

*Draft*

## **Policy Network Theory: an Ex Post Planning Evaluation Tool?**

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### **1. Introduction**

Academic planning literature shows in recent decades a growing awareness of the complexity of decision-making processes (e.g. see Khakee, 2001, De Roo, 2003). This complexity is often resembled with the metaphor of a network (Albrechts and Mandelbaum, 2005). Bureaucrats, politicians, and interest group representatives usually discuss public problems and devise means for their solution. They have common interests that lead them to co-operate, voluntarily or forced. Over time these interactions and exchanges form networks of interrelationships. The network concept has often been promoted by policy scientists to better understand this complexity (Jordan, 1990; Kickert et al., 1997; Thatcher, 1997; Klijn and Koppejan, 2000; Teisman, 2000).

The central focus of *Policy Network Theory* (PNT) is on decision-making. It provides a framework for analysing policy-making processes in relation to the role of actors and their interactions. How fruitful is this theory for use as an ex post evaluation tool in urban planning?

This paper aims to investigate the usefulness of policy-network theory in an urban planning context, viz. an analysis of the planning history of the city of Groningen in the northern Netherlands. Groningen has been in the Netherlands in the past a frontrunner in many urban planning innovations, such as the introduction of a traffic circulation plan, urban bicycle routes, etc. (Tsubohara & Voogd, 2004). It will be examined in this paper if PNT is a proper framework for analysing such planning processes.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, attention is paid to the main characteristics of PNT. In addition, an empirical illustration is given of this theory applied to inner city planning processes in Groningen. This paper is finished with a critical examination of PNT for its use in planning evaluation.

### **2. Policy Network Theory**

#### *2.1 Principal features*

A network exists if because of dependencies actors can not escape from each other, can obtain a benefit or have another interest in enter into a coalition with other actors. There are different conceptions of policy networks (e.g. see Borzel, 1998; John, 2004). For instance, important is the distinction between qualitative, interpretative networks versus

formal networks whereby interrelations are quantified. The latter offer possibilities for 'hard', i.e. numerical analysis (e.g. see Stokman and Zeggelink, 1996). This paper will not focus on formal networks, but on qualitative networks, since quantification of urban policy networks is very difficult due to, among others, the lack of adequate data and the stochastic nature of such data.

Main characteristics of a policy network are:

1. They deal with a configuration of actors who primary because of mutual dependencies and secondary because of an (assumed) advantage or an interest or other any other concern are relating to each other;
2. This is expressed in decision-making processes that are build upon numerous 'smaller' decision-making processes with as basic feature that they can not be known in advance;
3. Actors have means that are unequally distributed among them; these means can be very varied, i.e. tangible means like money or ownership of ground or real estate, but also intangible means like knowledge and experience, competencies and tasks;
4. Next to the means of actors, decision-making is affected by external influencing rules (e.g. higher government policy) and network rules (e.g. habits defined by past behaviour);
5. Actors take different positions during decision-making and this also affects the decisions;
6. If actors have sustainable relationships, specific network rules may exist that provide a network certain stability, but this is not a necessity;

Previous characteristics are interrelated and result in complex decision-making including a series of decisions taken by various actors involved.

## 2.2 The analytical framework

How may the analytical framework of PNT look like? Decision-making in a complex network is influenced by a number of conditions as outlined in Figure 1.

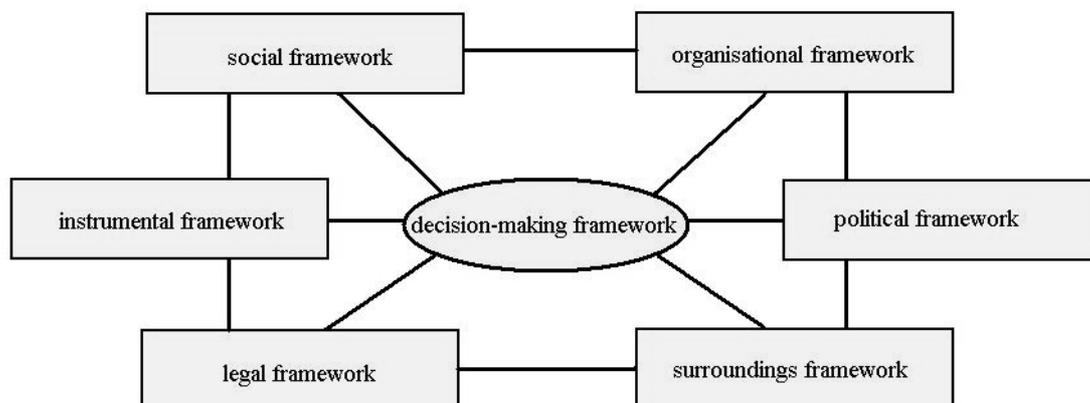


Figure 1. Conditions influencing a complex policy network (cf. Kräwinkel, 1997).

