

GIVE DIRECTION, MAKE SPACE!

NOVEMBER 2021



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Note: The Dutch version of the advisory report contains an additional analytical section.





SUMMARY

In the coming years, the Netherlands will need to undergo far-reaching physical changes. That will be necessary so as to tackle the major challenges that the country faces, such as the transition to a sustainable energy supply, a circular economy, and a sustainable food system. Tackling those challenges must also be combined with confronting major spatial challenges, such as housing construction. Is the spatial planning approach to these developments sufficient for undertaking this major transformation of the country in an effective manner? The Council for the Environment and Infrastructure ('Rli') does not think so. There are major deficiencies as regards both substance and process (governance). In the past, choices concerning the substance and process of spatial planning were made for understandable reasons, but the current (transition) challenges impose different demands.

This advisory report analyses the deficiencies in spatial management, and offers six recommendations for remedying them. The deficiencies do not call for amending legislation, for rebuilding the entire administrative structure of the country, or for 'going back to old times'. What they *do* call for are new forms of management in which the various tiers of

government choose a role that fits the substantive challenges of today that arise from the spatial (transition) challenges. Challenges that call for a more directing role on the part of the authorities, but at the same time also for greater participation and engagement on the part of the public and those closely involved. Challenges that require greater collaboration between public authorities, with each operating not only on the basis of its own responsibility but also with respect for the responsibility of the other. Challenges that recognise the need for cohesion between the policy tasks at the different tiers of government, cohesion that is needed not only to solve the problems but also to be understandable for the citizen. Challenges that require public authorities to dare to call one another to account. The existing range of instruments is adequate for this purpose, but it must above all be utilised differently.

The Council's recommendations draw on numerous recent studies and reports. We do not profess to have come up with entirely different insights, but we do aim to bring together many of the pre-existing views and relate them to one another, as well as adding some missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. This report focuses on the importance of (spatial) integrality, the deployment of design capability, civic engagement, implementation capability, and broad prosperity as a perspective for dialogue between national government and the regions. This can help to bring closer the spatial reconstruction of the Netherlands that ensues from the spatial (transition) challenges. That is not a 'quick fix', but it is necessary.

Analysis: current spatial planning is insufficiently equipped for dealing with major challenges

For this advisory report, we carried out an analysis of the way space is currently managed in the Netherlands. The picture that emerges is that over the past twenty years national government has been managing the overall spatial planning of the Netherlands to a lesser extent. However, other public authorities are insufficiently equipped with the knowledge, finances, and capacity needed to tackle spatial challenges effectively. An integrated spatial assessment of interests at national level has given way to policymaking at sectoral level. Moreover, spatial planning as a whole has become increasingly process-oriented, with hardly any public debate on the issue of what kind of country the Dutch can live in, and want to live in. As a result, space in the Netherlands is being ordered and designed less and less on the basis of vision and imagination, and increasingly arises almost by chance from the confusing maze of consultation structures in the Dutch 'polder model' and from the struggle between sharply competing sectoral interests. Moreover, civic engagement and support are often problematic: the public are involved too little or too late in plans for their physical environment, become disillusioned by their lack of impact, and sometimes even cease their involvement entirely. As a result, the spatial choices that are ultimately made are often either fragmented and sectoral (for example housing construction), or lacking in direction and decisiveness (for example nature protection and sustainable agriculture). In addition, there is insufficient implementation capability so as to ensure that spatial plans are actually carried out. This is not only the case in urban areas but especially in rural



areas, where problems are piling up and implementation capability has been decreasing over the past two decades.

Continuing on the current track is not an option

The Netherlands is facing major societal challenges regarding climate, energy, housing, nature and agriculture, all of which will have a spatial impact. This means that the Dutch landscape is on the eve of a drastic transformation. Continuing on the current track towards effectuating that transformation is not an option. Firstly, the hitherto standard political-administrative strategy is no longer sufficient, often involving as it does short-term solutions and the postponement of far-reaching decisions for fear of being held responsible for them. The Netherlands consequently finds itself at a standstill from the spatial point of view. Secondly, the country can no longer get away with proceeding in this fashion. The Council of State and the European Commission are increasingly clamping down on the failure to achieve goals in the areas of climate, water, and nature. Finally, current practice is also nearing its limits in social terms. The public are increasingly voicing their dissatisfaction. The spatial challenges that arise from the necessary transitions have major consequences for design of the day-to-day physical environment: tackling them will only be successful if there is broad public support.

A change of course in spatial planning is therefore urgently needed. It is necessary for the various spatial challenges to be related to one another more effectively; for national government to aim for achieving specific goals and to support the regions; for parties to dare to make use of the existing,

robust spatial instruments and to call one another to account when goals are not achieved. An imaginative design approach is also needed so as to outline an optimistic and attractive vision for the future. The urgent major spatial challenges of our time offer an excellent opportunity not only for making the Netherlands a better functioning, more sustainable and future-proof country, but also for ensuring that the environment in which its inhabitants live becomes more beautiful and attractive.

Recommendations for a change of course

1. Reinforce substantive management of national physical environment policy

In its current form, the government's National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI) does not provide enough support for regional authorities to be able to tackle the many challenges in the physical environment. We therefore recommend that a 'NOVI-plus' be drawn up, with the existing NOVI being supplemented with clear national goals and choices that are viewed in conjunction with one another, with room for regional elaboration and a reduction in the number of national programmes. National government should where possible translate the national goals for the physical environment into goals for each province, and monitor progress towards those goals. Furthermore, ensure that there is a conceptual spatial foundation underlying national policy for the physical environment and restore the government's design capability in order to achieve this. Physical environment policy must also create a stronger connection between the spatial domain and developments within



society. In our opinion, the diversity of areas in the Netherlands requires appropriate spatial management. The concept of 'broad prosperity' will be helpful in this regard.

2. Strengthen national government's role in directing spatial management

Given the major spatial challenges (and the way they are interconnected), the directing role of national government must be strengthened. Regardless of any possible rearrangement of ministerial responsibilities with regard to the physical environment, we believe that the above implies that spatial planning should be included as the direct responsibility of a minister in his/her portfolio, and thus reflected in the name of the ministry concerned. That minister's task will be to position spatial challenges and choices on the government's agenda and to further intensify the necessary inter-ministry collaboration. With that in mind, the minister will need to have instruments at his/her disposal, such as a dedicated budget for facilitating spatial choices. Furthermore, State-owned land must be utilised more effectively for societal ends, and the possibilities for a national land bank should be explored. In this way, the impact of the NOVI on the spatial and financial choices arrived at by other ministries can be increased. In addition, establish a sub-council of the Council of Ministers so as to prevent decisions about the physical environment having insufficient (spatial) cohesion. Finally, we recommend that national government and other public authorities actually utilise the powers they have under the Environment and Planning Act in order to manage urgent spatial challenges.

3. Strengthen the middle tier of government: provinces and regions

The region is an important scale level for the cohesive approach to spatial challenges. To strengthen this approach, we do not advocate structural changes in public administration, but rather customisation and differentiation in the relationship between province and region. This means that in some cases – especially when a region coincides with the territory of a province – the province will be the tier of government that takes the lead in tackling regional challenges, while in other cases the initiative will lie with regional partnerships. This requires provinces to have much greater control within the spatial domain, in terms of both substance (when the sum total of all regional plans and their spatial consequences is concerned) and process (when coordination between regions and guaranteeing integrality within the regions is involved). The province must also become the commissioning party in the case of a new round of land redevelopment for the rural area, in cooperation with parties such as farmers, land management organisations, landowners, and the water boards. We also recommend the establishment of integrated regional consultation bodies, which would consider the various spatial challenges in combination. These bodies should be allocated three tasks: to ensure that the sectoral plans for the region are coordinated, to consult on where they might take over tasks from the sector consultation bodies, and to draw up an integrated area plan.

4. Increase decentralised implementation capability

Provinces, regions, and municipalities are struggling with insufficient implementation capability due to a lack of capacity and knowledge and inadequate budgets. To overcome this problem, we recommend investing



in implementation capability. For a start, national government should make additional funds available to decentralised authorities for tackling new spatial challenges, such as the transition to a climate-resilient physical environment. We also recommend that government budgets for the regions should be decompartmentalised, so that they become available to each region as a single budget. This may require amendment of the Government Accounts Act. Opportunities for increasing implementation capability include working with flexible pools of experts. Further investment should be made in knowledge development at regional level. Finally, national government will need to structurally focus its national knowledge infrastructure to a greater extent on the issues confronting the decentralised authorities.

5. Take civic engagement seriously

The major (transition) challenges – which will necessitate large-scale spatial interventions in the physical environment in the coming years – make it necessary to take civic engagement seriously. We recommend organising new forms of such engagement. First and foremost, this means dialogue with the public at national level about the urgency and goals of the major transition challenges. Secondly, it involves civic engagement on a regional scale, with public authorities, the public, businesses, and other parties putting their heads together about possible and desirable images and visions for the future. That does not alter the fact that participation should always be followed by normal democratic decision-making at national, provincial, or municipal level. This ensures the democratic legitimacy of

the decisions taken. Among other reasons, this is important because civic engagement often involves only part of the public.

