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## **Designing Waterland: Strategies for a Contested Arcadia**

**Bart A.M. de Zwart, MSc**

PhD student

Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning / Urban Design Group

Eindhoven University of Technology

Vertigo 8.36 / Den Dolech 2 / 5612 AZ Eindhoven / The Netherlands

tel: +31 (0)40 247 44 08 / +31 (0)40 247 34 10 / mobile: +31 (0)6 52 32 0776

e-mail: [B.A.M.d.Zwart@tue.nl](mailto:B.A.M.d.Zwart@tue.nl)

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the case of Waterland, an area of Arcadian lowlands in the Western part of the Netherlands, the future of which is currently object of vehement debate. In the course of the elaboration of the prevailing Regional Planning Act different views have been put forward on the future of Waterland, a number which depart from design and designerly investigation of spatial dynamics and inherent landscape figures. Starting, however, from this common thematic focus, their differing assessments of institutional capacity have led them to develop radically different design approaches, typically resulting in rather contesting outcomes. Drawing on an institutional planning framework, the paper investigates how regional development processes may benefit from design's faculty to generate spatial concepts as motifs for mediating co-production.

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### **Introduction**

Today's urban condition of disintegrating and reclustered networks and sprawling spatial development has challenged the concept of the compact city as the self-evident unit of urbanization. As a result, contemporary urban planning practice has witnessed a focal shift, making way for less concentric points of view, and directing attention to the extensive urbanized landscape outside of the traditionally perceived city limits. The often inscrutable spatial and institutional structures of this peri-urban hinterland, however, raise a specific set of problems, urging planners and urban designers to reconsider their planning concepts and accordingly calibrate their instruments.

This paper discusses the case of Waterland, an area of Arcadian lowlands in the Western part of the Netherlands, the future of which is currently object of vehement debate. The case study investigates how regional development projects may benefit from design's faculty to generate spatial concepts derived from inherent landscape figures and their representations as motifs for mediating co-production in regional development processes.

## Waterland

At the fringe of the Dutch capital Amsterdam, stretching upward from the ring-road that carefully laces up the city's Northern district, lays Waterland<sup>1</sup>. A largely rural area, located in the Province of Noord-Holland, measuring approximately 51,000 hectares, spread out over 15 municipalities, and home to some 110,000 inhabitants (PNH, 2006a, p. 11). Sharply contrasting the adjacent metropolis, its panoramic scenery includes peat pastures, land reclamations, and well-known traditional (fishing) villages such as Edam, Volendam and Marken. Moreover, its distinct ecosystem<sup>2</sup> and fine-grained historical settlement structures constitute a widely valued landscape, substantial parts of which are designated as sites under the National Landscape Act [NL: '*Nationale Landschappen*'] and UNESCO World Heritage<sup>3</sup>.

The area, however, is also subject to large external forces. Predominantly, since it is not just located at Amsterdam's periphery, but is also near – and to some extent *a part of* – a larger urban area known as the Northern Randstad, bearing considerable pressure on it.

For the period between 2000 and 2020, a housing demand of 166,000 new dwellings for this area is estimated, 13,000 of which are assigned to the greater Waterland region (PNH, 2003a, p. 61). Furthermore, Waterland faces challenges of transitions in rural economy, soil hydrology, climate change, and environmental management (Taskforce NHM, 2003), as well as serving a recreational function to over one million urbanites (PNH, 2006a, p. 11). Last but not least, composing a characteristic display of Holland's perceived identity (Simon, 2005, p. 82), Waterland appeals strongly to both national and international tourists, making it a strategic competitive asset of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (PNH, 2007, p. 5).

### *Regional planning context*

In 1999 the provincial government of Noord-Holland decided to commission preliminary studies revising the seven prevailing Regional Plans [NL: "*Streekplan*"] for the Southern part of the province and their nine amendments, and combining them into one development prospect for the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (PNH, 22 June 1999; PNH, 28 January 2003, p. 3)<sup>4</sup>. Regulating the greater Amsterdam area<sup>5</sup>, the dune lands and coastline around Haarlem, the Gooi and Vecht region, and the greater Waterland region, this new plan has a large impact on spatial planning, as the Regional Plan is the province's primary planning tool and forms the basis for the municipal land-use plans [NL: "*Bestemmingsplan*"], which are the only planning documents binding on citizens (Van den Brink et al., 2006, p. 152).