- **Social framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Interest organisations (viz. their goals, demands, initiatives)
- Public support (media);
- Availability of means.

- **Organisational framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Actors with a direct, own or professional concern (e.g. housing corporations, architects);
- Goals and objectives of these actors;
- Distribution of means over these actors.

- **Instrumental framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Formal policy instruments (e.g. tasks and competences);
- Distribution of means, including tasks, competences and finances.

- **Legal framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Court of law;
- Legal rules;
- Legal protection.

- **Surroundings framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Economic situation;
- Social-cultural situation;
- Physical situation;
- Spatial situation;
- Housing situation;
- Demographic situation;
- Technological situation.

- **Political framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Representatives of the people;
- Political parties;
- Goals and priorities
- Availability of necessary means

- **Decision-making framework**

Influencing factors in this framework are:

- Participating actors
- Position and roles of actors;
- Interactions between actors.

### 2.3 *About decision-making*

Teisman (2000) distinguishes three conceptual models of decision-making: the phase model, the stream model and the rounds model. Each model is based on specific

assumptions about what decision making is and how it should be analyzed. The phase model focuses on successive and distinctive stages in a process, i.e. defining a problem, searching for, choosing and implementing solutions. The stream model emphasizes concurrent streams of participants, problems and solutions, defining decision making as the connection between these streams. The rounds model combines elements of the other two models, in assuming that several actors introduce combinations of problems and solutions, and create progress through interaction. Each model generates specific insights, the phase model concentrates on decisions taken by a focal actor; the stream model focuses on the coincidental links between problems, solutions and actors; and the rounds model on the interaction between actors.

#### 2.4 About actors

PNT is about actors and their interrelationships. Urban development processes are characterized by the presence of many actors. By an ‘actor’ is meant a person, group or organization with common interests and/or objectives. An actor becomes a stakeholder if he/she/it may gain or lose from decisions taken in such processes. According to Teisman (1992, 55) actors may take different positions in a policy network: viz. interaction, incentive and intervention positions (see also Ike et al., 2004):

- An *interaction position* is taken if actors try to realize their own objectives by co-operating with other actors who have powers to influence a process. An example is the co-operation between project developers and landowners.
- An *incentive position* is taken by actors who are not directly involved in the process, but who try to influence other participating actors by providing indirect incentives. An example is a higher public authority that stimulates certain policies by providing subsidies.
- An *intervention position* is taken by actors who have the means and power to change a course of action. Examples are an investor whose money is needed to realize a project or the owner of real estate who does not wish to sell his property and hence blocks new development.

#### 2.5 About relationships

Scharpf (1978) has performed a classic study about relations between actors. Well known is his definition of mutual dependencies: see Figure 2.

| <i>B's dependency of A</i> | <i>A's dependency of B</i> |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
|                            | <b>high</b>                | <b>low</b>           |
| <b>high</b>                | Mutual dependent           | Unilateral dependent |
| <b>low</b>                 | Unilateral dependent       | Mutual independent   |

Figure 2. Types of relations between actors (source: Scharpf, 1978, 356)

In collaboration processes between actors the presence of trust is an important variable for arriving at consensus (Woltjer, 2000). For instance, if an urban government does not have any trust in collaboration with a particular project developer, the government may choose not to collaborate at all with this actor and to open negotiations with other developers. In situations of mutual dependencies trust is an important factor. Urban networks that are characterized by mutual dependencies can find stability in searching for

consensus based on trust (Klijn, 2002). Some refer to discourse coalitions where language and debate characterize the relationships between the actors (Hajer 1993, 1997).

### 3. An empirical illustration

How workable is PNT for an analysis of the planning history of the city of Groningen in the northern Netherlands? This section will at first outline the decision making process of the Groningen's traffic circulation plan, and secondly analyse the process based on PNT.

#### 3.1 Decision making process

The city of Groningen (population 180,747 in January 2005) introduced the traffic circulation plan (*Verkeerscirculatieplan*, VCP) in September 1977. In order to keep out through traffic, this plan divided the inner city into four sectors by enforcing one-way traffic restrictions overall (Figure 3). Drivers had to go out to a ring road surrounding the inner-city to move from one sector to another. As a result, car traffic was cut by half, and the plan has created the possibility for urban design for pedestrians (not least as consumers), although it was criticised as "devastating", "catastrophic", or "fatal" by business organisations (Groningen Entrepreneur Federation (GOF), Chamber of Commerce (KvK) and Business Circle Grote Markt) before its introduction.

