The communicative ideology in spatial planning: some critical reflections based on the Dutch experience

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Abstract. Communicative, or collaborative, planning has received a lot of attention recently. Many planners today agree that planning should be a process of facilitating community collaboration for consensus-building. As a consequence, it seems that communicative rationality is becoming more important in modern planning than the conventional instrumental rationality, whose professional approaches are often criticised as being technocratic. In this paper we address the question whether communicative planning is a better framework for protecting values and reaching objectives that have justified planning interventions to this point in society. By using notions of quality and ethics as a framework, we evaluate critically the communicative features of Dutch infrastructure planning. A distinction is made between comments about planning *outcomes* and comments about consensus-building *processes*. It is argued that communicative planning could conflict with basic ethical principles of conventional planning. It is concluded that the communicative ideology *alone* does not meet conventional ethical planning principles any better. This is in line with the ideas of Kaiser et al and other authors that communicative planning must go together with 'adaptive' rational planning. Planning discourse should be based on planning intelligence, which consists of gathering, organising, analysing, and disseminating information to stakeholders in the use and development of land.

Introduction

New approaches are now being advocated, and sometimes also followed, that suggest a fundamental break with the planning methodology of the past. Traditional professional expertise seems to be losing ground. Academic and professional planners are increasingly convinced that planning should be a process of facilitating community collaboration for consensus-building (for example, Innes, 1996). In her study on collaborative planning Healey (1997) has eloquently outlined the new communicative, or collaborative, planning paradigm. We refer to this thoughtful book for a more elaborate overview of relevant literature in this field. According to Healey (1996) the planning community needs to engage in vigorous debate and research on the forms and methodologies of this new situation. Our aim here is to contribute to this debate.

The magic word embraced by all actors in the new planning game seems to be *communication*. Evidently, 'good communication' is a goal that is being welcomed, given the 'inclusionary ethic which underpins the approach' (see Healey, 1996). Nevertheless, each coin has two sides. In this paper we will not focus on the obvious positive side of a communicative planning approach. Our intention is to explore the other side of this coin. The purpose is *not* to reject, what we call, *communicative ideology*. We fully agree that a purely professional and technological planning paradigm is something of the past. On the other hand, we are not certain that communicative ideology is a proper framework for protecting values and reaching objectives that have justified planning interventions up until now in society. The purpose of this paper is to share this confusion with our readers in order to continue the discussion about this interesting new avenue for planning research.

The background of this paper lies in the Dutch planning situation, in particular in regional and national infrastructure planning. The ideas have evolved in a research

project conducted by the authors for the Dutch Ministry of Transport and Public Works (for example, Niekerk et al, 1997; Woltjer, 1996). It must be noted that the Dutch planning system is already more 'open' for communicative interventions than the systems in countries that are still dominated by the work of classical design-oriented disciplines such as architecture and civil engineering. We feel that in those countries the aim for communicative planning is primarily a plea for more citizens to participate in regular planning processes. Readers from such countries especially should be aware that this paper does not hold a plea for a return to their kind of planning system. We depart from a Dutch planning system where citizen participation is well organised and institutionalised by law, both in the preparatory stages of administrative plan-making and political decisionmaking, and in the implementation stages (for example, Alexander, 1988). Although some may call this communicative planning, we feel inclined to question this assumption because the Dutch citizen participation rules also incite much tokenism. If communicative planning implies collective decision-making by means of an open interaction between individuals or quasi-individuals (for example, Sager, 1994), then current Dutch infrastructure planning certainly has to change in order to meet this description.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In the next section we provide a brief impression of our interpretation of the current changing planning situation. After that, we will introduce the notions of quality and ethics. We use these as a framework to examine communicative planning. Our critical reflections about the application of communicative ideology in planning are subdivided into two sections: a section with comments about the planning *outcomes*, and a section with comments about consensus-building *processes*. The paper finishes with some concluding remarks.

The changing planning situation
The relations between participants and the political process have changed over the past decades. Certainly in the Netherlands, formal representatives of the people in city and regional councils or national parliaments are often no longer seen as unconditional spokespersons of their voters, that is, as persons who pronounce the same ideas as their constituency. Society and societal problems seem to have become too complex to be guided solely by this classical model of representative democracy. Evidently, growing welfare, rise in general levels of education, and increasing individualism can be seen as major explanatory factors for the current disillusionment of many citizens with political parties. Another important explanatory factor is interdependency. Dutch plan-making often turns out to be an activity in which government planning agencies are dependent upon other parties to show support for a plan. Characteristically, government has found that its position has shifted from autonomous decisionmaking to more interdependency with other actors (den Hoed et al, 1983; Zonneveld, 1991).

This change in the decisionmaking climate has also affected spatial planning in practice (see also Voogd, 1998a). For instance, if we compare today's spatial plans in the Netherlands with similar reports of two decades ago, we notice at least two striking differences: (a) the lack of depth in the *justification* of recent planning proposals; and (b) the emphasis on the *promotion* of an idea or particular policy rather than a balanced description of relevant features and options. Clearly, plans and planning documents are now often seen as instruments for the marketing of governmental ideas (see Ashworth and Voogd, 1994; 1995). Political parties, governmental bodies, and interest groups now stress the importance of communication, leaving the innocent citizen with an avalanche of newsletters and invitations to 'information evenings' or 'open days'. Promotion, persuasion, and propaganda have been discovered as communication tools.

Marketing has become an ordinary public planning concept, with other institutional groups also employing its techniques.

This widespread introduction of elements of communicative ideology in public planning seems possible only because of the fundamental societal changes discussed briefly above. Growing social complexity apparently needs a new—but simple— philosophy by which people come to terms with the world around them. This is an ideology, consisting or pervasive sets of ideas, beliefs, and images that groups employ to make the world more intelligible to themselves. Hall (1977) asserts that an ideology operates by being openly embedded in common-sense wisdom. It is common-sense wisdom in the Netherlands, and apparently in many other countries, that public discussions between political parties are being increasingly replaced by discussions between interest groups. Since the 1970s Dutch interest groups have been firmly institu- tionalised and operate in a cooperative way with government rather than taking conflicting positions (Kriesi and Giugni, 1996). In the Netherlands, a broad-based collaboration between government agencies and interest groups produces a corporatist mode of governance. We come across an important question here: what types of participative structure does the communicative ideology imply? For the Dutch situation it often boils down to interaction focused on institutionalised corporate and interest- group stakeholders. However, more recently, consensus-building-oriented approaches have more often aimed at involving individual citizens in informal noninstitutionalised decisionmaking situations (see Veldboer, 1996; Woltjer, 1998).

