



'Capacity to act' as driving force for change in metropolitan landscapes: a search for explanatory concepts

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Abstract

The complex changing context of the metropolitan landscape asks for new approaches in spatial policy that take actual planning practice into account. Dutch government is trying to find a solution through process innovation. The suggested strategy of 'development planning', however, is not really innovative because it is embedded in experiences with older strategies such as interactive policy making and region oriented planning. The paper states that interactive policy making does not really lead to a more realistic approach of problems. Interactive policy-making is, like the rational model of planning, based on a belief that society is malleable. Instead we increasingly become aware that change is more the unintended result of actions of a multiplicity of stakeholders. There is a 'lack' between policy intentions and actual planning practice. As an alternative, policy-makers might find new inspiration in the actions of non governmental actors that organize capacity to implement novel ideas for the future of their landscape. The question is how government can connect to the capacity to act of new initiatives. Therefore, insight is needed into the mechanisms of the 'capacity to act' of stakeholders in rural-urban regions. The paper explores a number of approaches and concepts that may help to analyze the mechanisms of agent's capacities to act. Power, defined as the capacity of agents to achieve outcomes, is identified as the central concept. Central focus is not on 'who decides', but how power is exerted. The paper identifies different ways to study power in relation to different dimensions of change: novel ideas in niches, enabling and restricting behaviour in regimes and gradual social trends and events at the macro level. The paper ends with a conceptual framework that is derived from the exploration of approaches, concepts and theories that can explain 'capacity to act', and concludes with directions for research in the form of research questions.

Introduction

The displacement and alteration of agriculture and appearance of more urban functions in the countryside result in rapid social and physical changes of open space between cities. These changes are indicated as the transformation of the landscape from *space for production* into *space for consumption* (VROM-raad, 2004; RLG, 2004). Changes in agriculture are determined by regional spatial developments as well as by increasing global market competition, high land prices and strict European and national regulations for agriculture, nature and environment. A declining number of agricultural entrepreneurs see possibilities for scaling-up and specialisation, while others sell their farms or switch over to multifunctional agriculture. In densely populated parts of the country, agriculture and dairy farming are disappearing. Instead new functions and actors emerge,

constituting a new social and physical context (see for example Van den Brink et al., 2006). These actors with their everyday activities and actions, contribute to increasing complexity and dynamics in the metropolitan landscape. As we will describe in this paper, spatial changes are said to be influenced more and more by the preferences and actions of citizens and entrepreneurs than by government interventions. In the midst of this changing context of rural-urban regions, practitioners are challenged to safeguard spatial quality. They are supposed to bring creative solutions for multiple land use and for sustainable management of open areas in the new context of *the consumption landscape*. Strategies involve 'region oriented policy', interactive policy making and 'development planning'.

In this paper we will explain why interactive policy strategies until now have not led to satisfactory solutions. We will pose that interactive policy making is in fact a continuation of the rational planning model based on the idea that society is malleable. Interactive policy making has not solved the 'lack' between policy and planning practice. Slow policy procedures are outdated by the dynamics of social practice, while potential innovative ideas out of society are overlooked by the policy system because of its narrow view on social reality. Meanwhile new initiatives of non-state actors emerge in the countryside, partly as a reaction to unwanted meddling of the government and delaying procedures and regulations. These initiatives share a 'capacity to act', which is lacking in spatial policy strategies. Spatial changes might be explained better when we look at the everyday actions of non-governmental actors and their interactions with government, than if we only view government interventions. Possibly, new policy strategies can learn and benefit from the way non-governmental actors try to achieve outcomes. Therefore, we are interested in the question how 'capacity to act' is manifested in the everyday activities of actors in practice. In this paper, we will explore different concepts that may help to define what 'capacity to act' is, and how it can be analysed. We will conclude the paper with a conceptual framework based on these concepts, and end with directions for empirical research.

2 Challenges for Dutch planning

Traditionally Dutch government has tried to preserve open space in with a restrictive building policy. However, as Van der Valk (2002) observes, despite these policy efforts, the western, southern, and central parts of the country are developing into an urban field. Van den Brink et al. (2006) note that among policy makers, researchers and social organizations there is a growing concern regarding the quantity and quality of green areas. One of the problems is the administrative gap at the regional level, which hampers adequate development of rural-urban regions. Municipal policies, sectoral national policies and attempts of the province to fulfill the role of intermediary, come together at the regional level. Although there are a lot of governmental organisations involved, there is nobody who exclusively has the power to decide. That is why this situation is perceived as a gap in regional governance (Van den Brink et al. 2006; Hajer et al. 2006).