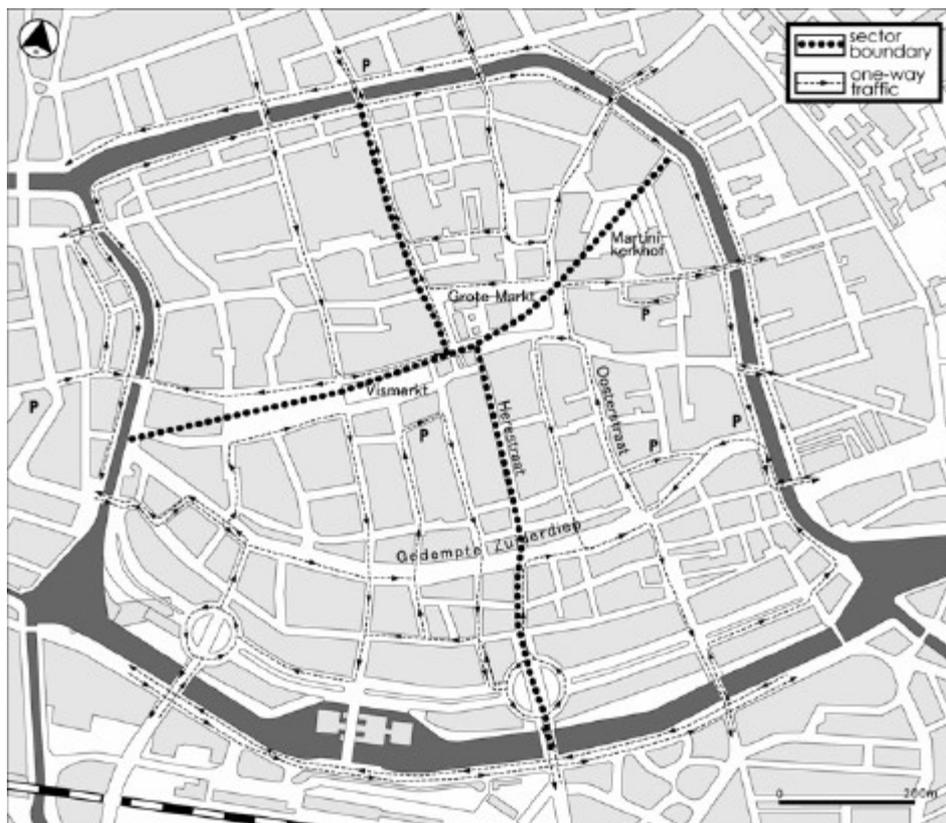


Figure 3. Traffic circulation plan of Groningen

One of the reasons for such huge criticism, which even now can be heard vividly, lies in the decision-making process. The first interim report was published in February 1975, the second report, the VCP Part II, in May, and the final plan was not published but revealed in July. Until this moment, there was literally no opportunity for the public to participate. This plan tried to expand the pedestrian area enormously. Tremendous opposition emerged from among business and commercial circles, and the municipality modified it in just "14 days". Again there was no participation. The result was the "sector-plan". The first and last "information evenings" were held for business people on September 5th, and for residents the next day. The plan was proposed to the municipal council on September 15th, and decided on 17th.

This "public" process of the VCP has already been described in detail by Tsubohara (2003). To illustrate the complexity of this process the attention in this paper will be focussed on the "intra party" decision-making process within the labour party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) of Groningen. The PvdA has been the biggest party in Groningen since its establishment after the World War II, and as a result of the local election in May 1974, it boasted the most council seats in history, 18 out of 39 in total, when the VCP was decided. At this election, it obtained a dominating 40.4% of the vote. The responsible *wethouder* (political executive) for urban planning was Max van den Berg, who was placed in the top position in the candidate list of the local PvdA.

The young new left activists of the PvdA, who emerged in the middle of the 1960s, advocated thorough "democratisation" of their own party as well as society as a whole. In order to realise this, according to the new left, rank-and-file party members had to be able to participate in party-policy making directly, while the public had to be able to participate in public decision-making process. The new left of Groningen had mainly three media or actors in mind to facilitate this intra-party participation. That is, "district teams" (*wijkteams*), "working groups" (*werkgroepen*) and "general member meetings" (*ledenvergaderingen*). Through these media, every party member participates substantially in political discussion, and creates party policy. This was the socialist democratic ideal for them. The following will examine one by one how these worked in the planning of the VCP.