In this regard, neither theorists nor practitioners are entirely clear on what successful participation means. People actively involved in spatial planning often have strikingly different views about the function, necessity, and range of participation within democratic decisionmaking. Important differences in understanding include the directness of participation and the question whether decisions are to be made by consensus or by majority rule. In a direct democracy, citizens make decisions themselves, whereas in an indirect democracy the people's representatives decide. Majoritarian democracy accepts that a majority (half the group plus one) will decide. A consensual democracy aims at getting a broadly based consensus to support its decisions. The combination of the differences leads us to different types of participation.

(1) Direct participation based on consensus (for example, Elster, 1998). Participation in this deliberative democracy view aims at the direct involvement of all interested individuals throughout the decisionmaking process. Decisions should be as broadly based as possible. In practice, this view advocates a focus on Habermasian communica- tion on the local level.

(2) Direct participation based on majority rule (for example, Cronin, 1989). This kind of participation relates to 'plebiscitary' democracy which strives at the maximum direct involvement of all members of society. In practice, referenda and electronic voting systems fit into this participation form. Usually committees prepare the proposal after which all citizens can formally decide a yes or no.

(3) Indirect participation based on consensus. The aim here is at an indirect involve- ment of citizens via representatives or delegates. This group seeks broadly based decisions and coalitions. In practice, the final decisionmaking rests with the formal political bodies. Representatives of societal groups are consulted or invited to cooperate in early phases of policymaking (Lijphart, 1984). In this case, decisionmaking focuses on the institutions of formal government (Healey, 1997).

(4) Indirect participation based on majority rule (for example, Dahl, 1982). According to this view, participation occurs indirectly, by means of elections or via well-established interest groups. Furthermore, representatives aim at majorities in decisionmaking.

Participants in communicative planning may include interested or affected individuals such as residents or citizens. Participants may also include groups of individuals such as interest groups, nongovernmental organisations, and lower levels of government. In this regard, communicative planning theory seldom clearly denotes only one type of participant or one kind of participation. Rather it refers to a variety of meanings. Therefore the type of participation underpinning spatial planning processes in a particular situation—or country—determines the way in which communicative planning should be understood. Combining direct and indirect and also formal and informal participation may be fundamental to the pursuit of good spatial planning (compare with Warner, 1997). In this paper we consider communicative practices that function beyond prevalent conventional participative structures.

In Dutch planning practice, the various governments, and even separate governmental departments, have increasingly directed their main efforts toward influencing informally the plan-making and related decisionmaking processes of the competent authority, that is, the Dutch national cabinet or the provincial or municipal governing bodies. They now do this at an early stage rather than follow the formal routes of consultation and citizen participation. As a consequence, in the Netherlands formal proposals of the governing bodies are rarely rejected or fundamentally changed when discussed in parliament or other houses of representatives.

This development has clearly benefited from the growing empirical knowledge collected in planning theory and other policy sciences about social decisionmaking processes. In the last decade, a new generation of young academic planning professionals and policy scientists have entered governmental bureaucracies in the Netherlands. Consequently, we notice that gradually more planning processes are paying attention to, although this is sometimes limited to lip service, a systematic consideration and treatment of 'relevant' actors, the aim being some kind of consensus-building (for example, Ministry of Transport and Public Works, 1995; 1996; 1997; 1998; Ministry of Physical Planning and Environment, 1998). In addition, studies of Dutch infrastructure planning processes endorse communicative approaches (for example, Glasbergen, 1995; Huigen et al, 1993; ten Heuvelhof and Termeer, 1991; Teisman and Verheij, 1995).

Should we consider this as a desirable development? On the first impulse, this has to be seen as a significant improvement. The explicit recognition of planning as a normative process embedded in a pluriform multivalued society deserves our unconditional support. Evidently, this pluriformity can be taken into account to an insufficient degree in a purely professional, that is, technical, planning approach, if only by the fact that opinions and the variation of values can become manifest only in a process of exchanging ideas, hence in a 'social communication process'. As Hall (1982) illustrated many years ago, great planning disasters have often stemmed from a professional arrogance that did not recognise competing views. Clearly the real world is not a SimCity computer game that just one player—the planner—can play. Nevertheless it is also fair to wonder whether social communication processes can fully replace 'old fashioned' professional planning expertise based on analytical and synthesising skills. Obviously we touch here upon a classical, but no doubt ever continuing, discussion about the role of planning and the planner. For example, see Mandelbaum et al (1996) and Campbell and Fainstein (1996) for recent extended inquiries into the practice of the planning profession. These and other studies show that generalising about planning and the planner's role is difficult because it also depends on the administrative, legal, and cultural environment in which planning takes place. However, this can never be a reason for not sharing experiences. Especially because changes, such as increased attention to the communicative ideology, are not limited to a particular societal environment.

Healey (1997) views strategic spatial planning as a process of facilitating community collaboration in strategic consensus-building. She presents it as a normative approach, as an ideal to strive for. To realise it in any planning situation, it needs to be shaped to the distinctive social relations and political possibilities of the particular context. Healey asserts that: "The result will inevitably be a locally specific process. But if its invention is informed by the inclusionary ethic which underpins the approach, its form should allow both voice and influence to be more evenly distributed among those with a stake in issues than is common in most strategic planning exercises these days" (Healey, 1996, page 231).