Hajer en Zonneveld (2000) argue that the Dutch planning system is not fit to deal with the complex and interwoven problems of scarcity of space in regions. De Haas (2006) identifies a discomfort among planners and public administrators. This discomfort is caused by 1) disappearing of the belief in the malleability of society; 2) a deep gap between planning and the reality of social practice—resulting in spatial developments in which spatial policy had no hand, and 3) disappearance of the ideal of comprehensiveness in spatial planning. According to De Haas the problem with current planning practice is that there is a limited understanding of 'real' spatial developments, planning practice lacks design skills at the structural level, planning lacks decisiveness, and finally, government lacks the capacity to realize plans. This analysis of the problems with current planning practice is confirmed by the report of the Scientific Council for the Government (1998) about the future course of spatial policy.

Dutch national government has acknowledged that other approaches need to be developed to deal with the increasing complexity of spatial problems. This is why the national government has currently moved its focus from designing visions for future development to process innovation in which responsibility is shifted to local and regional governments, and civil society. The attempts to innovate the planning process are known as 'development planning' or 'area development' (Ministerie van et al., 2004). Development planning has become a sort of mantra for administrators in all government tiers. The approach, which is actually a container concept for a diversity of ideas and conceptions, can be seen as a continuation of the experiences with interactive policy-making and region-oriented development. Interactive policy-making has become a new paradigm for spatial planning activities (see Aarts, 2007).

The 'lack' in policy and practice

Development planning re-affirms that dialogue with stakeholders has become a must in current spatial planning processes. Interactive policy making has found a new basis in 'development planning'. However, the experiences with interactive policy making and region oriented policymaking are not all positive. Participatory approaches in region oriented policy are supposed to generate more creative and realistic solutions as well as wide public support. In the ideal situation these intentions would narrow the gap between policy and reality. However, evaluations of interactive policy making and region-oriented policy reveal that outcomes often do not correspond with expectations. Aarts and Leeuwis (2006) state that interactive policymaking can be seen as a response to conceptualizations of steering that reflect great confidence in the malleability of society, and for that reason do not often give the expected results. They identify the following structural problems and dilemmas regarding interactive policymaking.

1. Complex relationships with politics and politicians
2. Complex and time-consuming processes
3. Unimaginative compromises with little support
4. Impossibility to define success
5. Power struggle instead of common adaptation

In planning theory, interactive policy making is known as the communicative turn in planning. Communicative planning, based on Habermas' idea of communicative rationality, has been criticized for its lack of a realistic vision on planning in practice (Hillier, Flyvbjerg, Yiftachel, Tewdwr-Jones and Lauria and Whelan). Communicative planning hampers an understanding of how power shapes planning and should focus more on the analytical question of 'what is actually done' than on the normative 'what should be done' (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). Fainstein (2000) writes about 'the myth' of the ideal speech situation and the unrealistic focus on consensus-building. Moreover, like the rational model, communicative planning lacks a vision on space and place, it lacks an object. And finally, communicative theorists avoid dealing with the classical topic of what to do when open processes produce unjust results. In fact, some argue that the possibility that top-down and bureaucratic modes of decision making can produce desirable outcomes should not be neglected (Aarts and Leeuwis, 2006; Fainstein, 2000). Aarts and Leeuwis (2006) pose that meaningful change hardly ever arises without conflict and power struggles. Power dynamics may not only be negative, but also a positive force for change.

Nearly all critiques of communicative planning refer to an unrealistic view on the social reality of planning practice, in particular with regard to the possibility of consensus building and dialogue that is free from power. Hillier (2003), inspired by Lacan, refers to an illusionary Real in which communicative planning may bring people together generating innovative ideas and wide public support. However, "in reality, actors may see little benefit in behaving 'communicatively rationally' when strategic, instrumental power-plays and manipulation of information could result in more favourable outcomes for themselves" (ibid., 41). Hillier adds that a belief in conflict resolution might be even dangerous and simplistic. There will always be an outside environment that does not agree with the select group of stakeholders that is participating in a planning process. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that participation leads to wide social support. There is always an outside which is unknown, but does constitute counterforces in change. This is what Hillier, following Lacan, calls The Lack. The Lack is the gap between The Real and reality, between policy intentions and planning practice. Consequently, plans or policy expressions are more a 'symbolic expression of incomplete consensus building' than they are realistic visions on the future.