### 3.1.1 District team

Just after the local election in June 1970, which sent many young new left into the municipal council, each PvdA councillor was allocated to one or two districts as "district councillor". The local party bulletin, "Onze Binding" of September 1970 publicised which councillors were responsible for which districts. The local party executive members were also allocated to districts.

The "district team council" (DTC) was established in October 1972 in order to facilitate communication not only between party leaders and district teams, but also between district teams each other. This was to be held, in principle, monthly, and a few councillors, a few executive members and representatives from all the district teams were to attend and discuss or exchange information. Since December 1973, the "description letter" had been sent to each district team a week before the DTC meeting. This letter

included the agenda for the next DTC meeting, minutes of the last DTC meeting, notices and information from the party group and executive, and so on.

Despite the "difficult start", district teams were organised in all but one district by 1972. There were 15 teams in 1973. The number of participants in total had increased from "more than sixty people" in 1972 to about 180 in 1976.

Many district teams were rather autonomously engaged in not only various typical neighbourhood problems, such as the lack of playgrounds or traffic safety, but also city-wide projects and plans, like the Ring Road or the Policy Plan. Furthermore, in some cases, they cooperated with each other or even with other neighbourhood groups.

However, for district teams to be active is one thing, for them to participate in party policy making is another. They could not necessarily systematically participate in party policy making, particularly in the planning of the VCP.

At the DTC, the VCP was for the first time talked about on May 21st, 1975. A description letter was as usual sent to each district team in advance. However, the VCP is not on the agenda in this letter, although the bus plan ("ring line") and "Bicycle Plan" are separately listed as the subject of discussion. *Wethouder* Van den Berg attended this DTC meeting, while the district team Centrum, whose area was to be divided into four sectors in the VCP, did not attend. The VCP was not discussed, but only its schedule was given as information. Instead, the ring line and Bicycle Plan were widely discussed.

The description letter, which was issued for the DTC on June 18th, listed the VCP as one of agendas. However, according to the explanation of this topic, the VCP was not scheduled to be discussed at the DTC, nor did the explanation encourage discussion and preparation in advance. This was in contrast to the Bicycle Plan, for which the explanation encourages to "try to work out these things for your own district".

While the VCP was not discussed at the DTC, Part III was revealed by the police on July 26th, by the local paper, *Gezinsbode*, on August 4th, modified for "14 days", and the B&W (*college van burgemeester en wethouder*, political executive office) decided upon this modified plan on August 22nd. This plan was decided by the general member meeting of the PvdA on August 26th, and the VCP re-emerged in the description letter, which was intended for the DTC on September 9th. Now that the general member meeting accepted this plan, the next DTC meeting was not any more intended to be the place to discuss its content. In the explanation of the VCP, after pronouncing that the general meeting supported the VCP, the letter points out the fact that "the general member meeting also decided that the party would go to the public with this plan". So, "we will have to tell the public why our party has supported this plan". For the coming municipal council meeting, where the VCP would be proposed, "we will have to consider at the district team council meeting to put a brochure into the post box in the greater part of the city." The letter closes the explanation by saying, "For this the help from district teams is necessary".

District teams were placed utterly in the same circumstances as the public and other organisations in terms of direct participation in the planning process of the VCP. They were just mobilised to propagate the plan after the decision had been made.

### 3.1.2 Working group

The expected functions of the working groups were either to respond to the requests for advice from the party group or to examine various problems on their own initiative. The

Binding of September 1971 proposed nine working groups in total, each of which had its own research topics, and called for participation by party members. For the working group "Urban Development, Public Housing; Traffic, Public Transport", it listed the following topics as examples:

Roads and green space. The car out of the inner city? City busses – where and how expensive? The next new neighbourhood. Housing and working separated? Old neighbourhoods destroyed? How can we realise affordable housing?

This working group was very quick to start. The Binding of November 1971 reported that "the working groups Urban Development etc. and Culture have already long existed, and have now grown to big organs". The party annual report 1971/72 also reported that "The working groups Culture and Urban Planning held substantially attended meetings regularly." The following is from the annual report 1974/75:

Urban Planning/ This working group consisted of 21 members. The subjects were, among others, bus line net, taxi plan, the Interim Report, bicycle plan.

For the Bicycle Plan, this working group organised the subgroup Bicycle. Asking for opinions from district teams, this subgroup published a report with 17 pages, Towards Better Bicycle Facilities in Groningen, in June 1975. It proposes the "main bicycle routes", saying, "bicycle routes of high quality have to be made between neighbourhoods, the inner city, employment centres and other objects attracting traffic". This working group seems to have been engaged in research actively and produced well-founded proposals.