6. Utilise one another's qualities in cooperation with the market, corporations, and implementing organisations

Spatial developments are more complex than before. Various claims must be accommodated within much more limited space, where the sustainability transitions must also be given shape. Given these circumstances, it will be necessary to discover (once more) an effective means of ensuring optimal cooperation between the authorities, the market, housing corporations, and implementing organisations. Among other things, this requires making greater use of one another's knowledge, capital and capacity, an open attitude on the part of the parties involved, stable and reliable commissioning on the part of authorities, and transparency on the part of project developers about the conditions under which a project is achievable. National government must become more aware that significant implementation capability lies with organisations such as nature and landscape managers, and must enable these parties to fulfil their implementation role in the best possible manner.

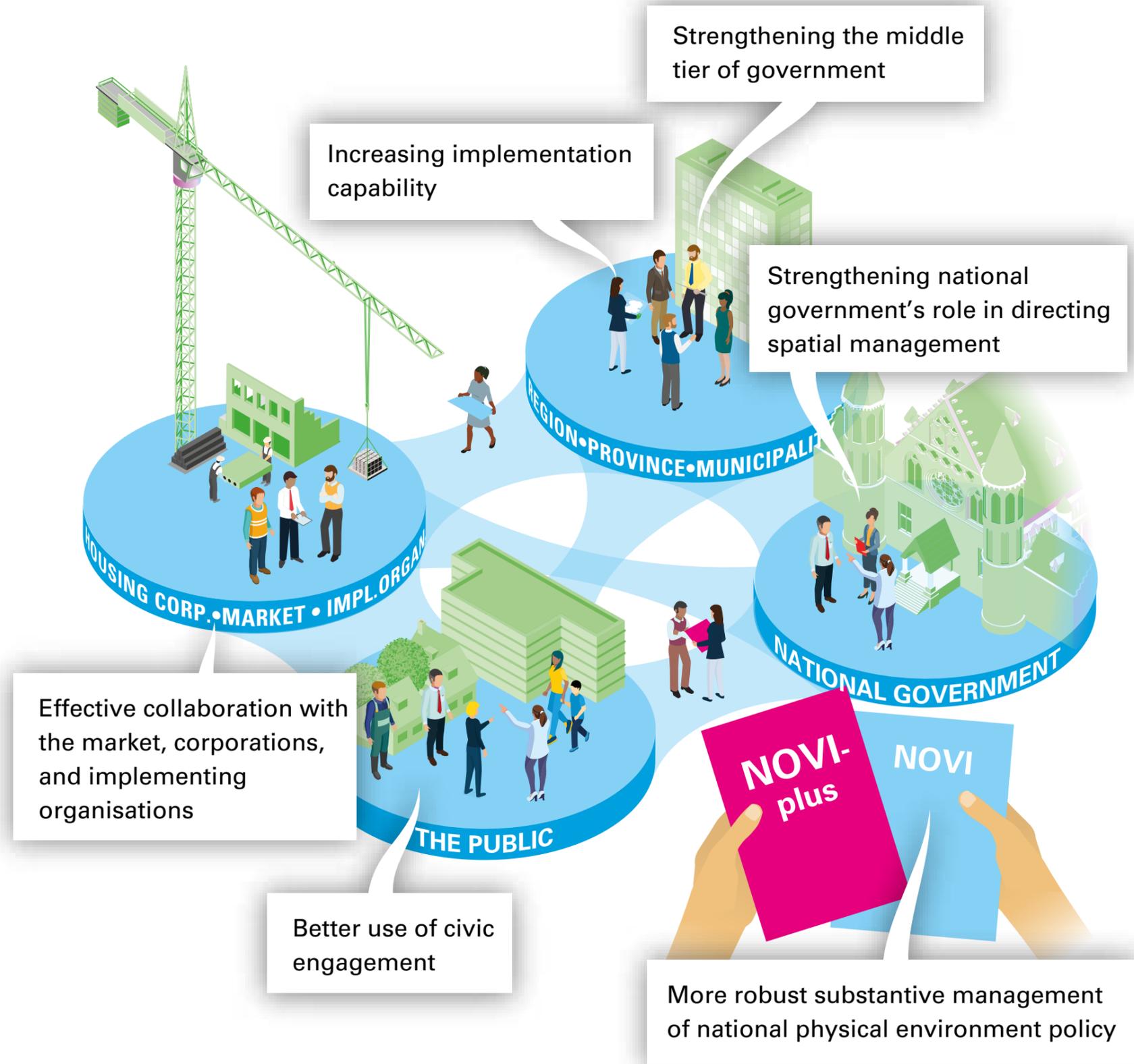


Figure 1: Summary of recommendations

<p>More robust substantive management of national physical environment policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw up a 'NOVI-plus' • Ensure imaginative approach and conceptual foundation underlying national physical environment policy • To that end, restore the government's design capability • Focus more on future value (including soil and water) and experiential value for citizens • Apply broad prosperity as the basic principle in <i>all</i> regions
<p>Strengthening national government's role in directing spatial management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include spatial planning as the direct responsibility of a minister and have that reflected in the name of the ministry concerned • Make a national budget available for spatial planning • Use state-owned land for societal purposes and explore possibilities for a national land bank • Aim for greater cohesion between spatial challenges; set up a sub-council • Actually utilise powers and instruments from the Environment and Planning Act
<p>Strengthening the middle tier of government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provinces: play a stronger role in spatial planning policy • Allow for differentiation and customisation in the relationship between province and regions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start voluntary pilot projects with 'region provinces' - As provinces, concur with the regions within the territory • Establish integrated regional consultation bodies, which would consider challenges in combination in an area plan • National government: be physically present in <i>all</i> regions
<p>Increasing implementation capability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure greater staff capacity: flexible pool and capacity sharing • Provide financial resources for additional tasks and explore possibilities for decompartmentalising budgets • Develop knowledge of the regions and gear national knowledge infrastructure towards the regions • Provinces: initiate new round of land redevelopment of rural areas
<p>Better use of civic engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new forms of engagement: national citizen panels + participation in regional design process • Ensure civic engagement is always followed by democratic decision-making • Make expectations explicit in advance • Involve socio-cultural history and residents' physical environment values when drawing up plans
<p>Effective collaboration with the market, corporations, and implementing organisations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise qualities of developers, corporations, and implementation partners for implementation • Required: transparency about feasibility, commitment, and effective commissioning on the part of public authorities



Recommendations





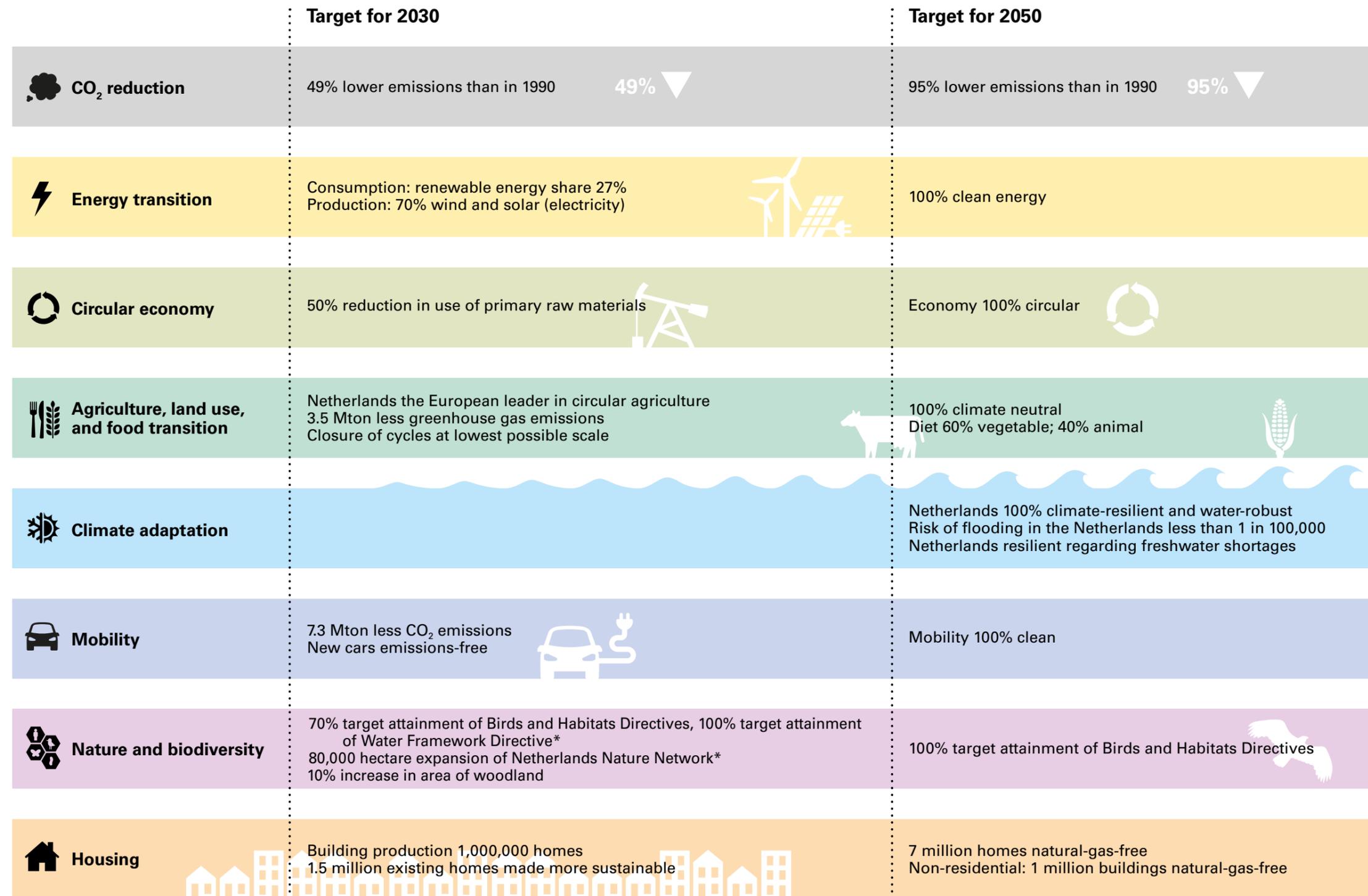
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Natural systems are under great pressure worldwide, and this is also apparent in the Netherlands. The climate is changing rapidly, sea levels are rising, and in many places the land is subsiding. Raw materials are becoming depleted and biodiversity is declining. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent, with periods of drought followed by flooding, and there is an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gases.