The gap between the illusionary "Real", as constructed by policy-makers, and reality has been described in many other ways. A growing number of authors refer to the unpredictable nature of change and the idea that change is actually the unintended result of multiple intended actions of diverse stakeholders. (Aarts, 2007; Frissen, 2000; Wagemans, 2004). Couclelis (2005: 1355), in this respect, presents an illustrative definition of planning: "Land-use planning is a hopelessly complex human endeavor. It involves actions taken by some to affect the use of land controlled by others, following decisions taken by third parties based on values not shared by all concerned, regarding issues no one fully comprehends, in an attempt to guide events and processes that very likely will not unfold in the time, place, and manner anticipated". Wagemans (2004) emphasizes that government has a limited view on social reality, causing distorted meaning making and manipulation. Government only has eye for that part of social reality that has meaning within the perspective of government. This is illustrated in figure 1. Initiatives of (B) are not part of the perspectives of the government and therefore they are, to the government, irrelevant and meaningless. In policy science, this process is described as selfreferentiality.

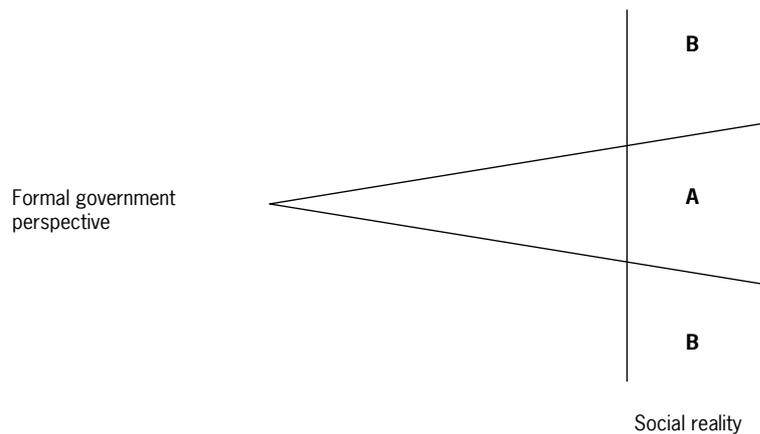


Figure 1. Definition of social reality by government (Wagemans, 2004).

An example of selfreferentiality of government in the context of the rural-urban landscape, can be found in what we call 'the urban-rural divide'. The urban-rural divide is caused by a division of spatial policy over departments for urban planning and housing and departments for rural development, at the national level, but also at the provincial and municipal level. In fact, urban municipalities do not seem to be concerned about the management of the open space surrounding the built environment. Van den Brink et al. (2006) point out that there is a lack of commitment of big municipalities when it comes to management of open spaces. Only rural parties, such as farmer representatives, nature organisations and recreational organisation are involved in committees that develop policies for open space between cities. Urban municipalities tend to see open space as a rural function for agriculture and nature development instead of an urban function for the benefit of the urban population (Van den Brink et al., 2006). Similarly, committees that are concerned with rural planning, only scarcely involve the multiple socio-economical relations with the urban environment. Meanwhile, there is an increasing number of new players in the rural-urban landscape, as agricultural stakeholders make way for nature organisations, water boards, recreation entrepreneurs etc. These new players, often with more 'urban' backgrounds, gain more and more influence thanks to their financial resources. These are, amongst others, reasons why urban and rural governmental organisations should try to become more involved in each others activities. Selfreferentiality, however, is a difficult bridge to cross.

Wagemans (2004) notes that the tragedy of this selfreferentiality in government approaches is that potential innovative forces that are developed within society, are overseen. New initiatives that do not correspond exactly with existing regulations and subsidy arrangements, do not get the chance to further develop ideas or the execute them. For example, the subdivide of regulations and resources over rural and urban policies, complicates governmental support for initiatives in areas carrying both rural and urban characteristics (for example rural-urban fringes). The government has the monopoly over meaning making when it comes to the distribution of resources and rules.

Opportunities of self-organization

New initiatives that emerge in civil society might offer new opportunities to deal with governance problems in spatial planning in another way. Government is struggling to find new ways of coping with complexity. The idea is to decentralize responsibilities to the lowest level possible and to simplify regulations. The danger is, however, that because of selfreferential behaviour, government will develop new authoritative and allocative rules that will complicate more bottom-up proceses. How can we find a way out of this dilemma? Some suggest that government should learn to let go more and leave matters for civil society to solve (e.g. Aarts and During, 2006; Horlings et al.; 2006). This would mean a new step in the liberalization trend of spatial policy. In fact, citizens and entrepreneurs already seem to have growing influence in developments in public space (Aarts and During, 2006). New initiatives in the countryside emerge, which are not only prompted by self-interest of individuals, but often are the result of social engagement of actors around issues of landscape management (Floor and Salverda, 2006; Horlings et al. 2006).