<sup>1</sup> There is some margin for discussion in establishing the boundaries of the Waterland area (Simon, 2005, p. 67). Generally we can distinguish three levels of definition: 1) the municipality of Waterland; 2) the greater Waterland region; 3) the National Landscape 'Laag Holland'. In this paper, unless specified otherwise, I will alternately use the second and third definition. Using the second definition when referring to the area as designated in the provincial documents, and the third definition when referring to the scenic rural landscape in general. Topographic and demographic figures are based on the third definition.

<sup>2</sup> Over 6,000 ha of the peat pastures are protected by the European Habitats and Birds Directives. Additionally, 6,600 ha of the total area are designated as nature reserve (PNH, 2006a, p. 11).

<sup>3</sup> Both the land-reclamation '*De Beemster*' in the Northern part of Waterland, as well as the line of former defensive works of Amsterdam [NL: '*Stelling van Amsterdam*'] which cuts through the area, have a UNESCO World Heritage status.

<sup>4</sup> For this section I partly draw on information collected during expert interviews conducted with Mrs. J. Kluit and Mrs. A. Molenkamp, staff members of the Policy Directorate of the Province of Noord-Holland, Department of Land-Use, in Haarlem on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2008 (13:30h-15:00h); and with Mr. H. Meijdam, former member (1998 to 2005) of the provincial government of Noord-Holland, in Heerhugowaard on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2008 (12:00h-13:00h).

<sup>5</sup> The City of Amsterdam has a somewhat greater planning autonomy than other Dutch municipalities. The details of this arrangement are, however, irrelevant for the context of this paper.

As part of laying down the groundwork for this momentous enterprise, a usual extensive array of surveys were conducted, as well as a series of public debates and deliberative sessions with local governments, interest groups, and so on. During these meetings an appeal was done by several local government officials in the Waterland area to the representing members of the provincial legislature to avail itself of the current amendment of the Regional Plan as an opportunity to unlock prevailing planning conceptions.

Several arguments can be distinguished underlying this call, ranging from rather opportunistic to deeply ideological. Firstly, it is important to recognize that Dutch planning practice for many years has been – and to a large extent still is – characterized by a rigorous separation between urban and rural space. From this distinction the concept of a compact city derived, which has been at the heart of urbanization policy since 1985, and is based on the idea that land-use ought to be intensified within existing settlements (Van der Valk, 2002, p. 207), thus reducing traffic movements and preserving open landscape. Today, however, this division is challenged by contemporary spatial reality, as rural communities face difficulties sustaining themselves socially and economically, and inadvertent developments have oozed through the seams of the envelopes delimiting the built-up territory. As a result, the classic antithesis between urban and rural has lost most of its significance, urging for a re-conceptualization of the “*dogmas of Dutch planning doctrine*” (Van der Valk, 2002, p. 209; Van den Brink et al., 2006, 148). Furthermore, since the mid-1990s planning policy in The Netherlands has witnessed a decentralization process, delegating powers to the lower government levels “*decentralizing what can be decentralized, centralizing what has to be central*”, and moving from restrictive to promotional strategies (MinVROM, 2004). Finally, as a closing argument, it should be noted that – notwithstanding any genuine quality concerns – municipalities are also strongly dependent on revenues from land development, leading some critics to overtly question the scrupulosity with which local governments will implement such a non-restrictive policy.

Be that as it may, provincial legislators acknowledged the local governments’ plea for a more liberal approach to rural land-use planning based on qualitative arguments, and included the possibility of opening up the Waterland countryside for the development of a maximum of 3,000 dwellings<sup>6</sup> in the text of the planning document (PNH, 2003a, p. 63). However, since relieving the rural environment from building restrictions is a highly sensitive subject – particularly in a high-profile area such as Waterland – the Regional Plan was prudently drafted. Anticipating objections from the provincial parliament, the provincial government passed decision-making on the implementation of this particular part of the planning policy on to a subsequent elaborative Regional Plan Addendum [NL: “*Streekplanuitwerking*”] to be handled after the term of then governing provincial administration.

In December 2003, ten months after the enactment of the Regional Plan for the southern part of Noord-Holland, the provincial government issued a memorandum presenting ‘Waterlands Wonen’ [GB: “*Waterlandish Living*”] as one of nine key projects. As part of the project, a socio-economical and a cultural-historical study were announced to investigate the conditions for building dwellings on new development sites (outside of the existing settlements) in order to strengthen “*natural, scenic and cultural-historical values*” and “*do justice to both the qualitative and dynamical features*” of the area (PNH, 2003b, p. 20). The socio-economic survey was commissioned to consultancy firm PRIMO Noord-Holland, and the results presented in 2004 (Primo NH/PNH, 2004). The cultural-historical survey was conducted by design office Landscape Architects for SALE (LA4Sale), and presented as ‘Bouwen voor Waterland’ [GB: “*Building for Waterland*”] that same year (LA4Sale/PNH, 2004).