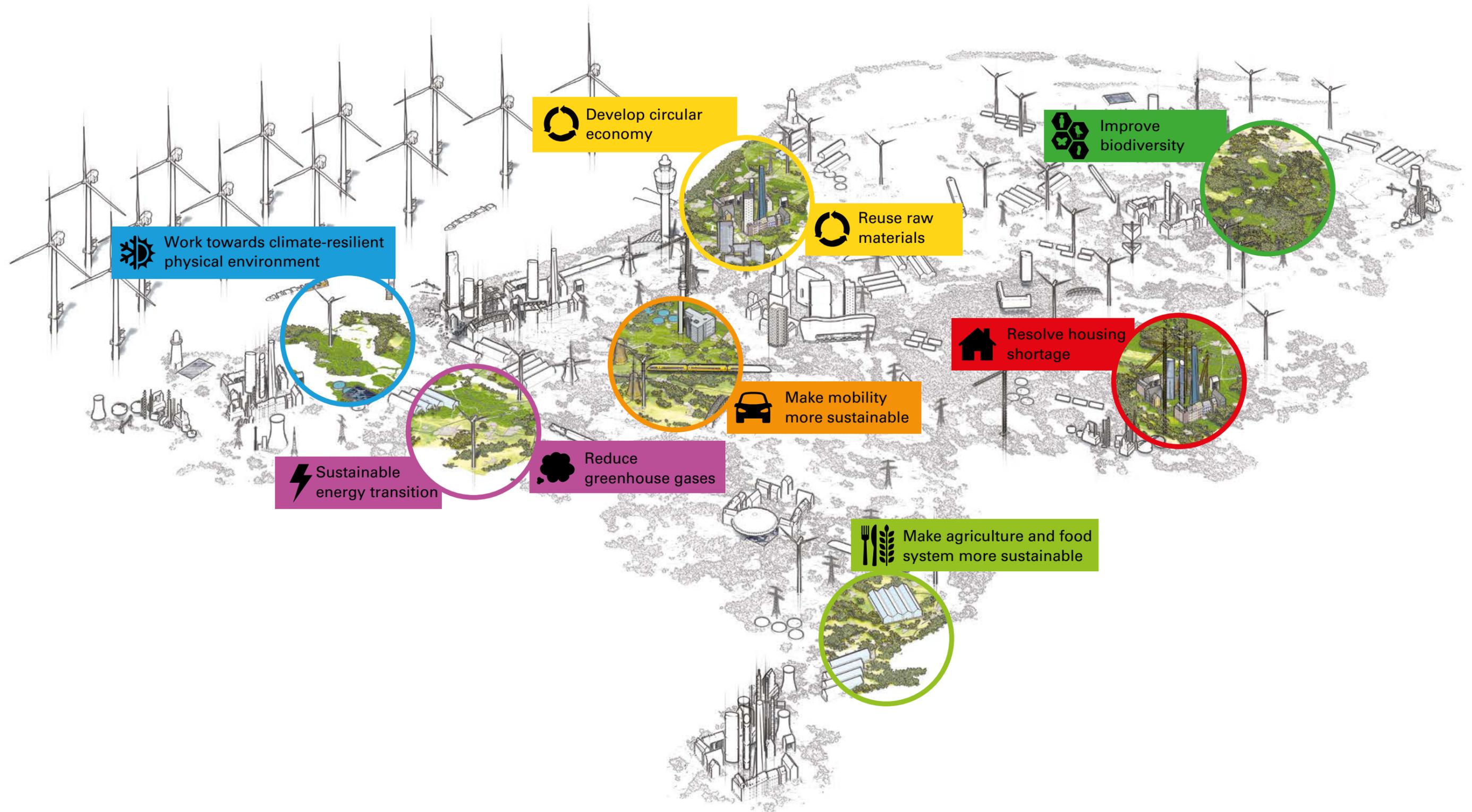
In order to halt or where possible reverse these trends, the Netherlands faces major *transition challenges*, such as switching to a sustainable energy supply, developing a circular economy, and making the food system more sustainable. In addition to these urgent transition challenges, the country also faces major *spatial challenges* in the areas of housing, working, water, and green space. Many people are currently unable to find somewhere to live, and in various places the physical environment in towns and villages needs to be adapted to cope with extremes of weather. Besides all this, deterioration in the quality of water and of nature must be reversed. These challenges are interrelated and cannot therefore be viewed in isolation from one another. All of them are urgent and tackling them will inevitably have a spatial impact. In order to tackle this entire package of challenges, the Dutch government has committed itself to substantial targets for 2030 and 2050; see figure 2.

Figure 2: National targets for meeting the major challenges in the physical environment



* This target is to be achieved by 2027 rather than 2030.

Figur 3: Challenges in the physical environment



A great deal needs to be done in the next eight years to meet the national targets for 2030 and to stay on track towards meeting those for 2050. This is because the Netherlands is in fact behind schedule in tackling many of the challenges. For example, although emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases are decreasing, it is expected that major additional steps will be necessary to achieve the target of 49% reduction compared to 1990 by 2030 (PBL et al., 2020). The transition to a circular economy is still in its infancy (PBL, 2020a), while the goals for the agricultural transition have hardly even been translated into specific policy measures (PBL, 2020a). It is also uncertain whether the housing construction target for 2030 can be met (IBO Ruimte, 2021). In that regard, additional housing construction will not solve the problem of all those seeking a home; among other things, taxation and/or financial measures may also be required.

It is clear that in the coming years the authorities will need to make increased efforts to meet the colossal challenges that lie ahead as regards the physical environment. This will mean the Netherlands undergoing fundamental physical changes in the near future, opening up a new chapter in the ongoing transformation of the landscape. A parallel with the reconstruction period after World War II quickly comes to mind. Back then, the Netherlands was also facing a major building and renovation challenge. A big difference between then and now, however, is that this time the physical alteration of the physical environment is taking place in a fully utilised and rezoned country. In short, we are dealing with a phase of remodelling rather than reconstruction (Janssen, 2021a). The question that

arises is whether all the desired changes can be accommodated spatially. Moreover, if this process is not handled and implemented properly, the country and its landscape will suffer as a result, with the quality of the physical environment then being jeopardised even further. A great deal is therefore at stake.

Despite the urgency of the spatial challenges, politicians have so far often displayed a lack of decisiveness: far-reaching decisions are not taken and there is a tendency only to take action when things go wrong. At the same time, critical members of the public are increasingly making their voice heard. They express dissatisfaction with developments in the environment in which they live, for example in the form of housing demonstrations, protests against wind turbine construction, and lawsuits against the State regarding climate policy.

The problems outlined here raise the issue of whether spatial planning is sufficiently equipped to tackle major challenges and also work on an attractive – or more attractive – Netherlands. The uncertainty about this is the reason for this advisory report by the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli).



1.2 The question to be answered in this report

The intention of this advisory report is to take stock of what is needed to bring about a careful and energetic approach to the spatial (transition) challenges facing the Netherlands. We focus not only on what is needed at the level of national government; we consider all tiers of government, as well as private and civil-society organisations, that are involved in the formulation, management, and implementation of spatial planning policy. The question we wish to answer is twofold:

- Do the frameworks for national spatial planning policy, with the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment and the Environment and Planning Act, provide a sufficient basis for action on the part of national government, the decentralised authorities, and other parties involved in spatial planning?
- What improvements are needed in the areas of governance, administrative organisation, implementation capability, civic engagement, and cooperation so as to ensure that the various tiers of government make the spatial choices necessary to create a high-quality, future-proof physical environment?

1.3 Terms and definitions

In this advisory report, the terms ‘spatial planning’, ‘land-use planning’, ‘spatial development’, and ‘physical environment policy’ appear. In some contexts these terms are interchangeable, but they often do not have exactly the same meaning.

‘Spatial planning’ is the process whereby space in the Netherlands is allocated, developed, and protected so as to achieve the best possible reciprocal arrangement of society and space. ‘Land-use planning’ means the actual design of space. ‘Spatial development’ concerns changes and trends that can be observed within the physical environment. Finally, with the arrival of the Environment and Planning Act (2016), ‘physical environment policy’ is the new umbrella term used to refer to all policy for the physical environment: in addition to spatial planning policy, for example, it also refers to policy for the spatial aspects of mobility and the environment.

1.4 Structure of the report

This advisory report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a brief history of Dutch national spatial planning, which has lost much of its significance since the 1990s. We argue that continuing with the current passive method of managing space is not an option in view of the major national transition and spatial challenges that lie ahead.

In Chapter 3, we list the most important substantive deficiencies in the national management of space. We argue that the limited space in our country demands clarity regarding the direction in which the country will develop. At the moment, national spatial planning policy does not provide enough of such clarity.