Floor and Salverda (2006) describe a number of examples of these new initiatives. These examples have in common that they are based on the changing context of the countryside that is increasingly determined by preferences of urban dwellers, nature organizations and other interest groups. Farmers are trying to adapt to this new situation. Some move to other parts of the country where sufficient land is available for lower prices. Others try to make a living by welcoming curious and interested citizens to their farm, providing health care in soothing

surroundings, selling regional products, offering camping facilities and so on. These choices are often made with the help of institutionalised organisations such as farmer organizations or environmental cooperatives. Government in most cases is also involved, to ensure that activities conform regulations and to provide access to subsidies and information about procedures, strategies etc. Interestingly, Aarts (2007) has observed that more and more initiatives explicitly avoid the involvement of governments. Government involvement is often perceived as meddling that can only lead to delay. Moreover, initiatives are only supported when they fit into existing policies. That is why new ways are explored to invest without applying for government subsidies. Examples are collective windmill parks, collective meadow-ownership and collective construction of a biogas-plant (Floor and Salverda, 2006).

Conclusion

The examples of selforganization and the new policy trend to decentralize responsibilities refer to new relations between activities of actors and institutionalized practices. How do actors achieve their goals and how do they communicate with established public organizations to realize this? Floor and Salverda (2006) observe that Dutch government is afraid to let go of control and to leave things to private actors, which is an obstacle for self-organization. The intention of the government is to give more room for citizens' activities, but that intention is not (yet) converted into actual actions. This leads to restrictions on initiatives through, for example, existing zoning plans. The former described developments lead to the question what government can learn from self-organizing capacities of groups within civil society to get closer to the ideal of a more facilitative government with a broadened perspective on the potentials of initiatives out of civil society.

We conclude with the proposition that what is lacking in government activities and what is the potential benefit of emerging initiatives in rural-urban regions, is a capacity of agents to achieve their goals, or in other words, a 'capacity of agents to act'. Spatial changes are understood to be more the unintended result of everyday actions of all kinds of actors than the result of government policies. Queries about agents' capacity to act refer to a wish to understand what is going on in actual planning practice. What do people do to realize their preferences? How do they connect to others to get what they want? Which paths are chosen to become connected with governmental actors that have access to required resources? In the next section, we will focus on the mechanisms of agents' capacity to act. Theoretically, these mechanisms can be found in social theory on the relation between agency and structure. We assume that actions are structured through diverse power relations that both enable and restrict. Furthermore, agents do not act alone. They often operate in networks, and as we have seen above, actors increasingly find ways to organize themselves around certain topics, problems and ideals.

3 Analyzing 'capacity to act'

Structure, agency and power

We will reflect on the relation between agents' actions and structure with the help of Giddens' structuration theory (1984). The main idea is that structure both enables and restricts human actions, but at the same time is constituted by human agency. Repeated behaviour of actors becomes a pattern that results in institutionalisation of the actions of actors. "Institutionalisation is the historical process in which initially individual and subjective behaviour (the unity of acting, thinking and feeling) is imitated, and then repeated in time to such an extent that it develops into a collective and objective pattern of behaviour, which in its turn exerts a stimulating and controlling influence on subsequent individual and subjective actions, thoughts and feelings. This creates taken-for-granted routines that may clear the way for the design of new actions, thoughts and feelings" (Zijderveld 2000: 31-32, in De Jonge en Van der Windt, 2007). Institutions are the "sets of 'rules' that guide and constrain the behaviour of individual actors" (Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2006, 26). This implies that actions of agents are structured by forces flowing from the institutional context (which itself is the result of human action). The relation between structure and agency provides insight into our question as to which mechanisms guide 'capacity to act' of stakeholders in rural-urban regions.

Healey (2006a), following Giddens (1984) identifies three key linkages in agency-structure relations.

- flow of material resources
- flow of authoritative resources or regulatory power (informal and formal)
- flow of ideas and frames of reference: "the power to generate new imaginations and shape identities and values

According to Healey, these linkages provide insight into the structuring forces of change. Changes can be identified through “the power mobilized as resources are circulated, regulatory norms activated and concepts brought to life in arguments and justifications” (Healey, 2006a: 303). A similar model is developed by Arts and Leroy (2006), who try to overcome the dualism of structure and agency by describing policy arrangements in terms of discourses (content), actors, rules and resources. Figure 2 indicates the interrelations of these dimensions of policy arrangements.