The approach proposed by Healey is based on empirical analyses of actual planning processes, both by her team (for example, Healey et al, 1995) and by others (for example, Forester, 1989; Innes, 1995; Innes and Booher, 1997; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987). Communicative ideology has roots in, among others, normative, Marxist-oriented, literature from the 1960s) but its current resurgence, as outlined above, in the USA, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and a number of other West European countries is practice driven as well. Owing to the development of 'practice-related theory building' we have been able to understand better the success and failure of planning actions. However, does this imply that we have to embrace unconditionally as a guiding principle planning theories that more or less 'copy' practice, including its less attractive characteristics? Should we not be critical about what we witness in practical planning processes rather than accept it unconditionally as our standard?

In the following sections we raise some questions about the planning outcomes that may result from a communicative planning approach. We also examine communicative planning processes and some procedural aspects, which may become problematic in a society that sticks to democratic principles. However, we first introduce the frame of reference of our examination: quality and ethics.

Quality and ethics in planning
One of the reasons to embark on a communicative planning practice is the dissatisfaction with former *outcomes* of planning processes. These results—plans or projects—have to meet quality demands that are ever increasing. In other words, the ambition level of what people consider 'good planning' has risen (Sirgy, 1986; Teisman, 1997). The ultimate goal of a planning agency is to serve human needs in a society. Therefore it is aiming at a good quality of life for society (Sirgy, 1986).

We are dealing here with effectiveness, which may easily be the most important principle for planning. This is because any planning activity or any effort to influence planning activities aims at changing something in the environment. Communicative planning, as well as any planning, makes sense only if it aims at effects as a consequence of certain goals (Mastop, 1987). Moreover, as the Dutch Environmental Policy Advisory Council (1996) concluded, in order for people to accept a certain policy, effectiveness of that policy is the most important demand that they make.

We can also understand quality in terms of the planning *process*. Democratic values are often used to indicate a good process. For example, John Stuart Mill symbolises the 'ethical' view on participation and democracy. According to this view, participation is an absolute condition for democracy: "... the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate; that any participation, even in the smallest public function, is useful; that the participation should everywhere be as great as the general degree of improvement of the community will allow; and that nothing less can be ultimately desirable than the admission of all to a share in the sovereign power of the state" (Mill, 1910, page 3). Dahl (1961, page 60) is a representative of the 'realistic' view on participation:

"...I think we must conclude that the classic assumptions about the need for total citizen participation in democracy were, at the very least, inadequate. What we call 'democracy'—that is, a system of decision-making in which leaders are more or less responsive to the preferences of non-leaders—does seem to operate with a relatively low level of citizen participation. Hence it is inaccurate to say that one of the necessary conditions for democracy is extensive citizen participation. It would be more reasonable simply to insist that some minimal participation is required, even though we cannot specify with any precision what this minimum must be."

We think that such a view for spatial planning could reasonably be just as ethical.

The communicative ideology is relevant if it improves the quality of plan-making. In our view, the concept of quality has outcome as well as process-related meanings. Quality of the process includes democratic principles. Quality of the outcome refers mainly to effectiveness. In the next section we would like to bring these observations one step further into ethical principles. We assume that there are universal principles of ethics that apply to any planning situation (see Low and Gleeson, 1997).

The quality of the planning outcome

The notion of quality usually has a normative denotation: quality as a synonym for a 'degree of excellence', or even a 'highly awarded property' of something. As such, quality is something to aim at, not just a description of how something happens to be. It can be approached in many different ways, each of which contains implicit definitions of its nature and intent (Voogd, 1994). The basic justification for any planning is that the quality of the resulting outcome is better than the outcome without it. Planning is a means to an end. Although an end does not always justify all means, it is evident that the opposite, a means justify all ends, should also be morally rejected. Hence, any appraisal of the communicative planning approach should therefore include an appraisal of its planning outcome as well. A paramount question therefore is: does a communicative planning approach produce a society and environment with a 'better quality' than would be the case with a conventional planning approach that emphasises instrumental rationality instead of communicative rationality?

This is a difficult question because the answer must be dependent on time, place, and actor. We may escape this 'uniqueness trap' by treating quality as a moral question to be answered in normative ethical terms (see Harper and Stein, 1992). A moral judgment of 'better quality' can be expressed at three levels of certainty (see Connelly, 1997): (a) as an opinion; (b) as a belief; or (c) as knowledge. Option (a) is not relevant here because, in ethical terms, opinions are interpreted as beliefs without thought which are often inconsistent and vague. Option b) is more certain because the beliefs have been thought about. But the most certain judgment, from an ethical point of view, is knowledge composed of belief backed by evidence, either empirical or rational—that is, along the lines of reasoning.

Therefore, do we have 'knowledge' that the adoption of communicative rationality as a leading principle for planning results in a better planning outcome? Let us explore the answer by means of the following *ethical principles*.

(1) The quality of life for future generations should be improved, or at least be maintained at the current level.

(2) The ecosystem should be protected.

(3) Planning measures should be coherent.

(4) Resources should be efficiently used.

(5) In 'social dilemma' situations, collective interests should prevail.

These ethical principles are not disjunct and the list is not complete and certainly debatable. More and other criteria could be formulated for assessing a planning *outcome* (for example, Lynch, 1981). We now discuss these principles in more detail.

(1) *Quality of life of future generations*

A fundamental aspiration of many policymakers is to achieve an improvement in the quality of life, or at least to maintain the current level of quality of life. We are dealing here with a multidimensional notion which is only partially determined by planning measures (Voogd, 1994). Besides, the appreciation of a planning outcome with regard to its contribution to quality of life, to some extent reflected in perceptions of 'place amenity', is a strictly individual activity based on current wishes, current perceptions, and individual strategic motives with regard to the policymaking process. As such, an intergenerational conflict may exist between current individual values and goals and the values and goals of future generations. This is also reflected in the well-known concept of sustainable development. Future generations can never participate directly in the arena in which consensus-building is taking place. Communicative rationality will therefore, *by definition*, exclude their interests. This may not be a practical problem if there exist advocates of future interests, such as Kaiser et al (1995) who feel that this is a task for planners. Nevertheless it remains a theoretical weakness of the communicative paradigm.