In Chapter 4, we survey the most important issues in the process of managing space: the governance at the level of the different tiers of



government. We shed light on how management of space is organised by national government, the regions, and the decentralised authorities.

In Chapter 5, we formulate a number of recommendations on the basis of our analysis of the problem. These are directed mainly at national government, but partly also at the decentralised authorities and market parties.





2 DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF NATIONAL SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE NETHERLANDS

What are the long-standing qualities of Dutch spatial planning? What developments have taken place since the 1990s and how do things currently stand? In this chapter, we argue that national spatial planning has lost a great deal of its significance since the 1990s. Continuing with the current method of managing space is not an option, certainly not in view of the major national transition challenges that need to be tackled.

2.1 A long tradition of comprehensive, integrated spatial planning

The Netherlands has a long tradition of national, integrated spatial planning. National spatial planning memoranda setting out principles and concepts for the spatial development of the Netherlands formed the guideline for post-war government policy. Sectoral synergetic interests such as the demand for housing and food have traditionally acted as

levers for achieving spatial planning goals. Public housing, for example, created large numbers of homes at sites selected through spatial planning. By safeguarding space for agricultural production, the agricultural sector helped to preserve open space in the ‘Green Heart’ of the country (WRR, 1998; Zonneveld, 2018; Denkwerk, 2020). The heyday of national spatial planning took shape through the national spatial memoranda.

*‘The Netherlands is a man-made country. ... It’s also very well made.’
(IenM, 2013, p. 3)*

Various iconic structures produced by Dutch spatial planning are still familiar, for example the Randstad conurbation in the west of the country and the Green Heart, the mainports, the Delta Works and the Delta Plan, the national buffer zones, the IJsselmeer polders, varied residential environments, land consolidation, and land redevelopment (see the *Canon van de ruimtelijke ordening*, IenM, 2013). It is to this that the Netherlands owes its international reputation in the field of spatial planning.¹

2.2 The 1990s: a turning point

Since about 1990, the importance of national spatial planning has been decreasing. The societal sectoral interests that have traditionally been synergised with spatial policy are increasingly disappearing (WRR, 1998). For a long time, for example, (social) housing construction was a means for

¹ For the history of spatial planning in the Netherlands, see *inter alia* De Klerk & Van der Wouden, 2021; Lörzing, 2021; Interdepartementaal beleidsonderzoek Ruimtelijke Ordening [IBO Ruimte], 2021; Van der Wouden, 2015.

implementing spatial planning, but this is disappearing due to liberalisation of the housing market. Agriculture too is ceasing to be a synergetic interest. The agricultural sector is intensifying and thus becoming less land-based, while the food market is becoming more international. Agriculture is increasingly driven by European policies. With the disappearance of these ‘synergetic interests’, national spatial planning policy is losing not only its relevance but also its impact. The guiding influence of classic concepts such as the Randstad and the Green Heart is in sharp decline.

2.3 From 2000 on: a further reduction of national government involvement

In the two decades since the 1990s, the power base of national spatial planning has declined further. Various developments have played a role in this; see Table 1.

Table 1: Interconnected developments in spatial planning since the 1990s

Decentralisation	Responsibilities transferred from national government to municipalities and provinces
Privatisation	Responsibilities transferred to the market
Spatial strategy	Loss of synergetic interests From vision-oriented to process-oriented spatial planning From permissive planning ² to development-based planning
Finances	Run-down of national budgets
Internationalisation	Transfer of control ‘upstairs’ (EU/international conventions)

² I.e. all forms of land use are permitted as long as they are not made impossible by planning regulations.



To begin with, internationalisation of the economy (free trade) and the emergence of a neo-liberal management philosophy play a role. At the beginning of the 21st century, it seemed that involvement in spatial planning by national government was no longer necessary; the prevailing idea was that the Netherlands had been 'completed'. Decentralised authorities were supposed to be able to manage the smaller-scale changes in spatial function in town and country on their own (Janssen, 2021b). Belief in centralist and framework-setting national planning began to wane (Ecorys, 2020, p. 27). *Decentralisation* made its appearance, coupled with the withdrawal of national government from spatial planning policy, for example in the fields of housing, nature, and industrial estates and business parks. Decentralised authorities were given more and more freedom regarding policy. 'Decentralised when possible' became the new slogan (IBO Ruimte, 2021, p. 25).

At the same time, *privatisation* gained a firmer foothold in spatial planning, in the form of public-private partnerships. Public area development was no longer the preserve of municipal engineering offices and design departments. Market parties came to play an increasingly important role, including in large-scale housing construction projects. Joint development companies were set up in which the municipality, developers, and corporations worked together.

In the new *spatial strategy* that was thus emerging, the role of the authorities shifted from being 'vision-oriented' to 'process-oriented'. Permissive planning (with an emphasis on what is and is not permitted and

preventing undesirable developments) gave way to development-based planning (with an emphasis on development, whereby more attention came to be paid to the opportunities that could be exploited by market parties through project development in an area).

Financially too, national government's involvement in spatial planning was progressively reduced, and national budgets for spatial development were scaled down. Finally, the growing influence of *EU policy* has had its effect on national government's room for control, including in the field of spatial planning. Partly because European policy is sectoral, including the regulations to which the Netherlands is bound, Dutch spatial planning policy became more sectoral in nature (Lörzing, 2021).

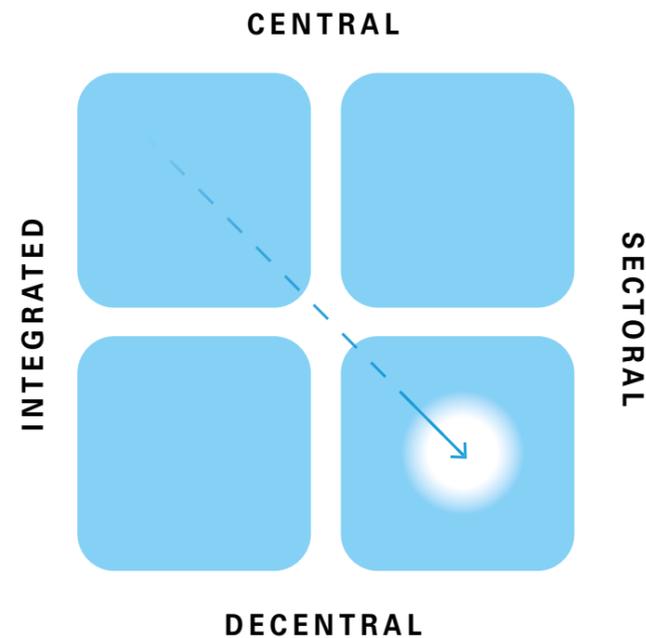
In 2010, these developments culminated in the partial dismantling of the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM). Some of the tasks of the Minister of Housing and Spatial Planning were divided up among other ministries.

2.4 The current state of Dutch spatial planning

In the past twenty years, national government has therefore increasingly relinquished control over spatial planning (Lörzing, 2021). Successive rounds of decentralisation in recent decades have led to spatial planning in the Netherlands being organised less and less nationally and more and more regionally. What was once under one roof at the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment has been broken up and allocated



Figure 4: Shift in management of spatial planning since the 1990s



Source: Denkwerk, 2020

to different ministries, with the integrated assessment of interests giving way to policies aimed at individual sectors (see Figure 4). There has been a shift from managing spatial planning on the basis of a vision and synergetic interests to more process-oriented management, in which judicial frameworks have the upper hand. There is nowadays hardly any public debate on the issue of what kind of country the Dutch can live in, and want to live in, and what future they see for the physical environment. In the view of the parties consulted for this advisory report, spatial planning has taken on a much more process-oriented character, with administrative and policy coordination as the main guideline. Everyone must have a say in it. Ticking

boxes and coordination gradually lead to inflation of the actual product: the desired integrated spatial solution. Instead of integrality, the emphasis is on coordination, with a suboptimal result. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 further exacerbated this, with public authorities cutting back on spatial planning and design services and/or departments, and spatial plans being delayed or downsized.

In practice, the approach that has thus developed is that space in the Netherlands is designed less and less on the basis of vision and imagination, and increasingly arises almost by chance from a confusing maze of consultation structures in the Dutch 'polder model' and from the struggle between sharply competing sectoral interests. Moreover, civic engagement and support are often problematic, certainly at supra-local scale: members of the public regularly become frustrated with the only slight impact of their input or the fact that they are involved at too late a stage of the planning process, and they sometimes cease their involvement entirely. Solutions to major spatial challenges as formulated within the current spatial planning system are either fragmented and limited to only a single sector (for example housing construction), or lack direction and decisiveness, resulting in no real progress being made (for example protection of nature and more sustainable agriculture) (Denkwerk, 2020). In addition, there is increasingly often insufficient implementation capability at the level of decentralised authorities so as to ensure that spatial plans are actually carried out. That problem applies above all in rural areas, where problems are piling up and implementation capability has been decreasing over the past two decades. In the next two chapters, we will explore these



problems in greater detail: the inadequate substantive management of space (Chapter 3) and the poor governance of implementation (Chapter 4).

2.5 The urgency of more robust management of space

The question is whether it is a bad thing that (national) spatial planning in the Netherlands has lost much of its significance. Our answer is a definite ‘yes, it is’. Various developments call for a different and more robust approach to managing space.