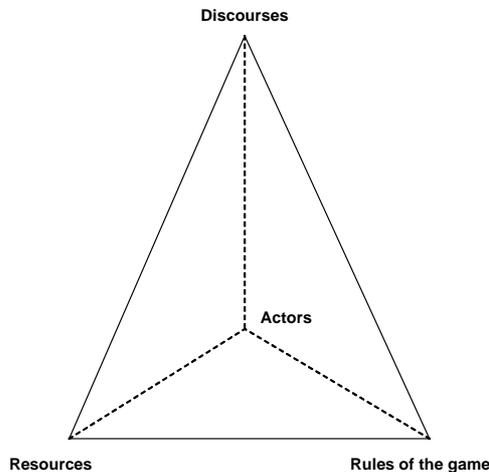


Figure 2. Dimensions of policy arrangements (Liefverink, 2006)

From the above, we can conclude that agency-structure relations can be studied through analysis of the way power is manifested in these relations. Power, according to Giddens (1984) is “the capacity of agents to achieve outcomes in social practices” (in Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2004). Arts and Van Tatenhove (2004) argue that power can be manifested both through discourses and through organizational aspects because policy agents do not only become influential by organizational resources, like money, personnel, tactics, but also by arguments and persuasion. They define power as “the organisational and discursive capacity of agencies, either in competition with one another or jointly, to achieve outcomes in social practices, a capacity which is however co-determined by the structural power of those social institutions in which these agencies are embedded” (ibid., 347).

In Giddens definition of power, power does not only restrict social action, it also enables agents to achieve outcomes. The enabling aspect of power, in that it produces society, is also an important argument in the work of Foucault (see for example Flyvbjerg, 1998). Healey (2006b: 46) stresses that “structuring power over behaviour of agents does not only refer to particular spheres of the world of work and politics. Foucauldian insight learns that power relations inhere in the finegrain of the social relations in which we live. Healey adds that Giddens builds upon the insight that power is manifested in social relations, but contrary to Foucault uses the concept of the active agent. “Marx and Foucault and their many followers present structure as external forces *acting on* individual subjects. Giddens argues instead that structural forces work through the relational webs within which we live, as we both use and constitute the structures which surround us The structuring is therefore *inside ourselves*” (ibid., 46)

Discursive hegemony

Healey (2006a) is not completely satisfied by a framework explaining agency-structure relations with flows of rules, resources and ideas because it does not explain dynamics in policy change. Therefore, she introduces the concept of discourse structuration, following Hajer (1995). Using this concept, she raises the issue of how discourses and practices come to ‘travel’ from one area to another. Following this logic, she argues that governance transformation can be identified “where new discursive frames appear and diffuse to a range of arenas with sufficient effect to shift significantly the way resources are allocated and regulatory tool formulated and used” (Healey, 2006a, 304).

Discourses are defined by Hajer (1993: 45) as ensembles of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena. Discourses frame certain problems and exclude other problems and aspects from public deliberation. “Discourse structuration occurs when a discourse starts to dominate the way a society conceptualizes the world” (2003: 46). Discourse structuration can lead to institutionalization of certain practices and traditional ways of reasoning. Important to note here, especially in the light of the earlier agency-structure

relation, is that discourses are carried, not only by institutions, but in the first place by actors. To that respect, Hajer refers to the existence of discourse coalitions, groups of actors who share a social construct.

Discursive power is generally seen as constitutive of power exerted through more material entities, like money, labour, land and regulations (see for example Hajer, 1993; Healey 2006a; Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 1998). Flyvbjerg (1998) warns that we should not view the universe of discourses as divided into accepted and excluded discourses, into dominant and dominated discourses, or into successful and fallacious discourses. He suggests to reconstruct this multiplicity of discursive elements in a concrete study of power and rationality.

So how can we position spatial changes into these perspectives of discursive power influencing actions of active agents? Van Dam et al. (2005), following Giddens (1984), stress that space is an important part of that social practice. The appearance of the landscape is repeatedly produced in social practices through discourses. Hillier (2003) refers to the '*passionate interpretation of speech acts*' while sorting the multiple values that are present in landscape development. The other way around landscape can structure social practice as well. An industrial park, for example, is not a pleasant location for neighbourhood inhabitants to meet. Landscape and social practice and their interrelation can both be seen as discursive constructs. Van Dam et al. (2005) add that landscapes structures are far more sustainable than social structures, which means that the outlook of the landscape can conceal social change. We can talk a lot about future visions for landscape change, while actual change can be hold off.

