly active in their efforts to promote these initiatives, even out of working hours. Their dual role was often very fruitful. One example of this was when a provincial official introduced a Service Club to the Biesland polder, inspiring the latter to set up a broader residents' organization which mobilized people in various ways to protect the polder area.

*Interactions between initiatives and established policy (in terms of relationships between discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game)*

If we consider the three cases from the perspective of the relationships between discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game, we are struck by a number of features.

Firstly, there was a lot of potential in terms of discourses and coalitions, with new coalitions being formed and various discourses co-existing. In other words, we can speak of a discursive space, fostered by new coalitions. In Biesland, alongside the well-established sectoral nature-oriented or 'green structure' discourse and the strong internal market discourse, a new approach grew up in which the qualities of the area were central, and which managed to combine the priorities of agriculture, nature conservation and access to the area for city-dwellers. In this context, and in defiance of the fear of unfair competition, the farmer could be paid for his nature conservation activities, which consisted for example of a closed nutrient cycle. Discourse and coalitions were therefore 'flexible', and could co-exist or even overlap each other. The flexibility of the rules of the game and resources was much more limited, however. In order to move things on, the content of the initiatives was partially adapted to comply with existing rules. Biesland provides a clear example of this: in the final EU directive approving implementation of the measures, a number of measures were included which ensured that the initiative broadly tied in with established policy. Similarly, in the Loonsche Land case, thinking in terms of the area as a whole, and of combining various different interests was sacrificed to thinking in terms of 'compensatory hectares'. This made it possible to get the initiative approved by policymakers, but it also made it more difficult for the 'new way of thinking' to be disseminated further. In the Grensschap case, the new coalition of initiators stuck to proposals they considered feasible from the start. It is possible however that the Grensschappers' way of thinking in terms of the connections between 'city' and 'country' and their expression in the form of viewpoints ('kijkvensters') or 'landmarks' will have a longer term impact beyond the time span of this study. In the meantime, these conclusions mean that justice is not done to some of the essential elements of the original idea, and there is a certain asymmetry between the flexibility of discourses and actor coalitions and the inflexibility of resources and rules of the game. The main point here is that this significantly reduces the chances of the initiatives being able to prove their worth in a wider context, even though the perseverance, efforts and courage of the initiators has enabled them to achieve their goals within their own areas.

### *Sub-politicization and depoliticization*

These are interesting cases in terms of Beck's theory of sub-politicization. Firstly, it was clear from the analysis of the relationships between discourse, actor coalitions, resources and rules of the game that new coalitions of actors create a new discursive space in which they can develop and implement their ideas. This discursive space mainly comes into being



in places outside the formal representative system. This doesn't mean, however, that there is no role for the municipal council or even for parliament – sometimes they can provide just the right bit of support at a crucial juncture. Yet the ideas for these initiatives were largely developed outside these formal political arenas – they evolved round a farm kitchen table in Biesland, during a field trip in the Grensschap or in a workshop on the golf course at the Efteling. The initiators used symbolic gestures to draw attention to the area, for example through the presence of cows at the signing of the agreement by the Minister and the regional administrators in Biesland, or through the viewpoint 'windows' ('kijkvensters') designed by the Grensschappers to point out certain features of their area to visitors. But what is most striking is the way people organized themselves, formed new coalitions and developed a new language in order to gain an influence over the land use and the management of the three areas.