(2) *The ecosystem should be protected*

Next to the anthropocentric view on intergenerational conflicts, we must also stress the ecocentric view, often included in the concept of sustainable development. Current practice in most countries shows that the protection of our ecosystem leaves a lot to be desired. Individual 'greed' of people and organisations, including governments, usually appears to be a much more important driving force than the collective interest of protecting natural resources. The various 'World Conferences' about climate change and the environment have hardly provided signs that adopting a collective rationality framework can solve these important problems. At the world level, no alternatives other than consensus-building remain, because a superimposed body with adequate power is lacking. However, at the geographical level of individual nations or at lower levels, we have governments that can act as a superimposed body with protective power. Here the relevant question is whether a 'bottom-up' consensus-building approach based on communicative rationality can offer better protection of the ecosystem than, for instance, 'top-down' regulations. If we look around us, this question does not seem too difficult to answer. Despite a consensus about the negative impacts, an increasing number of people drive cars, even if there are good, less polluting alternatives available, use environmentally unfriendly plastic cups and bottles, suburbanise if they can afford it, and so forth. These are clearly signs of 'social dilemma' [see also point (5) below]. Social dilemmas often explain the situation in which, despite the presence of a consensus, there is no change in the individual behaviour of people (for example, Dutch Environmental Policy Advisory Council, 1996). To overcome social dilemmas representative governments may sometimes have to intervene in favour of the collective public interest. If the term public or collective interest were to cover more than just local interests or the common interests of a group of individuals, this would signify deviation from the communicative ideology in planning.

(3) *Planning outcomes should be coherent and consistent*

A concrete danger for the quality of spatial decisions is fragmentation. An ethical approach to sustainable development, for example, implies a mandate for systemic and integrative thinking and a focus on similarities rather than differences (Verma, 1996). There is enough evidence, however, to suggest that consensus-building practices may

lead to fragmentary thinking in autonomous projects instead of integrated strategic thinking (Woltjer, 1997). In Dutch planning practice there is a growing emphasis on project planning, because in this way the stakeholders can be better defined and approached. Consequently, interrelationships between projects are often neglected, especially if the most important stakeholders of the different projects have no shared interests or if an adequate overall strategic planning framework is lacking. A good example is the decisionmaking process regarding the growth of Schiphol Airport Amsterdam and the new high-speed railway (HSR) from the Netherlands to Brussels in Belgium. Both were treated as separate projects with separate consensus-building processes. As a consequence, it was decided that the increase in air traffic at Schiphol Airport should be restricted for environmental reasons, or at least not encouraged, while the decision was made to connect the HSR with Schiphol Airport. Although the area-oriented planning process for Schiphol did envisage the proposed HSR connection to Schiphol and advocated it as one of the preconditions for reducing demand for air traffic by diverting some short-haul demand to surface transportation (see Alexander, 1998b, pages 19–20), the decisions for both projects were prepared and taken separately. Clearly, the decisions were conflicting because an HSR connection will increase the market area of Schiphol and therefore offer more people the opportunity to use this airport. Besides, the underlying idea that people flying from, for instance, Oslo to Paris, would now go to Amsterdam Airport and then take the high-speed train to Paris is very unrealistic in terms of travel behaviour. These conflicts between both projects have never been institutionally debated and balanced in public, probably because they were never analysed adequately and put into an overall planning framework (see also Voogd, 1998b).

An integrated planning strategy may help to improve coherence. This is clearly the case with the integration of the A2 motorway in the new town 'Leidsche Rijn' near the city of Utrecht. The project combined successfully the urban planning objectives of the 'Masterplan Leidsche Rijn' with the construction of the A2 as a hinterland connection, as proposed by the National Structure Scheme Traffic and Transportation (Bakker, 1996; Van de Hoef, 1996; Woltjer, 1997). It illustrates that an integrated spatial strategy can be beneficial for consensus-building for individual projects and can also improve coherent spatial development.

The policymaking concerning the 'Gelderse Vallei', an area of woodland in central Netherlands, has been a forerunner in the new approach towards consensus-building (Driessen and Glasbergen, 1993). The area had many conflicting interests ranging from cattle breeding, the poultry industry, nature, and recreation. In 1989 a committee of representatives from all regional interest groups entered into a cooperative dialogue for regionally integrated economic, social, and environmental policy issues. Approximately one year later they agreed on an 'integral area plan'. In this case, coherence in different policy issues was important. The plan involved a total package of measures instead of isolated parts (Ministry of Transport and Public Works, 1996).

Despite the obvious advantages of an integrated view of communicative planning, we see that especially in Dutch infrastructure planning the focus is on individual projects, which does not always promote coherent planning outcomes (see Woltjer, 1997). Infra-structure consensus-building processes therefore often show characteristics of individual interests and short-term, 'close to home' solutions. Consequently, integrated strategic views are also often violated, which need not be a problem if the resulting decisions are mutually consistent. Unfortunately this is not always the case.

(4) *Resources should be used efficiently*
The efficient use of resources, especially scarce resources, is an important ethical principle of planning. In plain terms this implies that we should not 'spoil' resources.

Usually this is interpreted in terms of economic efficiency, that is achieving maximum net economic benefit from a land-use pattern or from development processes. In purely technical terms this is accomplished by either getting the most benefit for a given cost, finding the lowest cost solution for a particular benefit, or getting the highest ratio of benefits to costs. According to Kaiser et al (1995, page 266) efficiency in terms of land-use patterns implies coordination of public and private development so that journeys such as home to work, home to school, home to recreation, and home or work to shopping are short; industries have good access to the regional transportation network; land uses are located to be most easily served by water and sewer services, transportation, and other services; and public and private operations are energy efficient.

Efficiency based on a utilitarian framework is in conflict with the communicative ideology. A consensus need not be efficient in utilitarian terms but it should, as Simon (1965) stated, be satisfying for the participants. Therefore it may be expected that communicative planning outcomes often violate this planning principle.

For example, in 1990 the elaborate proposal of the 'Betuwe' project, a new rail link to carry freight from Rotterdam to Germany, ran aground in parliament because alternatives and alterations proposed by the provinces and municipalities were not adopted (Huigen et al, 1993). At a later stage, under the current Minister of Transport, the interested parties bargained for an agreement package to reach a consensus. This package included tunnels, noise barriers, and mitigation for environmental damage. However, the line *quadrupled* in cost. This may have been truly satisfying for some of the participants and it may still have been the utilitarian efficient solution as the 'elaborate proposal' internalised all the costs and benefits of the various stakeholders, but it made it impossible for the Ministry to finance other infrastructure projects elsewhere.