Need for a multi-dimensional approach

In the former sections, change was conceptualised as the result of the capacities of actors to achieve outcomes. Capacity to achieve outcomes was defined as power, manifested through discourse and influencing the flow of resources, regulations and ideas. Healey (2006a) tries to give a more complete account of the dynamics of change by distinguishing multiple levels of change. She uses the concept of discourse structuration to explain that transformative initiatives require a 'capacity to travel' from the level of conscious actor inventions (episodes of change) to routinization as accepted practices (existing governance processes) en beyond that to the level of accepted cultural norms and values. The conception of different experiential levels of governance "firstly emphasizes the complexity, the multiplicity of interacting and often counteracting movements promoting and resisting change, the multiple timescales and the likely instability of urban governance transformation processes. Secondly, it stresses that significant transformations would have to affect the level of governance processes at the least." (ibid., 306).

In innovation literature, similar levels are distinguished. The socio-technical systems approach divides niches, regimes and socio-technical landscapes (Elzen et al., 2004). The niche level refers to local practice in which actors develop new ideas, or novelties and new socio-material configurations (products, practices, concepts, organization forms etc). The regime-level acts as a sort of mediator in change. A regime refers to dominant practices, rules and shared assumptions. It is characterized by reconfirmation of existing technologies and strategies and is not inclined to promote change. However, these dominant ways of thinking at the regime-level can be turned if innovations stand ground, evolve into a stable design, institutionalize and are increasingly adopted by others. Then the regime-level can have an enabling role using capital and regulations. In theory on transitions this breakthrough at the regime-level marks the take-off phase of transitions (Rotmans et al., 2001). Actors at the regime-level are more inclined to react positively to ideas and innovations from niches when they have the same direction as gradual social trends. Gradual social trends are part of the third level called 'socio-technical landscape'. At this level political culture, social values, world views, and paradigms are represented. The three levels of change are represented in figure 3. We introduce this new concept of levels of change because in our view niches and regimes can make the abstract actor-structure relation more concrete. Regimes, contrary to structure, involve actors, which makes it easier to analyse the relations between actors acting at the regime level and actors in niches that might come up with creative initiatives for the development of rural-urban regions. Of course, we should not forget that actors in their behaviour constitute structure which in turn provides the ground rules for (inter)actions of stakeholders at both the regime and the niche level.

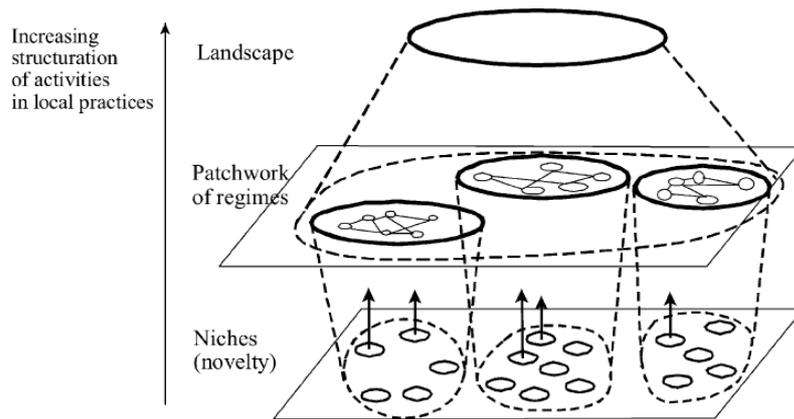


Figure 3. Multiple levels of change (Geels, 2002a, in: Geels 2004: 913)

Stone (1989) is the founding father of another conception of regimes, which in our view adds another interesting insight in the relation between niches and regimes. According to Stone, a regime can be defined as “an informal yet relatively stable group with access to institutional resources that enable it to have a sustained role in making governing decisions” (Stone, 1989: 4, In: Horlings et al., 2006). Regimes in this sense, involve actors that organize capacity to act by blending their resources, skills and purposes into long-term coalitions. That capacity to act is not presupposed, but must be created and maintained. It is not about ‘who governs’ but about how to develop the capacity to govern. “The power struggle concerns, not control and resistance, but gaining and fusing a capacity to act – power to, not power over” (Stone, 1989: 229, in: Horlings et al., 2006). Using the concepts of both urban regime theory and innovation literature, the relation between niches and regimes can be framed into questions about how actors in niches interact with influential actors, that belong to regimes, in order to get their ideas and initiatives implemented. The actor-structure dichotomy can be operationalised in this way into more concrete relations between niches and regimes that both consist of actors that somehow try to organize ‘capacity to act’.