However, these three areas also demonstrate a tendency that would seem to run counter to the trend towards sub-politicization: namely, 'depoliticization'. The core ideas of these initiatives were often sidelined in the context of the conditions prevailing in the system. These conditions included Europeanization (meaning that ideas for just one polder were discussed at length detail in Brussels for years before they got the go ahead); the sectoral nature of current policy; a growing distance between policymakers and 'the field'; and the dominant role of formal rules which were only indirectly relevant to the content of the initiatives. By contrast, discussion within the initiative focused on things like adapting maps of nature target types at the Efteling, doing the sums to determine whether there was a case of unfair competition through income support in Biesland, obtaining permits in order to establish 'landmarks' in the Grensschap. Procedural detail set the tone, as opposed to what the initiatives were really all about: the possibilities for farmers to manage nature in new ways in Biesland; opportunities to combine holiday accommodation with nature conservation in the Loonsche Land; promoting the qualities of the area 'as a whole' in the Grensschap. In the most extreme of the three cases, the Grensschap, efforts were restricted from the start to what was estimated to be feasible. In the other cases, the content of the initiatives was adapted at a later stage in the process in order to fit in with the rules in force at the time. This change in content facilitated the admission of the initiatives onto policy agendas, but at the same time meant that any discussion of fundamental principles was avoided. There was, then, at the same time, a process of inclusion (of the adapted content of the initiatives) and of exclusion (of crucial issues such as the distinctions that were built in to the rules: between nature and agriculture, city and country, nature and

construction projects). This observation enables us to further refine the sub-politicization theory. The fundamental, or political implications of the issues at stake were not made explicit, and the issue was therefore not accessible to joint decision-making, or even to simple discussion, with non-governmental actors. The same thing can be seen in the way that legal jargon gradually became dominant, in the shift in the content of the initiatives in the direction of the established arrangement, and in the sustained lack of face-to-face contact. These depoliticization mechanisms led to experiences loaded with negative emotions among the people who operated at a distance from the procedures concerned.

I see this distance between civil servants and people in the field, described in the thesis as 'distantiation', as a particularly significant factor. It is a widely applied rule of the game in policymaking ministries that civil servants regularly change jobs. This had drastic implications for the Biesland case, as there was never enough time to build up trust. By contrast, civil servants who did stay in one post throughout the period contributed a lot to the continuity of efforts to get the initiatives off the ground. They took on the initial ideas, helped to develop them further, and stood their ground, sometimes against their own colleagues. What happened cannot therefore be summed up in terms of contents and organization, but had more to do with personal commitment, trust and identity. Where there was contact, this contact bore fruit in the form of taking the initiatives further. However, major final decisions were usually taken by civil servants, sometimes as far away as The Hague or even Brussels, who didn't know the situation in the field. The frequent 'changing of the guard' was very frustrating for the initiators at times, because they repeatedly had to invest in new relationships. The 'not invented here' attitude exacerbated the effects of this rule of the game because this attitude hindered the transfer of knowledge about the idea within the organization. The current policy of frequent changes of job is problematic if governments want to ensure that interactive policymaking is a matter of two-way traffic, in which initiatives can come from non-governmental parties as well as from government.

*Perseverance, trust, empathy and other social-relational factors*

The fact that the initiatives did bear fruit, in spite of everything and even though the content was partially adapted to established policy, has a lot to do with a dimension that has not yet been explicitly mentioned here. Perseverance, trust and empathy are all aspects of what can be called 'human resources', or features of the actor dimension. I believe that these social-relational factors deserve special attention. The trust nurtured

through the actual contact between people who developed a feeling for a place during their time 'in the field' made it possible to build up long-term relationships. The cases demonstrated various situations in which personal contact on the basis of mutual trust survived even quite difficult confrontations. The trust that grew up in the course of intensive collaboration, the stamina, the skills in dealing with conflicts, the empathy fostered by face-to-face contact all made it easier for those involved to 'go for it' and not to throw in the towel too soon. Personal friendships often developed, and participants were inspired to keep going through their sharing of the pleasures and the disappointments, of the feeling of powerlessness or indeed of the sense of combined power. However, as soon as the chances of implementation of the initiative or emergence of space for policy innovation grew, the discussion shifted to the level of legal and accountancy issues, which were a long way from what was important in the field. There was less face-to-face contact too, notwithstanding the repeated stress laid in the region on the importance of 'real' contact. In the course of the process, it took more and more creativity on the part of the initiators to find ways of really applying their own 'rule of the game' about contact with 'the field'.