On the other hand, it could be argued that, if participants in a consensus-building process operate according to individual rational standards, some degree of individual efficiency will result. *If* the planning arena is well defined and *if* all relevant stakeholders participate and *if* all interests are represented and *if* the decisions in the arena logically interrelate, then the resulting outcome can also be called efficient in utilitarian terms. Many 'ifs', but the reasoning seems valid if we consider efficiency to be the outcome of an aggregate of individual rational behaviour. However, we think that these conditions will never be met in practice. This also relates to notions such as power politics and manipulation because an important problem of communicative planning is that, in the real community, actors play strategic games (see Flyvbjerg, 1996).

(5) *Collective interests should prevail in 'social dilemma' situations*

Social dilemma theory teaches us that individuals may act very rationally from their own perspective in pursuit of their own interests, but this behaviour may be irrational from a collective perspective (for example, Dawes, 1980; Schroeder, 1990; Voogd, 1995; 1998b). Well-known examples are contradictions between the individual interests and collective interests with respect to sustainable development and the prevention of environmental degradation. If such contradictions are denied, this may have detrimental consequences in the long run, for both society and ecology. Other examples of social dilemmas are activities such as NIMBY ('Not in my backyard') or LULU ('Locally unwanted land use'). Almost everybody acknowledges that society needs these, but not next door. Yet there are also planning measures that are very much desired by individuals but do not serve a collective interest. For instance, recreational entrepreneurs near a sensitive nature area want to expand their business, but this may ultimately destroy the nature resources upon which they base their existence. We can of course argue that information about such collective interests can be included in a consensus-building process. Massam (1993) advocates this point. Still, enough empirical knowledge exists to prove that this does not

work, at least not always. Consensus-building is not a panacea for every situation. In social dilemma situations or situations in which weak interests require special protection, authority may be necessary. Consequently, communicative planning is not appropriate for all planning purposes: "Contrary to the ideology of communicative planning, social dilemma theory teaches us that in social dilemma situations collective interests *cannot* be protected by voluntary cooperation of individuals alone" (Voogd, 1998b, page 5).

Theory and practice feature very different expressions of the term public or collective interest (Berkowitz, 1979; Gilbert, 1979). However, some general conditions must prevail if any social policy can be said to be in the public interest. These conditions include a need to maintain a balance between different interests. The collective interest lies in the quality of the spatial environment for current and future generations and stretches beyond the satisfaction of individual needs. For instance, the communicative ideology may be at odds with interests at a higher level of government. In a planning process, people may consider the collective interest but, when actually asked to contribute, consider self-interest. The difficulty with collaborative processes is that many individuals gain by being selfish (Campbell, 1986).

What can we conclude from this brief evaluation of a communicative planning outcome? The first, and perhaps most important, conclusion is a confirmation of the observations of Innes (1996) and Healey (1996), among others, that communicative planning implies a fundamentally different view of planning. In this section we have argued that the outcome of communicative planning will most probably conflict with basic ethical principles of conventional planning. This implies that, from a utilitarian view of planning, where the focus is on ends, the communicative ideology, as principally means-oriented, should be critically confronted.

This conflict can be played down by pointing to the inability even of conventional planning to meet these principles in practice (for example, Innes, 1995, page 184). However, we think that the question asked at the beginning of this section remains relevant and that there is enough evidence to suggest that the communicative ideology *alone* does not meet conventional ethical planning principles any better.

The quality of the planning process

Conventional planning principles are based on *utilitarian ethics*, whereas communicative planning is based on *communicative ethics* (Habermas, 1990). Planning processes that focus on utilitarian ethics usually emphasise scientific knowledge and instrumental rationalism. They are focused mainly on what Healey (1997) calls the 'hard' infrastructure, such as policy measures, thus neglecting the importance of 'soft' infrastructure, the process of consensus-building.

According to Innes and Booher (1997, page 7) "... a good consensus process is one which permits society and its policy to be adaptive and to develop a way of functioning so that it will become more sophisticated, responsive and efficient in meeting social, intellectual and political needs. A good process is therefore one which builds networks and feedback systems, which allows for adoption to new information and environmental or internal change, and which is self-organizing and evolutionary." Failures include processes where participants agree without discussion or without looking at the relationships or whether the concept as a whole makes sense. Failures also include processes in which participants use position-based bargaining or determine they can get something better by separating their interests from those of groups and pursuing them on their own.

This suggests that the quality of a communicative planning process very much depends on the quality of the participants, or perhaps better: the way they are willing to meet the *discourse ethics* of the communicative ideology according to Habermas (1990). One of the most famous phrases of the discourse ethics of Habermas is: in

discourse the unforced force of the better argument prevails. As everyone knows, such an ideal is very difficult to achieve in scholarly and everyday discussions. Although this should never be a reason not to strive for this ideal, we cannot deny that this is a fundamental weakness of communicative ideology, just as social inaccessibility is a fundamental weakness of a conventional planning approach.

However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. A more important judgment of the value of consensus-building should be obtained by analysing its characteristics in planning practice (see also Woltjer, 1999). We will apply here the following *ethical principles* for our appraisal.

(1) All relevant stakeholders should be actively involved in the planning process.

(2) The participation of stakeholders should not be hampered by cultural and/or educational differences.

(3) The planning process should be manageable and transparent for stakeholders.

(4) In a planning process, stakeholders should be endowed appropriately with the necessary professional knowledge on the relevant issues and the possible alternative solutions.