Structuration by ‘the past’

In exploring the driving forces of change in terms of agent’s activities, we have discussed discursive power and the different levels of change we need to take into account, but we have not yet discussed the time-factor in change. This in our view is a crucial factor in describing spatial change, as actor-structure relationships only gain meaning through time.

Healey (2006b: 45) argues that the past is an active force, filled with implicit and explicit principles about how things should be done and who should get what. “Pasts carry power relations from one period to the next”. Following Giddens (1984) she argues that we are linked through social relations with particular histories and geographies which constrain our material and conceptual resources and experiences. “In this sense, our efforts in working out our individual identities and social relations are ‘structured’ by what has gone before. We are embedded within these structures”. Corresponding with this plea for an account of the historical and geographical context in studying driving forces of change, discourse theorists stress the historical contingency of social systems. In their view, agents and systems are social constructs that undergo constant historical and social change as a result of political practices. Therefore, a major task in discourse analysis is to chart and explain such historical and social change in relation to political factors and logics (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Conclusion

‘Capacity to act’ can be analyzed using the concept of power and its workings in the structure-agency dichotomy. Power was defined above as “the capacity to achieve outcomes”, which can both relate to actors achieving goals at the cost of other actors, but also collective action in which power is manifested through collaboration. In Flyvbjerg’s (1998) definition of power, power is everywhere. There are no variables that can be tested, as “power is situated in the fine-grain of society”. However, for analysis’ sake, we have identified a number of dimensions in which the exercise of power can be studied. The most important of these dimensions is the power exercised through discourse. Discourse structures regulation, resources and the formation of actor coalitions (Hajer, 1993, Arts and Leroy, 2006).

We argued that the structure-agency dichotomy is not completely suitable to explain dynamics in social and physical relations. The model lacks an account of time, which is indispensable for a study of change. Moreover, structure and agency can be studied at any level of abstraction, which complicates analysis. This is why we suggest to use the multi-level dimension of change. Within this dimension change is studied viewing interrelations of niches, regimes and social trends and sudden events. Starting point is Healey's view that the micro-practices of everyday life are key sites for the mobilisation of transformative forces. Here, we can make relations between agents more concrete by distinguishing between agents that are functioning within institutionalised systems (regimes) that are characterized by dominant discourses and practices, and agents that develop novel initiatives for the management of the rural-urban landscape. Discourse structuration can be studied with the help of this model.

As for the time aspect of change, we need to find out how the historical and social context influences power plays. The above showed that the historical context is determinative for the construction of social practices and 'meaningful actions'. That is why we will not only look at discursive elements, but we will study them in how they evolved through time. How did networks emerge, which shifts between networks and actor relationships took place, which ideas and ambitions drove these relationships, and finally how do past relationships account for present relations and actions? In Healey's words, we need to discover the relation between 'historical legacy' and 'transformative energy' (2006a).

4 A conceptual model

Transition of rural-urban landscapes in this paper was problematized as being the unintended results of intended actions of both governmental and non-governmental actors. Especially in rural-urban regions, struggle between urban and rural spatial claims are causing rapid change and high complexity. Of course, these claims are not entities in themselves. Ultimately these claims come from agent's preferences and actions. That is why, we chose agent's activities as the key to understanding spatial change. In the next paragraph, the concepts and approaches that have been described in this paper, are combined in a preliminary conceptual model that will guide empirical research. After explaining the conceptual model, the central research question, 'how is capacity to act mobilized in rural-urban regions', will be divided into more specific questions.

Conceptual model

Power was identified as the key principle to examine 'capacity to act', referring to both individual actions and collective actions. In the previous sections, claims were made that the most important aspect of power, defined as the capacity of agents to achieve outcomes, is discursive power. Yet, other forms of power, authoritative and allocative flows of power, should not be ruled out. In our research we could wonder how different forms of power are manifested in planning practice and how they influenced actions of actors. Like Arts and Van Tatenhove (2004) and Healey (2006a) we assume that there are different dimensions of power that are interdependent.