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<sup>6</sup> The document states that from the estimated housing demand of 13,000, a total of 7,000 can be situated in existing plans. About half of the remaining 6,000 dwellings are reserved for developments within existing settlement borders, whereas the other 3,000 are projected in any of four ‘search locations’, one of which is the Waterland countryside (PNH, 2003a, p. 63).

Resulting from these inquiries and a subsequent environmental assessment (WB/PNH, 2005), the new administration in the end of 2005 proposed the Regional Plan Addendum 'Waterlandish Living' to the provincial parliament, followed by its enactment on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2006 (PNH, 2006b).

### ***Building for Waterland***

After having worked on several provincial commissions in 2001 and 2002 for projects regarding spatial identity, the Amsterdam-based firm LA4Sale in 2004 presented the findings of their environmental and cultural-historical survey of the greater Waterland region<sup>7</sup>. In the preface of their inquiry the authors introduced their approach – slightly rephrasing their assignment – as an alternative to conventional rural planning custom. Rather than linking to the Regional Plan policy to site 3,000 homes into the existing settlement fabric and investigate any of the four suggested 'search locations' for situating another 3,000 dwellings outside of the existing settlement limits, LA4Sale propose to analyze existing patterns and typologies within the landscape, based on their history of development. By extrapolating these figures and trajectories, they state, they can not only do better justice to the contextual embedding of the plan, but also reveal a considerable latent capacity within the landscape.

In their survey the authors elaborate a comprehensive landscape taxonomy that hints at genealogical connotations. Emphasizing the importance of diversity and coherence, the document distinguishes *entities* that can be recognized through *traits*, and which themselves are clustered in *families*. First, the survey deals with entities of landscape identity, which share common cultural-historical and spatial characteristics. These entities are then organized into families that display similar features, but whose members remain quite distinct. Recognizing and building on these differences and similarities, the authors argue, is the key to sustaining valuable identities (LA4Sale, 2004, p. 13). After dealing with identity, the authors move on to discussing morphological entities, which they order into three categories (fine grain, villages, and towns). Within these categories they distinguish twelve structural families that are constituted by repertoires of spatial structures and typologies (ibid, p. 25). Each family, and each settlement within this family, is characterized by a specific structural and typological configuration, which relates to its place within the identity classification. Finally, the document arrives at formulating development strategies for each of the configurations it has identified, mapping its potential capacity.

From these respective perspectives a regional overview is generated that aggregates the individual strategies, revealing the countryside's development potential (ibid, p. 147). Although this aggregated projection displays over 9,500 potential new building sites, which seems to fit the policy standards – that is, doing justice to and strengthening the landscape – and well exceeds any previous plan's development capacity, the authors fiercely resist the notion that Building for Waterland is in fact a *plan*. Rather, they argue, it is an inquiry of the landscape that articulates sustainable spatial strategies by revealing latent development opportunities through designerly examination. Moreover, by unlocking the development potential of the countryside and supplying an excess of capacity, the survey attempts to provide local authorities precious bargaining margin, improving their negotiating position towards wealthy real-estate developers, as well as relieving the market of some of the pressure on land prizes caused by speculative interests.

The latter is, however, vehemently contested, particularly by environmental conservationists and trust societies, depicting the supposed neo-liberal subtext of the document as an exclusive vehicle for

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<sup>7</sup> For this section I partly draw on information collected during an expert interview conducted with Mr. P. Godefroy, manager and designer of Landscape Architects for SALE, in Amsterdam on February 13<sup>th</sup> 2008 (10:00h-12:00h).

capitalist interests, and calling in question the local governments' ability to scrupulously manage the licenses of a non-restrictive planning policy (e.g. Dusseldorp et al., 2007).

### ***Purmer-Meer***

Meanwhile, Building for Waterland is not the only design causing uproar in the Waterland peat bogs, for in 2002 yet another bold vision for Waterland's future had come up to the surface<sup>8</sup>. This second plan was the brainchild of distinguished Edam-based architect Professor Tjeerd Dijkstra, who from the mid-1990s in his own name developed a plan for the urbanization of the Purmer polder between Purmerend and Edam. Although his plan treats only the 2,750 ha Purmer land-reclamation, and therefore can not really be regarded a *regional* design, it was in fact incorporated into the project definition of Waterlandish Living at instigation of provincial parliament, as an option to be taken into account during the elaboration of the plan addendum (PNH, 2003a, p. 63). Reason for this resolution, was the plan's considerable impact – not just on the Purmer itself, but on the constitution of the entire area – as well as its ambitious attempt to rehabilitate this rather dreary part of the Waterland territory by connecting it to the dynamics of the nearby metropolis. Furthermore, 'Purmer-Meer', as the plan is called, appeals strongly to the advocates of the compact city concept, as it raises substantial barriers between the urban and rural domain.