Firstly, the Netherlands will need to undergo radical physical changes in the coming years in connection with the major transition issues that need to be addressed *right now*: climate change, the switch to a sustainable energy supply, the development of a circular economy, and making the food system sustainable. Finding solutions will inevitably have implications for the country’s spatial planning. CO₂ sequestration in peatland meadow areas or the creation of new forests will occupy additional space. More extreme weather events – flooding alternating with periods of drought – necessitate more robust soil and water systems with space for additional water buffering (Adriaan Geuze in Sjerps, 2021). And in addition there are the ‘traditional’ spatial challenges that require space, for example housing construction, whereby decentralised authorities have in recent years been unsuccessful in meeting the pressing need for more new homes (IBO Ruimte, 2021). There is a significant risk that the 2030 national goals for urbanisation and the goals for rural areas will not be met. That there

is ‘plenty of work to be done’, as concluded in the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021, p. 60), is putting it mildly.

Secondly, the current political-administrative strategy (or rather, elements thereof) for tackling the major challenges has ceased to be effective. Seeking mainly technical and short-term solutions is no longer sufficient for tackling the major challenges in the physical environment, nor is searching for legal loopholes (trying to satisfy all interests) or postponing far-reaching decisions for fear of being held responsible for them. In this way, the planning machine has been kept running for a long time without any major adjustments being made. Opting for this risk-averse strategy is understandable from a political point of view. It is not attractive for administrators to make difficult choices whose costs are felt now but whose benefits will only become apparent in the longer term. It is very likely, after all, that they will be punished for it at the next elections. There is now a growing awareness, however, that this way of dealing with the major spatial challenges no longer works. Society is increasingly burdened by the sectorally fragmented, sluggish approach to tackling spatial challenges. The deadlock regarding various dossiers (nitrogen, climate, the housing shortage) is causing social, ecological, and economic damage (building projects not going ahead, people not being able to find a home, the harm done to nature, etc.). Failure to act from an integrated spatial perspective is costing society more and more (tax) money.

Thirdly, it would seem that the Netherlands can no longer ‘get away with’ the current approach in court. The Council of State intervenes (for



example by declaring the Nitrogen Action Programme ('PAS') invalid in 2019) and the European Commission sets limits (for example by deciding to tighten up the CO₂ reduction target for 2030 from 49% to 55%). There is growing public demand for the major challenges to be addressed in a more interconnected manner and for structural measures to be put in place with a view to a sustainable future. In the absence of government management – or reticence on the part of the government – as regards spatial planning, judicial regulation (national and European) is gaining the upper hand. The climate lawsuit brought by the Urgenda foundation concerning failure to achieve the CO₂ reduction targets and the ruling by the Council of State on the approach to tackling the nitrogen problem are examples of what the country may still need to deal with. The government has already been taken to court for failing to meet the climate and nature targets (Natura 2000), and the same is likely to happen as regards the targets pursuant to the Water Framework Directive.³ In addition, the European Commission has far-reaching plans within the framework of the 'Green Deal' (such as the biodiversity strategy and the Farm2Fork strategy) that further tighten up the international obligations that the Netherlands must meet.

Finally, it is not only the courts but also society in general that is setting limits. Members of the public are increasingly resisting spatial plans and interventions in their immediate physical environment and are demanding government action in a multitude of areas, for example in the form of the local protest campaigns against wind turbines in recent years and the

³ Even though water quality has improved considerably in many places, the Netherlands risks not achieving all the targets of the Water Framework Directive by 2027 (PBL, 2020b).

national housing demonstration in September 2021. This kind of civil protest and activism must be taken seriously. Government ambitions in the area of major spatial challenges can only succeed if they are able to connect with the public (PBL, 2020a; 2021a; Chief Government Architect Floris Alkemade in Muskee, 2021). This applies all the more to the spatial changes required in order to adapt to climate change and the energy transition, given that these have major consequences for the design of the physical environment and a tangible impact on people's daily lives. If people experience these changes to the landscape as deterioration, then civil resistance will ensue. And if the (economic) benefits and costs are unequally distributed, there will also be opposition. The fact that there are also groups of people for whom change is not happening fast enough (as shown by the Urgenda lawsuits) makes the societal challenge regarding the impending spatial reconstruction of the country even more complex.

In short, current spatial planning is insufficiently equipped to meet the challenges in the physical domain because (1) there are major, urgent issues at hand that will require the country to undergo radical physical changes in the short term; (2) a reticent political-administrative policy strategy is no longer tenable given the deadlock that has arisen in various dossiers; (3) it would appear that in court the Netherlands can no longer get away with the approach adopted so far; and (4) that approach is encountering increasing civil resistance, whereas public support is crucial to the success of major interventions in the physical environment.



2.6 Opportunities and perspectives

There is therefore a great deal at stake where reconstruction of the Netherlands is concerned. What is at stake is the sustainability of Dutch society and the quality of the country's physical environment, within which there must be a place for everyone to reside, work, and live their life. The major reconstruction of the Netherlands must be carried out properly. If the right (integrated) choices are not made, there will be a long-term negative impact on the Dutch landscape and on people's physical environment. A change of course in spatial planning is therefore urgently needed, whereby the various spatial challenges are interconnected more effectively and whereby national government plays a more directing role in achieving goals, and supports the regions in doing so. It is important that an imaginative design approach be deployed so as to outline an optimistic and attractive vision for the future. There is a need for a forward-looking perspective in which the focus is not solely on an intimidating 'must' but also on an inspiring 'can' and 'want' (CRa, 2018).

The different course that we propose does not call for amending legislation, for rebuilding the entire administrative structure of the country, or for 'going back to old times'. But it does call for new forms of management in which the various tiers of government choose a role that fits the substantive challenges of our time that arise from the spatial (transition) challenges. Challenges that call for a more directing role from government, but at the same time also for greater participation and involvement on the part of the public and those closely involved. Challenges that require greater collaboration between public authorities, with each operating not only on

the basis of its own responsibility but also with respect for the responsibility of the other. Challenges that recognise the need for cohesion between the policy challenges at the different tiers of government, cohesion that is needed not only to solve the problems but also to be understandable for the citizen. Challenges that require public authorities to (dare to) call one another to account. The existing range of instruments is adequate for this purpose, but it must above all be utilised differently. This can help to bring closer the spatial reconstruction of the Netherlands that ensues from the spatial (transition) challenges. That is not a 'quick fix', but it is necessary.

The major spatial challenges of our time offer an outstanding opportunity to make the Netherlands not only more functional, sustainable and future-proof, but also more beautiful and attractive. It is still far too soon to 'give up' as regards the spatial appearance of the country. On the contrary, the Dutch man-made landscape is a key element of Dutch identity and a strong, unifying foundation for future-oriented planning (SCP, 2019; WRR, 2021).

'The makeable society may have been consigned to the rubbish heap of the twentieth century, but our topography is makeable, we made it, and it must be maintained.'
(Dirk Sijmons in Mommers, 2017)



2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have provided a brief history of the development of national spatial planning. The Netherlands' rich tradition of national, integrated spatial planning has slowly but surely been eroded since the 1990s, partly as a result of decentralisation of national government tasks and a reduction in national budgets for spatial planning. National government has increasingly relinquished its control of spatial planning. Space in the Netherlands is today hardly ever designed on the basis of vision and imagination. Spatial choices come about within a confused tangle of consultation structures and sectoral interests.

We believe that a change of course in spatial planning is urgently needed, whereby the country's various spatial challenges are interconnected more effectively and whereby national government plays a more directing role in achieving goals, and supports the regions in doing so.





3 SUBSTANTIVE DEFICIENCIES IN SPATIAL MANAGEMENT

In the coming years, the Netherlands will have to undergo a thorough spatial transformation. Given the limited space available, this demands substantive management based on a clear vision as to the direction in which the country will develop. Does the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI), national government's policy framework, provide sufficient guidance for this? In this chapter, we argue that that is not the case. We survey the main substantive deficiencies that are apparent in current national management of spatial planning.

3.1 Insufficient substantive management in the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment

National goals and choices are insufficiently linked to one another and insufficiently differentiated according to sub-areas

The National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI) – recently drawn up by national government in collaboration with public authorities and civil-society organisations (BZK, 2020a) – outlines the long-term physical environment policy of the Netherlands. In that policy

memorandum, the Dutch government sets out the societal challenges facing the country. It describes substantive choices regarding 21 national interests. For instance, the government opts for development, protection, and management of the country's coastal zone and for large-scale energy generation by means of wind farms in the North Sea. However, many choices still need to be worked out at regional level. According to the authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021, p. 8), the NOVI offers not so much a detailed, integrated vision, but rather a framework for arriving at a spatial vision together with decentralised authorities.

'Wherever the choices at national level cannot or not yet be precisely focused within the NOVI itself, or wherever such a focus is not advisable, guidance is issued on the decentralisation of choices via preferred order or strategy and/or by identifying which (regional) process is best suited for arriving at those choices.'
(BZK, 2020a, p. 16)

The fact that this approach was chosen is in itself understandable. After all, many spatial challenges arise on a regional and local scale and are then best dealt with in the areas concerned themselves. However, we see two deficiencies.

Firstly, we note that in the NOVI the national choices and the corresponding goals to be achieved at regional and local level are hardly, if at all, considered in conjunction with one another at national level. It is important

that they are in fact considered in that way. After all, numerous national and international obligations already apply in the form of targets to be met by a particular year, such as -49% greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, the 70% target set out in the Birds and Habitats Directives by 2030, and the targets associated with the Water Framework Directive by 2027. In addition, there are targets for spatial challenges, such as housing construction. All these goals have spatial implications and should therefore be considered in conjunction, viewed from an overarching (physical environment) vision. However, the NOVI pays relatively little attention to these spatial consequences, and in particular to the issue of where goals may clash in the way they are implemented in the physical environment. In other words, the NOVI does not identify where the pain will be felt: what will soon *no longer* be possible in the Netherlands?