These dimensions of power can be connected to the mutual relations between actions and structure. Structure was defined as the boundaries and conditions that influence agent's activities. They do not hold actors. That is why, although analytically it would be convenient to perceive regimes as the structure determining actions of agents, regimes are not the same as structure. Regimes do consist of actors. The reason why regimes are chosen as a concept for further study is that regimes are a specific type of agency-structure relations. Regimes carry dominant thinking patterns that are so powerful that all actions seem to re-affirm their existence. Regimes are the source of powerful authoritative and allocative rules and thereby restrict the possibilities of self-organized groups of agents that like regimes strive for achievement of their goals. Interestingly, as Stone (2005) and Mossberger and Stoker (2001) show, regimes are not the same as government. Regimes are groups of influential actors, which can be both private and public actors, that determine decision-making to a large extent. They are not bounded to election periods like governments often are, but exist longer. We see them as coalitions of actors that through their past relations have built a relationship of trust and security and that are highly interdependent for resources (capital, knowledge, rules). They are the people and organizations that are always invited into formal and informal arenas and processes, thereby reproducing ways of thinking and re-affirming their influence.

For our research, it would be interesting to see how episodic power of self-organized initiatives challenges these structural forces. Network power or intransitive power (Innes and Booher 2002; Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2004), can be the determinative factor in cases where these initiatives in practice are adopted and supported by regimes. Questions as to how connections are made between initiatives in niches and regimes will provide insight into how 'capacity to act' and 'achieving outcomes' is organized. This is represented in figure 4. As has been argued

previously, we need to take into account the discursive aspects of the regional and historical context in concrete casestudies.

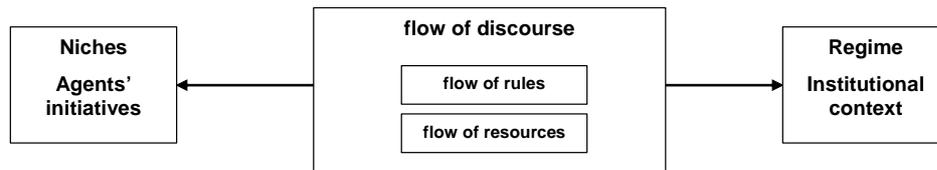


Figure 4. Conceptual model for studying 'capacity to act' of agents in rural-urban regions

Research questions

Below we will propose concrete questions for further research.

- How did (to be selected) rural-urban landscapes change over a period of about 20-30 years, and how does this relate to policy intentions and to the (inter)actions of government, citizens and market? A period of 20-30 years is usually seen as the adequate period of time to observe long term trends in transitions (see for example Rotmans, 2001).
- Which initiatives or niches can be indicated in the field of rural-urban regional development? What are their characteristics? What factors links them (interdependency with regard to resources, shared ideals and values, shared problems)? How did they come into being through past relations and events?
- Which coalitions or practices can be identified as regime or regimes? How can their institutionalized state of being be explained? Which are the dominant thinking patterns that guide their actions? How do they exercise discursive power?
- How do active agents that try to bring about change interact with the regime? How do they communicate (if they do) formally and informally? Which paths are followed to achieve outcomes (flows of power)?

To find out about the (inter)actions of agents and how they are restricted by structuring forces, such as power in its multiple forms and dimensions, we will use the following methods in three geographically delimited case-studies:

- At a regional level, evaluate the extent to which spatial changes can be traced back to policy intentions that have themselves changed through time. Discover patterns that may lead to events in which government actions were crossed by initiatives of other stakeholders or 'white spots' where government did not act.
- Through network analysis identifying initiatives or niches and the actors involved, looking at how relationships have grown throughout history (20-30 years, depending on interrelated events)
- Identifying story-lines of the involved (groups of) actors and how these structured action, through discourse analysis based on studying media, policy documents, reports of meetings (councils, administration, information meetings, etc.) and interviews with key-actors.
- Indicating how actors tried to connect to government, distinguishing formal and informal paths of interaction, thereby finding out how they tried to exert influence.

In the paper we noted that novel ideas concerning the development of rural-urban regions of ideas are often hampered by the administrative divide of urban and rural planning. Because of this urban-rural divide, administrators concerned with rural planning have difficulties understanding urban policies and (allocative) regulations and vice versa. Hypothetically, the urban-rural divide can be seen as one of the institutional conditions that hamper meaningful action of actors in niches. It can be seen as authoritative power hindering bottom-up initiatives. Another hypothesis would be that urban-rural divide in policy administration is especially complicating initiatives in areas where the struggle between urban and rural claims is most fierce. For the empirical analysis, this will mean that we will select cases in densely populated parts of the Netherlands, where open space is threatened by ongoing urbanization and changes in agricultural land use.

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