As for Dijkstra, the designer distinguishes three key motives that underlie his plan. Firstly, by advancing a comprehensive vision on the site, the plan intends to counter marginal architecture that encroaches upon the polder through a sprawl of industrial activity, disregarding structure, history and appearance. Second, it attempts to safeguard the Waterland landscape of any future (housing) developments, by projecting a massive building capacity of 30,000 dwellings and over a million square meters of commercial space in one relatively isolated site. Lastly, the plan aims to create a high-quality urban space surrounded by a recreational environment, by drawing on the rationale of the land-reclamation site.

Effectively, the plan proposes to retrocede the eastern part of the Purmer by widening its ring canal (Dijkstra, 2002). Taking up about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the current polder, the new water outlet physically separates Edam and Purmerend, creating an important recreational potential for the surrounding area. In this lake, the plan projects the sequential development of three self-sustaining urban centres, founded on islands, each containing some 10,000 dwellings and 350,000 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space<sup>9</sup>. The New Towns are high-density (50 dwellings per ha), organized tracing the gridlines of the polder, and are accessible via a rapid transit system connecting them to a northern branch of the Amsterdam subway. On the west side, the forest 'Purmerbos' is recuperated, providing space for some low-density housing and separating the planned islands from Purmerend.

Though Purmer-Meer was mentioned in the preface of the elaboration of the Regional Plan, its vision was not actually included into the Addendum text. Instead, the Addendum dismissed the plan, arguing that its ambitious concept outscapes the scope of the Regional Plan and crosses established supra-regional policy. Furthermore, the legislators identify a lack of support among local municipal governments, fearing that the high-density urban centres projected by the plan might drain the surrounding communities (PNH, 2006b, p. 10). However, since redeveloping the Purmer polder might – in time – prove a suitable solution for resolving housing demand on a higher scale, the provincial

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<sup>8</sup> For this section I partly drawn on information collected during an expert interview conducted with Mr. T. Dijkstra, architect of the Purmer-Meer plan and former Master Builder of the Dutch Government, in Edam on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2008 (15:30h-17:00h).

<sup>9</sup> The plan proposes a ratio between residential and commercial space of 70% to 30% (Dijkstra, 2002).

government decided to “*not make the Purmer-Meer impossible planning-wise*”<sup>10</sup>, keeping some elbow-room for the future (PNH, 21 June 2005).

In the mean time, the architect has initiated a lobby for Purmer-Meer, setting up a private foundation promoting his design<sup>11</sup>. In 2006 this foundation organized a workshop in association with the Faculty of Architecture of the Delft University of Technology, inviting three teams of real-estate developers and leading landscape architects and urban design firms to elaborate their ideas on redevelopment of the Purmer based on Dijkstra’s plan<sup>12</sup>. The outcomes of the workshop were brought together at an exposition at the Delft University from December 8<sup>th</sup> to December 22<sup>nd</sup> that same year, and are to be resulting in a forthcoming book publication in 2008.

Simultaneously, the plan has also gained support from a rather unexpected source, as several local interest groups and conservationists have taken up Purmer-Meer as part of their remonstrance against the Regional Plan Addendum, hoping to turn the tide in Waterland planning policy by appealing to the national government to interfere (e.g. Dusseldorp et al., 2007).

## Mediating plans

Before continuing my analysis of the Waterland case, it is useful to dwell for a moment at the concept of design as a mediating agent, as its appropriateness within the context of regional planning might not be entirely self-evident. Generally speaking, one might say that any regional plan – or all planning, for that matter – maintains a certain inevitable distance from spatial reality. Plans, as such, do not effectively change land-use, displace infrastructural flows, let alone alter the physical composition of sites. At best (or worst, depending on the desirability of the outcome) they can invoke human action, possibly triggering a chain of events which ultimately may or may not result in a particular spatial intervention. Furthermore, there is no certainty that the outcome of this intervention accords with the plan’s projection. Especially since both human and material behaviour remain stubborn and often unpredictable conditions.

As a result, the act of planning can be considered a combination of drafting both projections of new spatial realities, as well as the trajectories through which these might actualize. Contemporary regional planning has come a long way in developing a notion of the profound complexity of this task, as neither a comprehensive and desirable image of the future (integrating a multitude of claims, stretching across all economical, social and ecological domains), nor a linear chain of developments towards this utopia are easy to come by (e.g. Hajer et al., 2006). During the course of time a richer understanding of design within this planning context too has developed, appreciating not only its artistic, organizational and technical faculties, but also recognizing its merit as an instrument of knowledge, communication, and even power.