In the light of all this, then, in order to reach a better understanding of policy innovation, we clearly need to take into account the social-relational factors and, ideally, to experience them first-hand.

#### *Our own position as contract researchers*

A connection is often made between research by knowledge institutions and the legitimization of existing policy. These cases show that local, private initiators of innovative policy ideas also make use of 'contract researchers' in order to promote their ideas. Accepting the fact that knowledge is used strategically by various parties in various ways in order to promote their own interests is important in order to be able to evaluate the influence of that knowledge and to deal with it ethically. As researchers, we can choose to focus on the knowledge of local actors and to combine it with our own insights. Through seeking dialogue with established policy, research can facilitate the discussion of several different alternatives. However, these cases make clear that this is no simple matter. Paradoxically, making use of our knowledge in a non-governmental initiative contributed to the reproduction of existing policy because the initiatives were translated into the language and procedures of established policy in order to be implemented. This poses a difficult dilemma: the shift towards the language of established policy helped put the innovations on the agenda but at the same time transformed them, sometimes in ways that were not

altogether transparent. This is an important issue that deserves attention in future research.

*In conclusion – space for policy innovation*

It is essential that research looks for local initiatives that are not yet 'bogged down' in established policy. There seems to be plenty of potential for local initiatives, but the translation of that potential into public discussion of possible improvements to government policy seems to lag behind. It is in this sense that we can note the presence not only of sub-politicization but also of depoliticization. This study sheds some light on why this is so. For the time being, the space for policy innovation is to be found in the discursive space that is created by new actor coalitions. There seems to be very little prospect of a broader impact such as a rethinking of rules or resources. This would require a discussion of the following questions about the necessary conditions for policy innovation:

- Does the distance from 'the field' and the habit of frequently transferring civil servants from one post to another lead to a lack of political discussion over the implications of a local initiative for existing policy?
- If trust, empathy and perseverance emerge chiefly from situations in which there is 'real contact', what are the implications of this for a policy of 'remote control'?
- If a shift in the content of a local initiative towards established policy is a condition for realizing the initiative, what are the implications of this for the nature of the space for policy innovation and of interactive policymaking (as one-way or as two-way traffic), and is that desirable?
- How can the considerable local potential for innovation observed during this study generate wider policy implications?
- In the context of the increasing influence of European regulations, with their own specific discourse, how can space be preserved for debate about content at local level?

These issues deserve to be addressed more often, and in dialogue, by researchers, policymakers and practitioners. This makes it possible to bridge the gap between established policy and the wealth of ideas generated by local private parties - currently still 'worlds apart'.

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## Curriculum vitae

Marleen Buizer was born in Gorinchem on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1970. She completed secondary school (Montessori Lyceum Herman Jordan in Zeist) in 1988. She went on to study Public Administration at Leiden University, with a focus on developing countries and the environment. She followed several courses at the Centre for Environmental Science at Leiden University (Environment and Development), and at the Extension Sciences Group at Wageningen University (Management of Agricultural Knowledge Systems). Her master thesis studied government-citizen interaction at the forest fringe of the Sierra Madre, Philippines. In 1993 she graduated and continued to work in the Philippines as a consultant on participatory methods.

After her return to the Netherlands in 1995, she worked in the European Parliament in Brussels, as a policy assistant of the Dutch delegation of the Labour Party on nature, environment and development issues. In 1997 she started working as a researcher at the Institute for Forest and Nature Research, now called Alterra. She initiated and participated in various international research projects, in Vietnam, the Philippines or at a European level, mostly on the issue of governance and urban-rural interactions and nature. In 2002, she started her PhD research at the Social-Spatial Analysis Group of Wageningen University and Research, which she combined with work at Alterra, as a project leader in various multi-disciplinary, area oriented projects. Since June 2007 she works as a post-doc at the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group and Alterra at Wageningen University and Research (WUR). Here, she continues to analyze how private actor initiatives in the green domain are making part of governance processes.

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