However, the working group Urban Planning was not integrated systematically into the planning process of the VCP. Concerning the relationship of the working group with the VCP, the group itself explains in the description letter of June 1975 as follows:

Self-evidently the working group Urban Planning follows closely the development (of the VCP, by the author). The subgroup Bicycle tries to evaluate the proposed measures and routes for bicycle traffic, among others with the help of comments from district teams, and, if necessary, propose changes. Concerning public transport, the working group already agreed on what should be changed in the VCP.

The working group indeed examined the VCP in terms of public transport and bicycles, and submitted opinions, particularly based on the Bicycle Plan for the latter. However, it was not officially consulted by party leaders about the VCP itself.

### *3.1.3 General member meeting*

The new left of Groningen naturally tried to "democratise" also the highest party organ, the general member meeting (GMM). Until the middle of the 1960s, the GMM was held only once a year and 50 to 60 members attended. Political matters were hardly discussed, and it had almost become a ceremonial gathering. The goal of the new left was to change the GMM into a place where many more party members attended and substantially discussed politics. For this, the executive let party members know the schedule of the GMM earlier, tried to devote as much time as possible to political discussion at the GMM, keeping organisational matters to a minimum, and so on.

Concerning the frequency, the GMM had been consistently held about ten times a year since 1972. On the other hands, the attendance at the GMM did not increase so much as party leaders expected. The annual report 1972/73 states that the average number of

participants was 50 to 70, which were 20 to 30 less than the previous year. The report year 1974/75 saw on average about 150 participants, but the next year again experienced a decrease. In addition, political matters, including those at the municipal level, had been indeed raised on the agenda since the end of the 1960s. However, the GMM had not still gone so far as to become a forum where rank-and-file party members discussed politics substantially and created party policy. For example, the annual report 1972/73 reports that the intention of the executive "to engage the general member meeting more intensively in discussion on important political problems" was "practically not realised at all".

The VCP was on the agenda of the GMM on August 26th, 1975. In advance of this GMM, the Binding of August included the explanation of the VCP, covering six pages by the executive secretary and a councillor. They at first admit the lack of public participation, saying, "We regret that it was not possible to undertake participation for this plan." After citing the objectives of the VCP, they turn to the explanation of the plan's content. It drops a hint of the modified plan, "sector-plan", but it is impossible to understand the content of the plan in detail from this description, particularly as no map of the plan was included. However, in the conclusion "The plan and the party", they proclaim clearly, without waiting for the discussion at the GMM, that they support the VCP, saying, "The undersigned are now already willing to say that they experience this traffic circulation plan as positive." or "We want to say out loud that we can clearly recognise the party standpoints in this plan." At the GMM on 26th, the executive submitted a "draft-motion" for the VCP. According to this motion, the GMM supports the VCP, although it wants to put some "remarks". However, the B&W decided the sector-plan on 22nd, and the local newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* published it, with a plan map, on 25th, that is a day before the GMM. As a matter of course, the executive and party group were criticised by attendant party members for "having paid too little attention to good information". After all, the GMM approved this motion, it supported the VCP, and it also decided, as earlier mentioned, that party members should take action for the VCP. The GMM did not, or could not, discuss the VCP itself, and, as a result, did not ask for any modification of it.

#### *3.1.4 Influence on party policy making*

The three actors, that is district teams, working groups and general member meetings, all of which were intended to facilitate the intra-party democracy, did not function as media in which rank-and-file members participated directly in party-policy making. As a result, the party members could not participate directly in planning the VCP at all. However, new left party leaders acted within frameworks which party members had created, and rules were introduced for leaders to take responsibility in terms of these frameworks. In addition, there was room for the public as a whole to influence the party policy through these frameworks. Therefore, the opinions of the public as well as party members were reflected indirectly in the VCP.

##### *3.1.4.1 Election programme*

Until the 1970s, the Groningen PvdA, like other local PvdA and parties, did not make its own local election programmes. There were only nationwide party programmes. It was accepted or natural for the party to make municipal, not party, policies after the election,

joining in the so-called "*afspiegelingscollege*" in which parties from left to right had seats, and compromising with each other. Or, policy making was rather the privilege of bureaucrats. The new left tried to break through this situation by emphasizing the difference from other parties, under the slogan, "polarisation". As the foundation for this strategy, they introduced the election programme peculiar to the city.

For the election in 1974, the party executive commissioned a working group to draft the election programme. The district teams were asked for opinions and examined the draft and submitted opinions. The election programme was decided at the GMM on January 15th, 1974. This Municipal Programme 74-78 included twelve chapters, like "urban planning and housing", "regional cooperation", "economic development", and was sold at 1 guilder. The two sections "traffic" and "public transport" within the chapter "urban planning and housing" explain the party traffic policy. As it is shown below in the quotation from the section "traffic", the party clearly chooses particular traffic modes:

It must be continued to keep out through traffic in the inner city and residential areas. Public transport and bicycles will acquire a clearly privileged position. (...) Facilities for the car will be limited to those of the highest necessity. Existing short cuts will be closed. Concerning those plans that are not yet implemented, it will have to be examined whether the above principles were well considered.