Secondly, the national goals are hardly translated, if at all, into goals for sub-areas, such as provinces. Control by national government as to the goals to be achieved for sub-areas is necessary, because not all choices can be left to the regions. In view of the effects of sectoral policies on adjacent domains and interaction between regions, some developments demand that decisions be taken in conjunction with one another and at national level, for example regarding issues that transcend regional borders or that require cohesion between sectoral plans (PBL, 2016a). It is also questionable whether the decentralised tier will succeed in making the required, sometimes far-reaching, choices for tackling the transition challenges and translating the more 'classic' urbanisation issues into appropriate local policy. That point was repeatedly raised as a problem in the interviews we



conducted in the context of this report. If there are major differences in perception of the problems and the desired solutions, there is a danger that local solutions will not be found and that implementation in the region will falter (see also Rli, 2020, p. 29). It is therefore essential for area-specific customisation to be facilitated by means of clear goals and choices at a higher administrative level – i.e. at national level. Clearly defined national policy goals and choices provide indispensable support for local and regional authorities when adopting unpopular measures.

National government's oversight of the decentralised implementation of national spatial planning policy choices is also a point requiring attention. It is important to properly monitor achievement of the NOVI goals at national level and to intervene if they are not met. We will deal with this point in greater detail in Chapter 5.

NOVI Implementation Agenda: accumulation of sectoral national government programmes

The Dutch government has provided the NOVI with an Implementation Agenda setting out how the policy goals in the NOVI are to be achieved. A frequent criticism of the Implementation Agenda is that it is above all a list of instruments that national government wishes to deploy, in particular programmes (IPO, VNG & UvW, 2020). When the Agenda was drawn up, no selection was made as regards the number of national government programmes. This has led to an excess of national and inter-authority programmes in the region, which makes implementation highly complex. There is therefore frustration within municipalities about the numerous

programmes (often also divided up according to sector) that national government expects them to implement (PBL, 2021a).

In rural areas, the accumulation of national government programmes and campaigns is particularly large, more so than in urban areas, as can be seen for example in the Peel region (see box).⁴ Moreover, there is a lack of substantive cohesion between the programmes and associated instruments, which can hamper implementation in actual practice (IPO, VNG & UvW, 2020).

An example of the accumulation of national government programmes: the Peel region

In the Peel region, the following national and inter-authority programmes are ongoing: NOVI area; national Our Landscape Programme; Approach to extending national parks; National Agricultural Soils Programme; Nature Programme; Biodiversity Enhancement Programme; Natura 2000 management plans; National Rural Areas Programme; Regional Energy Strategies Programme; MIRT Programme; Delta Programme; Soil and Subsoil Programme; IBP Vital Rural Areas South-Eastern Sandy Soils; Heritage Action Agenda; Region Deals; Healthy Physical Environment Programme; Housing Deals. Each programme has its own

⁴ It should be noted that some of the programmes in the Implementation Agenda are not programmes in the sense of the Environment and Planning Act. They are knowledge programmes and not actual policy implementation programmes.



ministerial 'sender'. There is hardly any coordination between the various programmes at national level. In the region, the programmes must be coordinated.

3.2 Conceptual poverty and lack of design capability

With the NOVI, the national physical environment policy has been given some new principles (such as 'preventing shifting responsibility to the future or to other locations')⁵ and new consideration principles (such as 'combinations of functions take precedence over single functions'). There are, however, hardly any guiding spatial concepts (such as the former National Ecological Network or the 'compact city' concept). In other words: visions for the future for the desired structure or land-use design of the Netherlands (and within it the regions) are sadly lacking, in our opinion, in the NOVI.

Such spatial visions have recently been presented by external parties (often civil-society organisations and regional coalitions). Some examples are the vision for a future sustainable Netherlands in 2120 produced by Wageningen University (WUR, 2019a), 'Natural Friesland 2050', originating from a coalition of environmental and nature organisations (Friese

⁵ This principle means that physical environment policy choices may not be at the expense of future generations (passing the buck in terms of time) and that interventions in one area must not have a negative impact on other areas (passing the buck in terms of place).

Milieufederatie et al., 2021) and 'The Eternal Source', drawn up by a coalition of parties and a drinking water company (Vitens et al., 2020).

The NOVI contains only a limited number of spatial concepts, for example the 'Urban Network Netherlands' concept, intended to guide national policy in urbanisation strategies (IBO Ruimte, 2021, p. 45; Studiegroep Inrichting Landelijk Gebied, 2021). According to the IBO Ruimte (2021), guiding spatial concepts are also urgently needed for rural areas. The Rli concurs. With convincing spatial concepts, guidance can be provided at national and regional level, thus facilitating the adoption of spatial choices in the region.

Designers play an important role in conceiving and formulating spatial concepts. They are able to integrate different claims on space and to mobilise imaginative capability. There was good reason for involving design firms in drawing up two of the three aforementioned regional concepts and visions for the future. Although it is not the only reason, an important factor for the current conceptual 'vacuity' of national spatial visions (a term coined by Zonneveld, 2001) seems to be that the design capability within public authorities has largely fallen victim to cutbacks. This applies to urbanists, landscape designers, and architects alike. It is precisely from investigative design processes that compelling planning concepts can emerge. Design is, after all, an integrative way of thinking and acting that visualises possible and desirable futures.



3.3 Insufficient attention to future value in national physical environment policy

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the limits of the carrying capacity of the physical environment are in sight, and have sometimes even been exceeded (PBL, 2021a). In particular, the quality of the water, soil, and biodiversity is under great pressure. Government ambitions in the areas of climate, natural systems, nature, environmental quality, and health are not being met, and in many areas there are problems (Royal HaskoningDHV, 2019; PBL, 2020a; Erisman & Strootman, 2021).

According to Buitelaar & Hajer (2021), the situation is so serious us that, if policies and practices remain unchanged, the physical basis of the Netherlands can no longer be taken for granted. In their opinion, the natural preconditions are currently insufficiently decisive for policy regarding the physical environment.

The NOVI, too, fails to adequately reflect the importance of the physical foundations of the country. It does in fact mention the importance of soil and water in several places, especially in relation to urbanisation, land subsidence, peatland meadows, and land use. The NOVI states, for example, that locations that are unfavourable as regards water management or land subsidence (for example in deep polders or on soft soil) must be avoided or their effects mitigated (BZK, 2020a, p. 125). It also notes that in rural areas the equilibrium between land use and the quality of landscape, soil, water, and air must be improved (ibid, p. 135). But the NOVI devotes far less attention to the consequences that developments will have if choices are

not made. In that sense, too little attention is paid to the future value of the physical environment.⁶ The challenge is to connect area development and construction tasks regarding space for housing, working, and living with improvement of the physical foundations.

'The Dutch need to realise that our physical foundations can no longer be taken for granted. Climate change is going to radically alter the form and functionality of our country. The sea level is rising, while the land is subsiding. And as if that is not bad enough, we are already experiencing intense periods of drought and extreme rainfall. This is not an issue that can be tackled at the level of green-blue roofs or paving-free gardens; it is a national challenge. If we allow spatial developments to run their course, agriculture will reach its limits, nature will wither away, and many spatial investments in infrastructure and real estate will need to be written off early. And the investments to "keep our feet dry" will be many times higher.' (Buitelaar & Hajer, 2021)

⁶ Spatial quality is made up of the triad of experiential value, future value, and utilitisation value. Future value involves the future-proofing of space, i.e. its ability to cope with the spatial consequences of changing circumstances (VROM-raad, 2011).



3.4 Insufficient attention to socio-cultural differences between areas

A final aspect that we examined in our assessment of national policy for the physical environment as set out in the NOVI concerns the degree to which attention is paid to the specific qualities of the country's regions and the differences between them.

The NOVI clearly recognises that the Netherlands is a collection of very different areas. The section on the future perspective for the country speaks, for example, of '... a mosaic of areas that are allowed to differ from one another. ... In 2050, the country will have more metropolitan features and qualities than today, but will still have an open and polycentric spatial structure' (BZK, 2020a, p. 19).

The NOVI on regional differences:

'In the past, thinking was too much from the perspective of a single approach everywhere in the country. With the NOVI, we wish to make an explicit distinction between areas. The perceived (cultural-historical) identity and possibilities of an area and appreciation of the characteristics of a region, landscape, town, or village must always be taken into account in the choices to be made.' (BZK, 2020a, p. 74)

Recognition of the pluriformity of areas is also to be found in the basic principles of the NOVI. One of these, for example, is 'a different view, different choices', which focuses on the features and identity of areas. This is not so much about 'how we can accommodate the functions individually

within the country, but about the specific features, identity, and genesis of the Netherlands' (p. 11). The different way of 'looking' is translated into one of the three consideration principles in the NOVI, which states that characteristics and the identity of an area are key points for focus (p. 75).

We endorse the NOVI's view of the Netherlands as a mosaic of different areas, each with its own qualities. It is a polycentric spatial structure: a whole made up of cities large and small, generally well connected to one another, with green areas – large and small – in between. We also wholeheartedly agree that spatial planning must take account of the identity and history of regions.