(5) The interests of stakeholders should be more important in the definition and weighting of solutions than the degree of involvement of a stakeholder in the planning process. As with the previous ethical principles, we recognise that other and more principles are possible. This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

(1) *Involvement of all stakeholders in planning process*

It is difficult to apply this principle in practice, even if a communicative approach is actively pursued. Clearly the 'willingness' of parties to participate determines the consensus-building process. Cases of application of consensus-building in the USA (see Innes, 1992; Innes et al, 1994) seem to have been successful because of a relatively high willingness of actors to participate. In the Dutch situation, however, a lack of willingness sometimes leads to *selective participation*. For example, in Dutch infrastructure planning there is a contrast between the involvement of environmental interest groups and economic interest groups (Woltjer, 1997). Some environmentalists deliberately choose not to participate in decisonmaking or to enter official sessions. Economic interest groups are strikingly eager to become involved and to cooperate.

Interviews conducted by one of us (Woltjer, 1996) showed that most project managers of the Dutch Ministry of Transport and Public Works recognise the importance of a participative approach but they find it *impossible to involve* all relevant stakeholders. For instance, in 1996, in the North Holland region six large infrastructure projects were in progress. However, even municipalities simply did not have the means to participate in all consultation meetings. Experience in the Netherlands further suggests that, despite the efforts of government organisations to invite a group of stakeholders that is as representative as possible for the interests at hand, full representation is virtually impossible. There is evidence that inviting parties to a participatory planning process in particular activates parties who take an interest in the topic and are willing and able to participate. In the participatory planning process for motorway A28, for example, in which road users, citizens, and other stakeholders collectively developed plans for better utilisation of the road, advertisements in local newspapers were published and letters were sent to invite affected citizens and road users to participate (Dijkstra, 1996). Despite the attention given by the Ministry to this invitation policy, the participatory planning process for motorway A28 resulted in problems with representation (Ministry of Transport and Public Works, 1996).

Dutch practice regularly reveals problems with a limited circle of participants. For example, in the communicative planning processes for restoration of the river 'Vecht',

there was inadequate participation by interest groups. In this case, fifteen organisations cooperated in decisionmaking for a recovery plan on the river Vecht (Lammers, 1996). These parties included the Ministry of Transport and Public Works, the provincial governments, the municipal governments, and the public water boards. However, an invitation that was sent to representatives of interest groups and to citizens to get involved did not lead to a broadly based reaction (Ministry of Transport and Public Works, 1995).

In addition, experiences in participatory planning at the local level provide evidence of selective participation. In planning the new urban transport policy for the city of Groningen, for example, highly educated citizens were overrepresented (Woltjer, 1998). In the preparation of a traffic circulation plan for the city of Deventer, in which the municipality based its interaction with citizens on principles of direct democracy, the participants were not a good reflection of the public as a whole (Veldboer, 1996). In this case, young parents with children seized the opportunity to participate.

In particular, the relationship between the *level of decisionmaking* and the involvement of parties is unmistakable. It appears that most local, and many regional, parties do not see the importance of being involved in a national consensus-building process about transportation planning. They consider this strategic planning level too complicated and fuzzy, despite the fact that the Dutch national government is also responsible for the implementation of most infrastructure projects. The interaction with society and 'the environment' occurs mainly at the local and regional levels, as a consequence of the elaboration of strategic goals. A number of Dutch problems concerning consensus-building correlate with tensions between decisonmaking levels. Consequently, *a strategic consensus* often differs from *an operational consensus*. Case studies in Woltjer (1998) provide evidence of the fundamental differences between, on the one hand, an agreement on broad outlines at a higher level of abstraction and, on the other, an agreement about details at a lower level of abstraction. Only when plans or projects become tangible or conceivable do parties become active. The strategic phase seems to interest 'hobbyists' whereas local and regional parties do not take the opportunity to influence strategic decisions. Thus there are difficulties with building an operational consensus on specific details, rather than with a strategic consensus on general outlines. The key question may be how compatible communicative planning is with higher level (national) integrated planning where issues are more abstract unless they are concretised as projects. This is a common question, for example in discussions about transactive planning (see Friedmann, 1993).

In their analysis of the application of consensus-building strategies in Italy, Balducci and Fareri (1996) find similar differences in the roles of actors at varied scales of operation. An important element for the mobilisation of the actors is the clarity concerning what is at stake. Overall, people are inclined to become involved in planning issues only when they think that the issue is in their immediate interest. This has already been discussed extensively by Sewell and Coppock (1977).

In Dutch infrastructure planning another important difference can be observed between the participation of proponents and the participation of opponents. In the Dutch planning system there is a relatively high number of 'defensive means' available to opponents, such as appeal and procedures to raise objections. Nevertheless, proponents do not have legal 'offensive means' to express gains or plus points. Proponents of effects such as national infrastructure accessibility or sustainable growth inevitably have to deal with much uncertainty. Opponents speak of easier and predictable direct negative effects such as noise pollution and nature degradation. Consequently, these effects often dominate the discussions in participation and consultation. In brief, discussions about the preservation of the 'here and now' are easier than debates about a change for 'there and later' (see also Berkenbosch, 1996).

This is consistent with the results of a survey into citizen participation in the Groningen regional airport 'Eelde' (Woltjer, 1999). In this case, opponents adopted an attitude that was much more active than that of the proponents. In a consensus-building situation, this phenomenon could easily lead to an overrepresentation of the former group. The problem of selective participation is not limited to the examples mentioned above, but has been documented extensively in the US political science literature (Dahl, 1961; Lindblom, 1968) and in the public participation literature (Checkoway and van Til, 1978; Peattie, 1968; Piven and Rosen, 1970).

(2) *The participation of stakeholders should not be hampered by cultural and/or educational differences*

This condition is also difficult to meet in a communicative planning process. In a multicultural society such as Dutch society, some social groups have a modest or poor command of the Dutch language. In addition, some social groups are better integrated in Dutch society than other groups with more isolated lifestyles. It is a fundamental problem of communicative planning to involve these citizens, who have democratic rights just as any other citizen, in a planning process.

This is a well-known problem that has already been studied in Dutch spatial planning in the 1970s. Examples are the analyses of participation processes in the 'Structure Plan' for the Zaan region and the 'Regional Plan Central Gelderland' (for example, Jolles, 1974; Korsten and Kropman, 1977). These studies revealed that only well-informed people with high education levels and high income seize the opportunity to participate.