As for knowledge, designerly research has been part of Dutch urban and regional design tradition since the 1970s (Meyer, 2003, p. 17). Drawing on earlier work at the Parisian and Venetian schools of architecture, research by design brought forth a range of tools for exploring the morphological and typological dynamics of the built environment. From these inherent landscape figures and their representations, potent integrating spatial concepts have been derived, as well as motifs for amending cities through strategic interventions, as has been proposed by the advocates of the Urban Project (ibid). These interventions for some part draw on spatial knowledge but, in a sense, also apply

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<sup>10</sup> This inarticulate expression to “*not make [...] impossible*”, is a common artifice in Dutch public policy planning to defer decision-making on a certain issue without shutting the door on it.

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.purmermeer.nl>, at May 17th, 2008 (15:05h).

<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from: <http://rbit.comes.nl/purmeratelier/AtelierHome.rbm>, at May 16th, 2008 (17:49h).

knowledge themselves. And though not all designs should be considered part of an explicit epistemological strategy, it seems that by repeatedly investigating the urban space through design, it is possible to – to quote Flemish publicist Tom Avermaete – “*develop a detailed knowledge regarding both the act of designing as well as the built environment. Every design adds a something new to this knowledge, refines it, or thoroughly revises it*” (Avermaete, 2004, p. 178). By designing and conducting designerly research concrete interventions become imaginable, rendering plausible a new reality.

This register of knowledge is not necessarily limited to the physical conditions of the site itself, but can also substantiate the organizational context in which the design is conceived. In this sense, the plan presupposes an institutional structure, which is reproduced and cognizable throughout the plan. These structural properties are particularly relevant as they express a connection between the plan as it is projected, and a particular constellation of actors and stakeholders that are included in its trajectory.

### *Acts of persuasion and bias*

Because of their tendency to build up these forms of spatial argumentation, it is not uncommon for regional design and planning to be associated with narration. Indeed, planning scholar James A. Throgmorton has repeatedly argued, that planning is in fact an act of “*persuasive storytelling about the future*” (e.g. Throgmorton, 2003). This seemingly benign statement has however provoked a fair deal of opposition, as conventional planning practice is “*deeply imbued with the ethics, ambitions, and sometimes obfuscations of science*” (ibid, p. 128), and tends to reject the notion that its projections on the future are anything but politically neutral and objective. Nevertheless, thought within planning practice and theory has shifted, opening up to the idea that design, particularly on a regional scale, can be – and often is – an act of political significance. Regional design does not only develop within a given process, but also influences and alters the process itself (Hajer et al., 2006, p. 19). Future-oriented storytelling is therefore, thus agrees Throgmorton, not just persuasive, it is also *constitutive*, in a sense that it shapes community, character, and culture (Throgmorton, 2003, p. 130).

From this political angle two concerns arise. Firstly, it is important to realize that planners are not the exclusive authors of the stories they exclusively tell. Instead, as argues linguist Barbara Eckstein, planners host, hear and renarrate traditional stories and local conventions, creating “*an amiable narrative and physical space, that allow their telling, retelling, and thus transformation of the community’s stories to be heard.*” (Eckstein, 2003, p. 21). In order to create these communal spaces, however, storytellers tend to establish borders delimiting the narrative space, including some members within its territory and excluding others (ibid, p. 13). These boundaries are particularly robust, and, being at the disposition of the planner, allow designers to “*draw in*” (Gomart, 2003, p. 31) certain stories into their design, while leaving out or ignoring others. As the Waterland example illustrated, the regional landscape, through its scale, unclear demarcation, and peripheralness, constitutes an inscrutable juxtaposition of these individual and collective stories, making it virtually impossible to develop an inclusive narrative. The planning tale, while posing as a comprehensive representation, thus runs a risk of being deceptively selective.

Underlying this possible mobilization of bias remains, however, a more fundamental issue. In the sense that the planning system in which design operates is shaped by structural properties. These properties condition the act of designing as well as the plan itself, charging it with an array of embedded presuppositions. Planning texts – among which I will also count designs – are richly encrypted with these subtexts making it often difficult for them to be read (Mandelbaum, 1990). It is, however, precisely in this bedrock structure that design’s intermediation is fitted.