As a result of campaigning with this election programme, the party won an historical victory by going from 13 to 18 seats.

After the election, the new so-called "*programcollege*", which consisted of only left wing parties, set out to draft the first comprehensive municipal plan, the Integrated Policy Plan 1975-1979. Each district team examined the draft of this plan and submitted opinions. The final draft, which took into account these opinions, was approved at the GMM on November 28th, 1974, with about 200 participants, and the municipal council decided this in December. The following is the quotation from "3.7.4. Traffic":

The continuously increasing mobility requires intervening in traffic choice through facilitating the use of bicycles and mopeds and of public transport. The relationship between environment and traffic encourages the exclusion of through traffic out of the inner city and the creation of traffic calming areas in residential neighbourhoods. (...) The facilities for the car have to be restricted to those of the highest necessity. (...) The facilities for bicycles, pedestrians and public transport (...) have priority.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, programmes or plans have been introduced, which worked as frameworks within which party leaders made each policy, and opinions of party members were reflected in those frameworks. The public as a whole were not involved in making election programmes, but, of course, in a representative democracy opportunities were guaranteed to express their approval or disapproval for them at the elections. The election programme Municipal Programme 1974-1978 obviously chose public transport, bicycles and pedestrians, and obviously rejected the increase of car use. It seems to be well-founded to say that 40%, or more than 50% if votes for other left parties included, of voters supported this policy.

#### *3.1.4.2 Informal framework*

Only election programmes or integrated plans might be not enough to direct what PvdA party leaders do. As frameworks for party leaders, an "informal framework", which was created through daily dedicated activities by party members, must have been not less substantial than the officially published documents. District teams were engaged in neighbourhood problems in their own districts, and sent to party leaders various demands.

Among those demands, there were many which were impractical or not well considered, like placing speed bumps on the trunk road. On the other hand, we can recognise radical proposals in the Bicycle Plan by the working group Urban Planning, such as adjusting the phasing of traffic signals to bicycles. Indeed, it was impossible to integrate these demands or proposals as they were into the party policy. However, these voices of party members could accumulatively contribute to creating a framework for party leaders, for example as a message that party members accept or even want drastic measures to restrain car use.

In addition, these voices did not reflect necessarily only the opinions of PvdA members. Many district teams cooperated with other neighbourhood groups, and there were even some district team members who were more active in these neighbourhood groups. The district teams functioned as an "important link between the electorate and the elected", and, as a result, the opinions of the public as a whole influenced, at least to a certain extent, an informal framework.

The inquiry into district teams, whose result was reported in the description letter of February 1976, revealed the fact that "councillors and executive members have visited the meetings of district teams very faithfully. No district team has complaints in this regard.". As an institution for communication, there was the DTC. Councillors and executive members, at least a few of them, always attended the DTC meetings, and members of the working group Urban Planning themselves attended this and explained its Bicycle Plan.

The opportunities were indeed limited to the party members to participate directly in party policy making. However, they participated or took the initiative in creating both formal and informal frameworks, and could take into account the public opinions in this process.

#### *3.1.4.3 Party discipline*

In addition, procedures or rules had been introduced in the 1970s to make sure that party leaders respected these frameworks. All the official standpoints of the Groningen PvdA had to be decided by the GMM. The executive and party group were obliged to submit annual reports to the GMM. Furthermore, party members got the chance to recall executive members and councillors. As pointed out, the GMM had not become a place for substantial discussion. At GMMs dealing with important matters, like annual reports, 100 or sometimes more than 200 party members attended. Judging from this fact the GMM must have played an important role in forcing party leaders to respect frameworks created by party members.

Moreover, at the election in 1974, it was made a prerequisite to defend frameworks as a united party group if he or she wanted to be placed in the candidate list. The following is the "qualitative advice" for the candidates, which was approved by the GMM on October 19th, 1973:

2. The (candidate) members of the party group defend the election programme which was approved by the division general member meeting of the PvdA, and are willing to test their policy continuously against it and against the decisions of the general member meeting.
3. The members of the party group take it upon themselves to make contact frequently and exchange information actively with members and parts of the organisation of the party, such as district teams, working groups, district team council and general member meeting.  
(...)
5. The members of the party group must be willing to:

(...)