What we find lacking in the NOVI, however, is attention to the socio-cultural side of the story. It is already noticeable that regional feelings of dissatisfaction have become ever louder in recent years, including on the outer fringes of the polycentric Netherlands (De Voogd, 2013; Van den Berg, 2018; Van den Berg & Kok, 2021). This is clearly apparent, for example, in debate on the major challenges in the areas of climate and energy. There is great pressure on rural areas to accommodate solutions to the transition challenges. The spatial claims of those solutions seem to end up mainly in more sparsely populated regions, because cities have hardly any space for them and the more sparsely populated areas seem to be 'empty'. This leads in some areas to the impression that they are paying for the energy needs of others (PBL, 2021a, p. 52). The landscape in which the people concerned live is changing as a result of the many transition challenges, and this is – understandably – arousing resistance.



In our opinion, it is important for national government to take account not only of the spatial qualities but also the socio-cultural qualities of areas and the differences between them. The whole of the Netherlands is needed in order to tackle the transition challenges, not just a selection of areas. Not every challenge can be resolved within the borders of a particular region, meaning that areas therefore need one another. But it is also the case that the major spatial and other transition challenges are putting pressure on the quality of the physical environment and the Dutch man-made landscape in all areas, and thus on their experiential value. It is important for national government to be mindful of all the country's regions and of places (and people) that fall into the apertures within the urban network (medium-sized cities such as Roosendaal) or fall outside of it (the peripheral areas of the country) (Tordoir & Regioplan, 2015). The NOVI should, in other words, be mindful of how the Netherlands can remain a cohesive country, both spatially and socially (BZK, 2019). This calls for appropriate national management of space. We will deal with this issue more extensively in Chapter 5, arguing for the perspective of broad prosperity.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have listed the most important substantive deficiencies in national management of space. The limited space in the Netherlands demands clarity regarding the direction in which the country will develop. The NOVI offers insufficient clarity. Cohesion in national goals and choices at national level are lacking: not everything can be left to the particular region. In view of the effects of sectoral policies on adjacent domains and

interaction between regions, some developments demand that decisions be taken in conjunction with one another and at national level. National policy on the physical environment devotes too little attention to the future value of the physical environment. Decentralised authorities have too little to go on because national policy lacks guiding spatial concepts and visions for the future. The design capability that can make an outstanding contribution to this has largely fallen victim to cutbacks by the authorities. Finally, the NOVI lacks attention to the socio-cultural aspect of organising the physical environment: how can the Netherlands remain a cohesive country, both spatially and socially?





4 GOVERNANCE DEFICIENCIES

In this chapter, we look at the process side of government management of spatial planning: the governance. What are the main governance deficiencies that make current spatial planning in the Netherlands ill-equipped to address major spatial challenges in a cohesive and integrated manner? We discuss successively the position of national government, the regions, and decentralised authorities. We also consider the significance of civic engagement, public support, and collaboration by the authorities with the market and other civil-society (implementing) organisations.

4.1 National government: insufficient direction of management of space

Compartmentalisation within national government: imbalance between sectoral and integrated approaches

With the NOVI, the Dutch government presents an approach to challenges in the physical environment that focuses on collaboration. The aim is to work as a single government (BZK, 2020a, p. 160): authorities bear joint responsibility for the physical environment.

We note, however, that national government does not always set a good example itself in this regard. In the context of the collaboration referred to, it continues to work in a highly sectoral manner. The current way national government is organised along ministerial (and therefore sectoral) lines contributes to this significantly. Each ministry has its own interests and ambitions, with its own budget. Government resources are compartmentalised (ROB, 2021a; Studiegroep IFV, 2020a; Verdaas & De Zeeuw, 2020). As a result, municipalities, provinces, and water boards experience collaboration with national government in the area of spatial planning as being 'like playing chess on several different boards simultaneously' (IPO, VNG & UvW, 2020). The lack of collegiate management at national level (something that does exist within decentralised authorities) also contributes to this. At national level, ministerial responsibility applies, with each minister being responsible for his or her own domain. This is reflected in the composition of the committees in the House of Representatives, which are organised along the same sectoral lines. Matters that exceed the ministerial responsibility of a single minister are more difficult to deal with effectively. Who is accountable for the cohesive and integrated approach to tackling the major spatial challenges?

It is therefore unsurprising that provinces, municipalities, and water boards are concerned about whether the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) is providing sufficient direction regarding spatial and financial choices (based on the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment) in relation to the policies of other ministries (IPO, VNG & UvW, 2020). Choices at national level are then made not on the basis

of a cohesive forward-looking perspective but are dictated by ministerial, sectoral considerations. Although the ministerial 'potato chip cutter' has always existed, it is now becoming a problem in that decisions with a spatial impact at national level are not weighed up in an integrated manner (as the Ministry of Finance does for the national budget). This links up with the following point.

National government's sectoral approach means that little attention is paid at national level to how different spatial challenges intersect with one another. In order to overcome this, ministries will need to cooperate more effectively. Awareness of that need has been present at national level for quite some time. There are now also cases in which collaboration on shared spatial issues does indeed take place across ministerial boundaries, for example in the Delta Programme or in the 'NOVI areas'. However, existing boundaries are deeply ingrained and not easily crossed (Van der Steen & Scherpenisse, 2020). The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL, 2021b) notes, for example, that the Inter-Authority Vital Rural Areas programme has not succeeded in breaking down the compartmentalisation between ministries, even though an integrated approach is in fact one of the programme's objectives.

*Evaluation of Inter-Authority Vital Rural Areas programme:
'The "integrated" character remains limited to benevolent interest,
without actual removal of the barriers between the different domains.'
(PBL, 2021b, p. 11-12)*



However, a sectoral approach is not always problematic: sometimes an approach from individual sectors is appropriate. A sectoral approach can sometimes enhance effectiveness in the case of issues of limited scope. But especially when large-scale spatial challenges and projects come together in a region, diverging interests often play a role. If these are contained in the portfolios of separate ministers, there is a delaying effect: no one feels ‘owner’ of the challenge as a whole. Opportunities to achieve goals in various fields simultaneously through synergy are then not exploited (Rli, 2019). It is therefore a matter of finding the right balance between a sectoral and an integrated approach. This balance is currently lacking in national government’s approach to tackling spatial issues. We will deal with this problem in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Absence of national government in the regions

Despite the many ongoing government programmes in the individual regions, national government is often insufficiently present. In so far as there is involvement on the part of national government, it is mostly of a sectoral nature, occasional in character, and with little authority to be able to remove any obstacles and take decisions. This applies in particular to issues that transcend the regional scale, where the region does not always have the organisational capability or resources to help initiatives further and/or to overcome vested interests (Rli, 2019). As a result of its limited presence in the regions, national government is not sufficiently aware that municipalities have to deal with a different government official in a different ministry for every issue, and consequently find themselves confronted by

contradictions. These must then be resolved ‘upstairs’ through government consultations, which often take a great deal of time and obstruct the work.

But national government is not only absent from the regions in a material sense (i.e. in terms of manpower). The problem also has a non-material aspect: there is little substantive knowledge at national level about what is of concern in the regions. National government also demonstrates little intrinsic interest in the concerns and needs of the regions (ROB, 2021a). In an evaluation of the Inter-Authority Vital Rural Areas programme, the PBL (2021b) refers to the relationship between national government and the regions as being ‘out of balance’: regions do in fact align their area plans with national policy, but conversely national sectoral plans are hardly at all aligned with the experience, insights, possibilities, and problems in the areas where they need to be implemented. That is however necessary, according to the PBL, because the basic assumption for the relevant Inter-Ministerial programme is that ‘it is the region that needs to take the initiative’. It should be noted that the Inter-Authority Vital Rural Areas programme is in fact taking cautious steps in the right direction, and the parties involved appreciate the link that has been established between national government and the region. The same applies to the Region Deals, in which national government works with regions to reinforce the latter as regards various themes and challenges (LNV, 2021a).

Insufficient use of available Environment and Planning Act ‘tools’

The Environment and Planning Act, which is expected to enter into force in mid-2022, offers a ‘toolkit’ for tackling challenges in the physical



environment. It brings together legislation from various different policy areas. The toolkit can be utilised for various different purposes and in different tiers of government. The Act is also designed to be robust legislation that can be applied regardless of how national government interprets its management role in spatial planning policy (BZK, 2021a). Whether the Act will operate in that way in actual practice is not yet clear, however. The effectiveness of the Environment and Planning Act will to a large extent depend on how the public, businesses, civil servants, and administrators can and do deal with it in practice (Raden voor de leefomgeving en infrastructuur, 2011). Those we consulted in connection with the present report state that it can easily take several years for a new way of working to emerge. That will create tension, because in order to tackle the transition challenges, public authorities need to get down to work right now.

At the same time, it is apparent that authorities do not always make use of the full range of instruments. In the province of North Brabant and in the East Netherlands region, for example, there are problems with groundwater depletion, diminishing supplies of fresh water, the necessary switch to circular agriculture, and deterioration of nature. These problems are interlinked and spatial planning tools are needed to get things moving. Provinces find taking action a complex matter. However, the necessary policy instruments are indeed available: currently in the Rural Areas Development Act and soon in the Environment and Planning Act.

4.2 Regions: important scale spatially but poorly organised administratively

The region is an important scale level as regards tackling spatial challenges. This has to do with the trans-municipality nature of many of these challenges. Professionals in the field often characterise the region as the scale level of spatial planning that is ‘pregnant with solutions’ (Dirk Sijmons in Hajer et al., 2006, p. 32). Many of those we consulted in connection with the present report endorse this ‘integrating’ importance of the regions. The Council for Public Administration (ROB) also recently determined that the regions are an appropriate scale for tackling many of the country’s challenges (ROB, 2021b).