This type of selective participation can be found especially in citizen participation. Since 1973, the interest of the Dutch population in actively influencing government policy has been stable (Castenmiller, 1988). However, people with an active interest are distinguished by a higher level of education and social-economic status. Women are beginning to catch up but still participate less often than men (Castenmiller, 1988). Furthermore, a study in the city of Zwolle has shown that people who are already active in society are more likely to engage in participatory decisionmaking processes (van Deth and Leijenaar, 1994). The 'average' citizens hardly participate.

This illustrates that communicative planning often serves only the common interest of a selection of participants, and not the public interest. Day (1997) points out that the outcomes of participation processes will not truly reflect all citizen interests, because relatively few people take advantage of the opportunities for participation that do exist. She cites Grant (1994, page 426) who explains that: "participation is a luxury in modern industrial societies because it requires skills, resources, money, and time that many citizens do not have". Clearly the motivation of people to participate cannot be assumed natural or universal (see Scharpf, 1970).

(3) *The planning process should be manageable and transparent*

The communicative ideology rejects the idea that planning is an instrumental activity that operates as a 'black box' for stakeholders. On the contrary, stakeholders should be involved and stimulated to share views and knowledge to arrive at decisions consensually. This implies transparency of the process for stakeholders. This can be derived only if the process itself is manageable because of a relatively simple structure. However, this idealistic picture seldom exists in actual planning practice (Woltjer, 1997).

In regional planning in particular, decisionmaking situations can be rather complex. These situations usually feature various actors (individuals or organisations), each with specific preferences, opinions, and individual problems, all of which change in time and include fundamental uncertainty. For example, with regard to the planning of motorway A15 in the Netherlands, the planning problem consisted of a large number of different partial alignments. This stretch of motorway was also interrelated to other projects such

as motorway A12, a HSR from Belgium to Amsterdam, as well as the northern connection of the Betuwe railway. For adequate participation meetings, project managers needed to cover large parts of the province of Gelderland. At an operational level, the situation was so complex that the project appeared to be unsuitable for consensus-building strategies 'according to the book'.

If a planning process concerning an infrastructure project follows a communicative approach, it runs the risk of ending up as an expensive, complex, lengthy or uncontrollable decisionmaking process. In writing about communicative planning, Grant (1994), among others, suggests that too much citizen participation could heighten political conflict rather than help achieve a consensus. In Dutch practice, many project planners, when speaking about building a consensus for an infrastructure project wish they had more money at their disposal so as to give away 'presents'. They consider providing subsidies for local projects or providing compensation for loss of value. This kind of 'negotiating flexibility' could quickly empty the public strongbox. Above all, it may be a threat to an equitable distribution of national money if one party or region manages to negotiate a lot of money at the expense of others.

A manageable process does not imply that the management of planning processes always follows similar lines. For instance, van der Heiden et al (1991) have pointed out that whether or not a consensus will be reached depends on the formal and informal structure of the planning system. Based on observations about the Dutch growth-centre policies of the 1960s and 1970s and the compact city policy of the 1980s, they conclude that the process of consensus-building has not been uniform in the past and will not be uniform in the future. Each planning process based on consensus-building will therefore be unique in its organisational structure and process characteristics.

(4) *In a planning process, stakeholders should be appropriately endowed with the necessary professional knowledge on the relevant issues and the possible alternative solutions*
Another important question regarding the quality of planning processes based on consensus-building relates to the role left for professional knowledge and expertise. This planning principle is important because its denial could imply that societies do not need academics and academic knowledge in a planning process. Although the involvement of expert professionals cannot be an end in itself, a refusal of scientific input in processes that can ultimately be decisive for the future of humankind is irresponsible and denies the value of scientific contributions of many (social and technical) academics. It is inconsistent with the efforts of modern societies to invest in the protracted education of young people for making them skilled planners, economists, geographers, and so on.

Traditionally, planners consider themselves defenders of the public's best or collective interest (for example, Davy, 1998). Planners may feel their tasks include preserving environmental quality, providing good transport systems, and stimulating an efficient use of material resources. However, if communicative processes imply a farewell to basic planning tasks such as correcting market failures and ensuring social justice, planners should be critical towards an increase in their use. This is not to deny, however, that conventional planning also does not work ideally. Planners cannot simply be assumed to know what is best for everyone (Yiftachel, 1998). They do not single-handedly make the decisions. Nevertheless, communicative planning may be just as ineffective or inefficient as conventional rational planning in gathering the necessary knowledge for stakeholders and decisionmakers.

With the communicative planning approach gaining ground, the question about what role is left for professional knowledge and expertise is clearly important. With respect to planners, we share the views of Kaiser et al (1995, page 29): "Planners ... must develop ... capabilities.... Among these are vision, comprehensiveness, technical

competence, fairness, consensus-building, and innovativeness. Together they constitute the qualities that the public and the planning profession expect to find in planners".

Professional knowledge in the sense of technical knowledge has a bad reputation in communicative literature (for example, Fisher, 1990; Innes, 1995). This is understandable, because technocratic approaches of planning violate most of the ethical principles mentioned in this section. Kaiser et al (1995, page 30), however, stress that technical competence of a planner is vital: "In land-use planning, technical competence includes analysis, with its breaking down of data to seek out trends and meaning, as well as synthesis, with its recombination of elements into proposed designs. It involves framing problems as well as developing solutions. We hold that both the analytical and synthetic work of plan-making should follow strict professional canons".

If the public planner represents collective interests, such as sustainable development, the striving for social equity, efficient use of collective resources, protection of minority interests, and so on, what then should be the frame of reference for such decisions? It is obvious that, perhaps apart from small communities, our societies are too complex to involve the representations of all people in daily decisionmaking, let alone to use even more refined consensus-building approaches. It is for this reason that communicative rationality can never be the single frame of reference for such decisionmaking. On the one hand, the contribution of the knowledge of experts *alone* is not a desirable ground for planning. On the other, citizens or interest groups do not always know better than the experts. Consequently, the planning process should include 'ordinary' knowledge but not prevent professionals from contributing their expert knowledge and information.