- dedicate themselves in a good team spirit for full four years. If this is no longer possible, this must be discussed in the party group, in which the continuation of the councillorship must be tested against the opinion of the party group.

Thanks to these procedures or rules, frameworks were not nominal, but functioned substantially. In addition, the new left got back the policy making from the bureaucrats, appealing for "politicisation", and were themselves engaged in policy making energetically. Even after the 1974 victory, the PvdA could not dominate alone the majority of the council. However, since 1972, they had chosen not the *afspiegelingscollege* but *programcollege*, and tried to realise their own policy, avoiding compromise as much as possible. For the *wethouders*, who were sent in the B&W by the party group, their responsibility to the party group was clearly stipulated in the decision by the GMM on September 14th, 1972 as follows:

The wethouders of the PvdA are obliged to refer to these statements of the party group in their political attitudes, and make an effort to realise these in the college van B&W and in the council.

They are responsible to the party group for this. If a wethouder deviates from the views of the party group in matters that are essential for the party group, then he finds himself in conflict with the party group, and the party group can call him to account for this.

Party members were engaged in making not each policy but frameworks, and party leaders pursued each policy within these frameworks. In addition, these frameworks reflected public opinion.

Neither the public nor party members had any opportunities to participate directly in planning the VCP. However, again, this VCP was formulated within the formal and informal frameworks created by party members together with the public, and therefore reflected the opinions of the public as well as party members indirectly.

### 3.2 Application of PNT

The decision making process of the VCP, which is partially outlined above, is translated into Figure 4 and 5 based on PNT. Figure 4 represents an overview of the actors involved.

| Actors   | Goals/Objectives                                       | Means  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Social framework</b>  |  |  |
| business and commercial organisations:<br>-Groningen Entrepreneur Federation (GOF)<br>-Chamber of Commerce (KvK)<br>-Business Circle Grote Markt | promote interests of members, improve economic climate | mobilize members, propose alternatives           |
| Citizens' organisation Working Group Inner City  | inner city for pedestrians and bicycles                | investigation, direct action                     |
| Neighbourhood organisations  | improve neighbourhoods                                 | investigation, direct action                     |
| Local newspapers:<br>-Nieuwsblad van het Noorden<br>-Groninger Gezinsbode  | maximise circulation                                   | provide local news and background information    |
| <b>Organisational framework</b>  |  |  |
| Ministry of Traffic and Transportation   | improve traffic circulation, influencing modal split   | reports and regulations, investment subsidies.   |
| Police   | public safety and maintaining order                    | police power, membership in municipal committees |
| Central Institute for Medium and Small Business (CIMK)   | investigation  | commissioned research                            |
| Royal Association of Entrepreneurs (KVO)   | promotion of entrepreneurial interests                 | communication to members and press               |
| Trade Unions (NVV)   | protection of employment                               | political pressure                               |
| <b>Legal framework</b>   |  |  |
| Planning law   | balancing spatial interests                            | plans and procedures                             |
| Traffic law  | traffic safety, smooth traffic                         | plans and procedures                             |
| National Regulations   | facilitate national goals                              | subsidies  |

**Surroundings framework**

|                                    |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Spatial situation                  | facilitate the meeting function of inner city area  | planning and implementation   |
| Cultural situation                 | Groningen as regional capital always pays much attention to economic goals.   | planning and implementation   |
| Demographic situation              | As a university city the majority of population is less than 35 years. This results in an innovative, cultural and political climate. | Young politicians with innovative ideas and intentions                  |
| <b>Political framework</b>         |   |   |
| local political parties, notably:  |   |   |
| -Labour Party (PvdA)               | promoting social democratic policies  | politicisation, polarisation election programs, integrated policy plans |
| --new left party leaders           | democratisation   | “Onze Binding”,   |
| --party group                      | advocate desires of party members   | intra-party procedures and rules  |
| --party executive                  | party management  |   |
| --rank and file party members      | promoting social democracy  | vote at elections, help campaigns                                       |
| --district teams                   | facilitate intra-party participation  | district team council   |
| --working groups                   |   | description letter  |
| --general member meeting           |   |   |
| -Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) | Promoting middle class interests  |   |
| -Conservative Party (VVD)          | Promoting entrepreneurial interests   |   |
| -Liberal Democrats (D66)           | Promoting participation   |   |
| -Communist Party (CPN)             | Promoting lower class interests   |   |

|                            |   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| municipal council          | representative democracy                | decision making                         |
| political executives (B&W) | daily administration and implementation | support from majority municipal council |