## Forum design in the Waterland region

In order to develop an understanding of the way in which design is brought into action as a mediating agent in the Waterland case, I will turn to work by American planning scholars John Bryson and Barbara Crosby. Who, in their award winning 1992 publication *Leadership for the Common Good*, developed a descriptive framework for planners and policy analysts (Bryson & Crosby, 1993, p. 175) to deal with planning and leadership issues in today's shared-power and no-one-in-charge world<sup>13</sup>. Starting from the position that contemporary institutional reality has moved away from hierarchical organizations containing singular problem areas into a 'multi-organizational field' or 'multiactor network' (e.g. Healey, 1997), Crosby and Bryson call attention to the emerging problems of modern societies, such as environmental and security issues, sustainability, and globalisation (2005, p. 14). These highly complex and multiform problems, they argue, do not longer call for traditional 'rational planning' as this type of planning assumes a principle agreement on goals, policies, programs and actions, but rather a new form of institutionalist planning and leadership that helps to establish value consensus. In order to do this, the authors propose a 'triply-three dimensional' model addressing different kinds of institutional settings and practices, as well as the powers that are wielded there.

Drawing on the dimensions of power put forward by Steven Lukes<sup>14</sup>, and connecting these to Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory<sup>15</sup>, Crosby and Bryson distinguish three strata of power: 1) human action; 2) ideas, rules, modes, media, and methods; and 3) social structures. In this schema, the first dimension expresses the most obvious type of power, being the prerogative to act – that is, to communicate and create meaning, to make decisions and implement policy, and to sanction and adjudicate. These actions are however continuously affected by ideas, rules, modes, media, and methods that precede these actions. These concepts do not determine what is finally communicated, created or decided, but which issues come up for decision-making in the first place. One could thus say that the second dimension of power distinguishes 'live' issues from 'potential' ones, creating 'decision' and 'non-decision' categories (ibid, p. 401). Funding these concepts, however, underlies yet another dimension of power, that of the 'deep' structures that shape social behaviour. These structures are substantiated through the ideas, rules, modes, etc., from the second dimension, which act as 'vehicles of bias' (ibid, p. 403) ordering our thought worlds.

Embracing sociology's institutional tradition, the authors pose that human action draws on structural resources and displays structural properties, while meanwhile recognising that these structures are recursively organised. In this sense, the dimension of ideas, rules, modes, media and methods – which is quintessential to the model of Crosby and Bryson – acts as an intermediate link, producing human action as well as reproducing social structure. Since the power of planners to directly influence human action and its outcomes in shared-power cum no-one-in-charge settings is very limited, the authors pose that "*planners can have their greatest influence over action and outcomes by focussing on the second dimension of power – that is, by strengthening, weakening, or altering the ideas, rules, modes, media, and methods that divide what is theoretically possible into what is actually possible and what is not*" (Bryson & Crosby, 1993, p. 178).

With regard to procedure, the authors distinguish three social practices through which planning and public policy are developed. These practices are made up of principle types of policy action and their

<sup>13</sup> For this paper I will draw on the revised second edition of *Leadership for the Common Good: Tackling Public Problems in a Shared-Power World* (Crosby & Bryson, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> e.g. Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A Radical View*. London: Macmillan

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. London: Macmillan; Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California press.

designated settings and are related to the dimensions of powers. The practices include: 1) the design and use of *forums* for communication and creation of meaning; 2) the design and use of *arenas* for decision-making and policy implementation; and 3) the design and use of *courts* for adjudication of residual conflict. Strategic design and use of these settings, particularly through the second dimension of power allows planners and community leaders to promote desirable developments, advancing – what Crosby and Bryson like to call – the ‘common good’.

Based on the latter, to conceive the plans of LA4Sale and Professor Dijkstra as part of the second dimension configuration of practices in which spatial policy in the Waterland region is developed, appears a viable approach. Moreover, recognizing that the root of design’s mediating agency is its capacity to mobilize shared appreciation and common interest as an incentive for (co-)production, a more specific focus on the *forum activity* of these plans seems in order. Drawing on the six aspects<sup>16</sup> proposed by Crosby and Bryson to interpret the ideas, rules, modes, media, and methods that shape the design and use forums, it is possible to develop a richer understanding of the way structure and action interrelate throughout these plans.

We will therefore now revisit the Waterland case and its two designs, using the conceptual framework of the forum’s second power dimension.

### ***Communicative capability***

Though operating in an increasingly shared-power world, it is clear that in any given planning process not all stakeholders can claim an equal voice in creating and communication meaning. In fact – following Crosby and Bryson – it is possible to distinguish four types of actors participating in the process, each with their own communicative profile: 1) *Players* (stakeholders with high power and high interest); 2) *Context setters* (stakeholders with high power and low interest); 3) *Subjects* (stakeholders with low power and high interest); and finally 4) *The crowd* (low power, low interest). While players are as a matter of course part of planning fora – just as the crowd usually is not – most visionary public planning aims to enhance the power of the subjects and increase the interest of the context setters (2005, p. 122).