(5) *The interests of stakeholders should be more important in the definition and weighting of solutions than the power or degree of involvement of a stakeholder in the planning process*
Communicative ideology is about the interaction between actors and the way they can integrate their opinions and views. Because actors are often trying to achieve their own particular goals, they might strongly base this interaction on self-interest (for example, Flyvbjerg, 1996). This raises the more basic issue of the contradiction between ideal communicative rationality and actual strategic action (also discussed in Alexander, 1998a, page 674). Although it is often assumed that communicative planning leads to acts of solidarity among participants, experiences in Dutch infrastructure planning suggest that full solidarity, at least the voluntary type, is rarely achieved. Very often one or more actors have to exercise their power to arrive at agreements.

A problem inherent in decisions guided by solidarity is that such decisions could easily turn out to be unjust and unfair for those affected, but who are not part of the arena in which the discourse took place. In several examples in Dutch infrastructure planning, participants of the institutional arena reached a consensus whereas the agreement was unacceptable for outsiders to that arena. According to communicative ideology, a solution to this problem is to include these outsiders in the discourse. However, this assumes that the most powerful actors want to include these additional players in the game. Practice, such as in the Schiphol case (see Voogd, 1998b) and the Betuwe line case (Huigen et al, 1993), teaches us that this is seldom the case.

An important reason for keeping the 'arena of discourse' limited to the most important actors is evident. The fewer the actors involved, the easier it is to reach a consensus. Besides, a plan that can be promoted in the political arena as the outcome of a 'consensus-building process' between 'all major actors' has a much firmer basis than a plan that has the support only of the political executive at hand. What we sometimes see in Dutch planning is that, under the umbrella of communicative planning or consensus-building, an agreement is reached between a limited number of the most powerful actors, thus diminishing the possibility of outsiders to challenge this

agreement. The outsiders would have to challenge not only the agreement but also the additional weight it carries because of the fact that it is a consensus of those who are in power and those who support the powerful. An example is the expansion of Schiphol Airport by constructing a fifth runway. This result was based on a consensus-building process between the Airport authority, the Dutch railway authority, the municipalities of Haarlemmermeer and Amsterdam, the provinces of North and South Holland, and two ministries. No environmental groups or institutions, or other social or citizen groups, were invited to participate. In the end, they were unable to change the outcome of this 'communicative planning process', because it was presented as an outcome of a complex consensus-building process (Voogd, 1998b).

In the Dutch corporatist governance system, problems such as these occur often, and also when societal organisations participate in public decisionmaking. Most of the environmental groups aim at cooperation with government when they are seeking a solution (Dekker et al, 1997). This presents an important problem in terms of representation: on whose behalf do these organisations speak? It is unclear whether an environmental group represents its members or supporters or public interest in general. According to Dekker et al (1997) the crux of the problem is that business organisations as well as environmental organisations are not organised very democratically. The consequence of this might be that a selective nondemocratic group makes decisions that affect the entire population.

The preceding paragraphs illustrate that it is extremely important not only to recognise the relevant actors in a planning process, but also to manage that process properly. Those who are in charge of the process management can influence the outcome by the invitation policy: who can participate in the discourse and who cannot? This encourages manipulation. The result is that powerless participants have *fewer possibilities* to influence a decision than was the case when plans were presented solely as products of a government. Therefore a planning process based on consensus-building may also hamper proper democratic decisionmaking processes.

Some summarising conclusions
A paramount question posed in this paper is: does a communicative planning approach with communicative rationality produce a society and environment with a 'better quality' than would be the case with a conventional rational planning approach? In order to answer this question we have examined communicative planning and its qualities ethically.

Evidently, planners realise that 'the project' is more than drawing up a plan, as was the case previously. Nowadays 'the project' goes hand in hand with 'the process'. It is a quality requirement whether a project has been a subject for debate, consultation, and participation. Several Dutch studies have produced evidence of a growing orientation in the Netherlands towards the processes associated with consensus-building (de Bruijn et al, 1996; Huigen et al, 1993; Teisman and Verheij, 1995; Scientific Council for Government Policy, 1994; Woltjer, 1999). However, experiences with communicative ideology in Dutch infrastructure planning situations show signs of possible adverse effects on some ethical principles related to quality. These ethical standards address the quality of the planning process (for example, selective participation) and the quality of the planning outcome (for example, inadequate results in terms of sustainability, consistency, and cohesion). Consensus and the quality of spatial decisions may go hand in hand if planners realise that participants might be strongly oriented on issues close to them: in terms of time, space, and their own life world. Therefore the role of planners should continue to be concentrated on long-term goals, balancing interests, thinking in terms of relationships between parts, and perhaps even on designing innovative and, if necessary, nonconformist solutions.

In this paper we have argued that communicative planning could conflict with basic ethical principles of conventional planning. We have done this from a utilitarian view. We think that there is enough evidence to suggest that communicative ideology *alone* does not satisfy conventional ethical planning principles any better.

Consequently, we agree with Kaiser et al (1995) and others that communicative planning must go together with 'adaptive' rational planning. Planning discourse should be based on planning intelligence, which consists of gathering, organising, analysing, and disseminating information to stakeholders in the use and development of land: "Intelligence alerts decision-makers to conditions, trends, and projections as well as the social, economic, and environmental impacts of those projections and proposed alternative decisions (i.e. impact assessments).... The presumption is that better information will lead to improved public discourse, more equitable and effective policy, and better land use decisions" (Kaiser et al, 1995, pages 60 – 61).

We are also inclined to follow Alexander (1998a) who identified the different views on planning as complementary rather than as substitutes. In other words, conventional planning and communicative planning are not mutually exclusive, as, for instance, Innes (1995) suggests. According to Alexander, deliberative rationality often precedes communicative practice. It can also alternate with communicative practice over time.

Generally we believe that spatial decisions should not depend overwhelmingly on communicative planning. After all, spatial planning should go beyond the short term, separated projects, social dilemmas or the selective activation of participants alone. Under such circumstances planners should not pull out all the stops to follow consensus-building strategies. Given a specific context, the conventional planning ideology can be at least as ethical as communicative ideology. Both can complement each other in varying combinations as the quality of planning processes and its outcomes are contingent upon the particular context of space, time, and people.

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