Figure 4. Main actors in the VCP process

| Actors   | Network position             | Degree of influence |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------|
| business and commercial organisations  | Interaction                  | Low                 |
| Citizens' organisation<br>Working Group Inner City   | Interaction                  | Low                 |
| neighbourhood organisations  | Interaction                  | Low                 |
| local newspapers<br>-Nieuwsblad van het Noorden<br>-Groninger Gezinsbode   | Incentive                    | High                |
| Ministry of Traffic and Transportation   | Incentive and intervention   | High                |
| Police   | Incentive                    | Modest              |
| Central Institute for Medium and Small Business (CIMK)   | Interaction                  | Low                 |
| Royal Association of Entrepreneurs (KVO)   | Interaction                  | Low                 |
| Trade Unions (NVV)   | Interaction                  | Low                 |
| local political parties, notably:<br>-Labour Party (PvdA)<br>--new left party leaders<br>--party group<br>--party executive<br>--rank and file party members | Intervention<br>Intervention | High<br>High        |
| --district teams   | Interaction                  | High                |

|                                    |              |        |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------|
| --working groups                   | Interaction  | Modest |
| --general member meeting           | Interaction  | Modest |
| -Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) | Interaction  | Low    |
| -Conservative Party (VVD)          | Interaction  | Low    |
| -Liberal Democrats (D66)           | Intervention | Modest |
| -Communist Party (CPN)             | Intervention | Modest |
| municipal council                  | Intervention | High   |
| political executives (B&W)         | Intervention | High   |

Figure 5. Network characteristics of VCP actors.

#### 4. A critical assessment of PNT

Although policy network theory acknowledges the variation across and within political institutions, at the same time it simplifies public decision-making. The empirical illustration in the previous section revealed to us some practical and also fundamental problems. The first is the definition of the actors. Are they institutions/organisations or individuals? Should we consider connections between bureaus, agencies and groups; or examine individual, politicians, lobbyists, bureaucrats, experts and consultants? Evidently, the finding that all public organisations are connected together is truism. Not the fact that they are related is relevant, but their impact on the final decision/ outcome(s).

The application of PNT in urban planning only provides a snapshot of very fluid sets of relationships. What is missing is the feel of the policy process; the complexity of personal and professional connections and the multi-layered character of relationships between individuals (see also John, 2004). PNT skims the surface with just an account of the decision-making context, an identification of the main actors and a discussion of the change in policy. This is too meagre for a meaningful ex post planning evaluation. This needs an approach which shows how personal links can affect policy outcomes and the transfer of policy ideas in society.

PNT ignores that urban planning is essentially a goal-seeking process. Hence, problems and objectives may change during the process. This is usually omitted in PNT frameworks.

*Ex-post planning evaluation* is seen here as the systematic assessment of the effectiveness and sustainability of completed planning processes. In our opinion no new development activity should be planned or undertaken without first reviewing the lessons of past experience.

The aim of ex-post planning evaluation is to examine the underlying causes of activity outcomes in order to determine activity efficiency and impact, including their potential to be sustained in the longer-term. It assesses:

- the achievement of sustainable outcomes against the objectives identified during design and modified during implementation ('conformance'); and
- the impact of the activity on the actors, sectors and areas designated in the activity design. ('performance').

Its main aim is to generate and distribute the lessons that can be learned from the activity experience to planners and policy makers.

Conformance and performance tests have been developed in ICT for determining the reliability of computer technologies (conformance) and their speed (performance). Faludi and Mastop (1997) have used these terms to denote two principally different methods of ex post evaluation: conformance evaluation focusing on 'means-ends' logic; performance evaluation is to examine if the plan helped to improve the quality of subsequent actions. PNT as applied in section 3 also disaggregates into actors, goals and means and as such resemble a community impact evaluation framework (cf. Lichfield, 1996). However, PNT is based on the assumption that problem formulation and objectives of actors may change in the course of action. Hence, there is a problem with evaluating success and failure of networks (see also Klijn and Koppejan, 2000). Conformance evaluation can only be actor-based, but it doesn't include the dynamics of the network. Performance evaluations are in PNT only meaningful as a kind of satisfying analysis (Teisman, 1992; Klijn and Koppejan, 2000). It is conceivable that the actors involved are approached for an assessment of the process and its outcome together in relation to objectives formulated by actors and realized outcomes.

## **5. Some concluding remarks**

It is illustrated in this paper that *Policy Network Theory* (PNT) provides a framework for analysing urban policy-making processes. However, it appears to be difficult to make the role of actors and their interactions explicit in an unambiguous way. Social decision-making processes in practice are less neatly arranged than it is suggested in PNT.

PNT is also not very appropriate for an ex post evaluation since it is unable to examine the underlying causes of activity outcomes for determining activity efficiency and impact. Besides, it doesn't offer any insights into their potential to be sustained in the longer-term.

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