When we transpose this model to the Waterland context, we find some interesting differences. The Purmer-Meer plan, for example, seems to depart from – what might be called – a ‘top-down’ approach. In this approach, the Province, and to a lesser degree the State, are regarded responsible for the sustainment of landscape on a regional scale, as they are expected to have both knowledge and resources to implement spatial policy on a supra-local (or even supra-regional) level. The higher government bodies are joined in this venture by strong civic institutions, such as housing corporations, schools and public health organizations, and development corporations. Together they compose the forum’s players, while the countryside’s communities remain in the crowd.

Building for Waterland, by contrast, directs itself no so much at the State or social institutions, but focuses exactly on the smaller municipalities as its primary players. Passing over the larger towns and national government, the design allows the power and interest of local communities to prevail, descending the regional landscape to its constituting elements.

Subjects of both designs are in each case the landowners and farmers, that clearly have substantial interest, but remain rather voiceless in the designs. Same goes for the future occupants that are

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<sup>16</sup> These facets include: 1) communicative capability; 2) interpretive schemes; 3) norms of relevance; 4) norms of pragmatic communication; 5) modes of argument; and 6) access rules (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Bryson & Crosby, 1993).

inscribed in to the plans, though we must note that Purmer-Meer addresses a slightly different, more supra-local, housing market than Building for Waterland does.

The context of Dijkstra's plan is meanwhile mostly set by planning professionals (designers, planners, developers, etc.), who elaborate the design as part of professional discourse in, for instance, workshop-like settings, as was being done at the Delft sessions. Building for Waterland, on the other hand, as a result of its fine-grained approach, makes a bridge between landscape architecture and regular architecture, ruling out urban design in its traditional sense. (In fact, part of the LA4Sale argument seems to be that *urban* design is not in order at all in a rural context.) Instead, Building for Waterland stresses the importance of an intensive dialogue between developers, architects, and building commissioners, producing and reproducing landscape entities at a local level.

### ***Interpretive schemes***

In order to align their policy claims, planning texts draw on interpretive schemes, which act as intersubjective frameworks for building up value consensus. These schemes include "*beliefs, expectations, and rules through which we interpret our personal experience and the social knowledge we receive*" (Bryson & Crosby, 1993, p. 182), creating a condition that allows for certain types of information to be accepted, while disregarding or distorting others. Moreover, interpretative schemes are often ideologically charged (Crosby & Bryson, 2005, p. 123), appealing to specific actors, mobilizing them to build up (growth) coalitions.

For Purmer-Meer, two of these interpretative schemes are important. First, the plan implies that one of the key values of Waterland's landscape is its openness, or rather, its *vacancy*. This feature is, however, acutely threatened by an ongoing process of wealthy commercial developers buying up economically vulnerable farmlands, causing land prizes to soar and disrupting rural society. Being largely dependent for funding on land revenues, small municipalities are incapable of resisting this capital pressure, forcing State and Province to act to restrict development in these fragile areas.

Second, the plan states that the Purmer land-reclamation is rapidly degenerating through inadvertent spatial developments. Creating a comprehensive plan for the Purmer site, makes this creeping urbanization manifest and can rationalize its appearance by drawing on the historical and spatial figure of the Dutch polder.

Underlying Building for Waterland are also two interpretative schemes. Firstly, the plan states that the concept of a 'green' landscape that has to be protected from 'red' developments, in today's peri-urban condition is an outmoded point of view. Instead, it argues, we should assess the value of the Waterland landscape not by its status quo, but by the rich variety of identities, structures and typologies in which it has been cultivated throughout the course of time. This particular quality can be sustained, not by indefinitely 'locking up' the countryside, but by making sure that future developments respect the pace and grain of the historically established landscape figures. In addition, the design claims that current capital pressure on land value is sustained by restricting the amount of possible building sites. By inflating the number of potential locations and creating an excess capacity within the landscape using designerly investigation, speculation profits will decline, providing margin for local municipalities to take up quality management.

### ***Norms of Relevance and Pragmatic Communication***

Regardless of the schemata on which a design draws, all planning – according to Crosby and Bryson – is subject to what can be referred to as 'norms of relevance' and 'norms of pragmatic communication'

(ibid, p. 125). These norms, that rely heavily on the principles of signification that are embedded in the third dimension of power, determine that collaborative communication and creating of meaning can only occur when the arguments that are put forward in the forum are comprehensible, sincere, appropriate to the context, and accurate.

Obvious as that may seem, it is often quite difficult – of not impossible – to establish whether these messages are, in fact, accurate, relevant and genuine. Rather, as a consequence of the powerful effect of interpretive schemes, planning is often the bias-ridden playground of common fallacies, domain assumptions and conventional wisdoms (Van der Weiden, 2002, p. 161).

### ***Modes of Argument***

Apart from the content of the messages being exchanged, the rhetoric and dramaturgy of the forum too, are of great importance for the way in which meaning is communicated and created (Crosby & Bryson, 2005, p. 126).

In the Waterland case we can for instance distinguish two kinds of motives. One – Purmer-Meer – expressing a *sense of urgency*, as the Purmer is rapidly clogging up and Waterland is in danger of being ruined by imminent building activity. The second – Building for Waterland – positing a *need for change*, as conventional rural planning practice has proved utterly inadequate and has led to a general degradation of the countryside.

Following these rationales, the plans select their attitude. Purmer-Meer, by starting with an implicit trade-off between ‘locking up’ the Waterland territory for further development and displacing the building issue to the Purmer, which, thanks to its massive capacity, can easily accommodate any programme projected in the countryside. Furthermore, the polder, as a symbol of rationality, vigour and entrepreneurial spirit, poses a productive metaphor for creating a bold, high-density housing scheme.

For Building for Waterland, its ‘lexicon of change’ is key, inducing a critical attitude towards conventional planning thought and practice, attacking sacred cows and thus redefining its own limits.

### ***Access Rules***

As a final aspect, the outcomes of the process of creating meaning are highly dependant on the accessibility of the forum. Each forum, in this sense, by its design and use establishes its own rules of access, governing which parties effectively have access and which do not.

In the Purmer-Meer study, for instance, the forum primarily exists as a threesome of planners, designers, and policymakers on a professional discourse level. Including the Province, State, civic institutes, urban designers and architects, whereas private and commercial developers, local governments, farmers and landowners are outside of the equation. The LA4Sale plan turns this system partially inside-out, inviting Province, local authorities, small scale real-estate investors and private developers, architects and planning officers to the table, while excluding governmental planning authorities, housing corporations and landowners.

Access rules are thus closely tied to communication capabilities, although access rules can be regarded as a vehicle to endorse, re-establish, or re-define differences in power to make one’s voice heard in a forum setting.

## Concluding remarks

As we have seen in the previous exercise, imposing an institutionalist structuration model on regional development plans in order to analyse their mediating capacity has its benefits. The power framework of Crosby and Bryson, as well as the Giddensian inheritance from which it draws, help us to develop an understanding of how structure and action can interrelate through design and planning texts. This, in turn, opening up a vista to the mobilization of their agency for mediating the co-production of regional development projects. However, before finishing with this promising outlook, I should touch upon some critical closing remarks.

Firstly, there seems to be a considerable gap between the fact that I, on the one hand, have attributed 'mediating' potential to two individual designs within the same planning arena, while at the same time recognizing that these designs, in fact, have produced diametrically opposing outcomes, and neither seems to have succeeded in fully integrating the multitude of claims and interests that rest upon this highly contested Arcadia.

Though I feel that this apparent paradox certainly requires further scrutiny, I would not, however, want to conclude beforehand that the designs – even when regarded from their mediating capacity – have failed. Instead, I tend to agree with Eckstein that it is virtually impossible to project a truly inclusive plan trajectory, as all planning texts essentially have to do with establishing boundaries. Rather than pursuing a single comprehensive strategy, I am therefore inclined to regard design as an instrument to recognize, question and disrupt ongoing development processes.

My second, and final, point has to do with the fact that there is an apparent discrepancy between the institutional capacity that is projected through the design and the organization of the actual planning process in which the design is captured. This problem has to do, I believe, with the structure that underlies the act of designing itself and the authorship of the plan. Planning scholar Seymore Mandelbaum has once suggested that planning texts construct their own audience and authors (1990, p. 351-352). That is, an 'ideal' author and an 'ideal' audience that share a mutual understanding throughout the text, free from the chaos and volatile uncertainty of everyday life. These authors and audiences differ fundamentally from real "geo-historical" (Eckstein, 2003, p. 32) authors and readers that are actually writing and reading, creating, so to say, a world of their own inscribed into the text. This constructed reality – that is at the root of the above-mentioned inconsistency – I feel, is not so much part of the interpretative scheme that is applied, as is it part of the designer's principles of signification that resonate in the plan.

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