At the same time, however, the regional scale is not well organised administratively. This is a problem that has persisted for a long time, despite the numerous attempts to create regional forms of administration. In the course of the past hundred years, proposals have been made in vain for the establishment of regional municipalities, districts, provinces-new-style, and city provinces (Boogers, 2013; Zonneveld, 2021). The most recent proposal – for ‘urban plus regions’ – was abandoned in 2015.

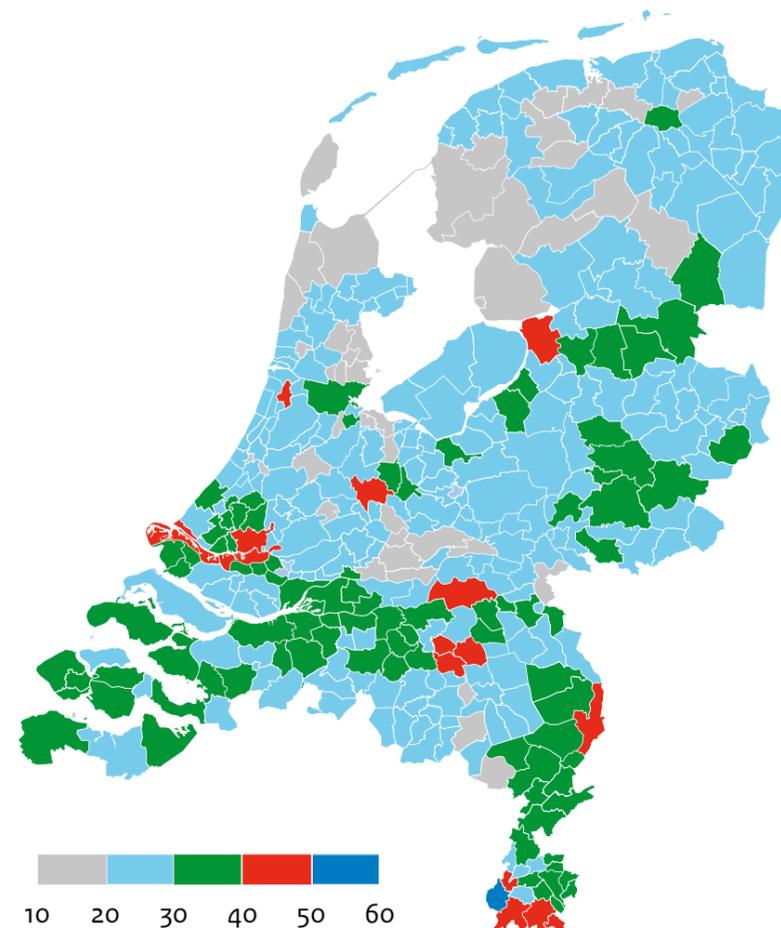
Administrative complexity: patchwork of regional configurations

The absence of a formal fourth tier of government at regional scale has led to a constantly increasing growth in the number of (informal) regional partnerships. In 2020, the Netherlands had a total of 1284 partnerships, an increase of 17% compared to 2017 (Proof adviseurs & KWINK groep, 2020). On average, municipalities participate in more than thirty joint



arrangements and regional consultation bodies (Lelieveldt & Van den Berg, 2021); see Figure 5. Provinces and water boards also often work within regional partnerships (ROB, 2021b). There is good reason why the Inter-Authority and Financial Relations Study Group refers to this as a ‘confused tangle’ of regional divisions (Studiegroep IFV, 2020b, p. 25).

Figure 5: Overview of the number of partnerships in which municipalities participated in 2020



Source: BZK, 2021b; based on data from Proof Adviseurs/KWINK groep

In the spatial domain too, national government has numerous different regional divisions and regional consultation bodies, several within each line ministry. These include the regional consultation bodies for Environment Agendas, Regional Energy Strategy regions, Inter-Authority Programmes, NOVI areas, Region Deals, area agendas for large waterbodies, housing deals, etc. From the perspective of the ministries that deal with spatial issues, these different regional divisions are pleasing, making it possible to select the ideal scale for each issue. This approach is in line with the awareness that there is no single ideal region. Each issue has its own dynamics, network, and scale (VROM-raad, 2008).

In practice, however, the growing number of regional partnerships leads to unworkable situations and difficult decision-making. In addition, national government – which has cut back on knowledge, expertise, and capacity in recent decades – sometimes finds it difficult to staff the various regional consultation bodies. All this puts pressure on the administrative capacity of public authorities, especially municipalities: administrators are run off their feet going from one consultation body to another (ROB, 2021b). Moreover, the division into regions impedes the work of making integrated administrative decisions at regional level. Opportunities to achieve a cohesive approach to various challenges are thus being missed: the many regional consultation bodies ‘do cross one another, but they don’t cross-pollinate one another’ (Henri Kool, interview 2021).



Democratic deficit

Regional partnerships also face problems as regards democratic legitimacy (Van den Berg & Fraanje, 2020; Lelieveldt & Van den Berg, 2021; Studiegroep IFV, 2020b). This is because important decisions and arrangements made at regional level cannot be monitored sufficiently. In the Netherlands, regions are not, after all, a tier of government with an elected representative body that can directly monitor the regional government. Their democratic legitimacy is indirect, namely through the municipal councils.

According to the Council for Public Administration (ROB), the lack of direct democratic legitimacy is in itself already a fundamental issue, but it takes on even more significance ‘... when one considers that many members of municipal and provincial councils claim to have little understanding of – let alone have a real grasp of – the ins and outs of the partnerships in which their municipalities or provinces participate. There is also little engagement on the part of the public’ (ROB, 2021b, p. 27). Due to the increase in the number of regional partnerships, policy decisions are increasingly made in places other than the municipal or provincial councils, and therefore without proper democratic legitimacy. We consider this to be a worrying development.

Lack of effectiveness

Another complication, pointed out by several of the parties we consulted, is that the administrative effectiveness of the regions is limited: arrangements are often non-binding. They often end up needing to be ratified at municipal level, but that is not always straightforward. This is because municipal

councils and regional partnerships are often very remote, which often leaves municipal councils feeling trapped in a web of arrangements to which they have not had input regarding their own interests, or insufficiently so. They then do not have much of a basis for implementing those arrangements (Studiegroep IFV, 2020c).

With this problem in mind, participants in regional consultations often pay more attention to local challenges than to regional and national ones. This is also apparent when regional partnerships are set up: as far as possible, they are based on what is possible and feasible locally, not on what is desirable from a regional perspective. The upshot of all this is that choices are often postponed or result in policy decisions that are suboptimal from a spatial perspective.

4.3 Decentralised authorities: insufficient implementation capability

Provinces, regions, and municipalities are faced, to a greater or lesser extent, by a lack of implementation capacity for addressing major spatial challenges. There are various reasons for this: a shortage of capacity and skills, a shortage of knowledge, and a shortage of funds.

Shortage of capacity and skills within municipalities

Many small and medium-sized municipalities struggle with a lack of sufficiently qualified staff (VNG, 2020). This is, first of all, related to cutbacks during the financial and economic crisis in 2008, which led to a sharp



reduction in the staffing of spatial development departments. In addition, municipalities are faced with an expanding range of tasks that is no longer in proportion to their staff capacity (VNG, 2020). This is due to the decentralisation in 2015, but also to new policy challenges on the municipal agenda, such as the energy transition (VNG, 2020, p. 4).

The shortage of sufficiently qualified staff hampers municipalities as regards implementation of their physical environment policies. That shortage is felt, for example, by municipalities that have insufficient capacity to properly supervise every construction plan or inner-city area transformation, or that are facing new challenges such as the energy challenge (see NUL.20, 2021; Brabants Dagblad, 2021; Verheul & Hoorn, 2021; Stadszaken, 2021).

As became clear from discussions with those we consulted, the lack of capacity is particularly noticeable in smaller municipalities that wish to qualify for state subsidy schemes. Each national programme and each scheme has a separate procedure to follow, with a different format to qualify for financing. Not all municipalities have the capacity for this; see the box.

An example of municipalities' insufficient capacity to apply for subsidy schemes

There are many national government programmes, incentive schemes, or funding arrangements for which municipalities can apply. These include the housing construction incentive, the housing deals, the MIRT grants⁷ and the Inter-Authority Vital Rural Areas programme. It is difficult for municipalities to constantly have to determine what requirements their application must fulfil. Despite applications often concerning one and the same area or project, different sources of funding are utilised. That means that municipalities have to submit something different each time in order to qualify for funding, with a different specification. That requires consultation with different people each time. Smaller municipalities do not always have sufficient capacity to keep up with all the (fragmented) regulations, programmes, and national government funding.

Source: interviews.

The exact number and qualifications of staff that a municipality requires varies according to the particular issue involved. Implementing the energy transition, for example, requires staff with specific expertise. As the Inter-Ministry and Financial Relations Study Group found in 2020, municipalities do not currently have the expertise required to oversee the entire energy system, the system choices, and the related investment decisions. Where construction and housing is concerned, there is above all a shortage

⁷ MIRT: Multi-Year Programme for Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport.



of planning economists (necessary to be an effective commissioning authority) and technical staff (VNG, 2020; interviews). There is also a lack of qualified staff as regards process skills. For example, the new participation policy in the Environment and Planning Act requires civic-engagement skills (VNG, 2020, p. 22). The scarce capacity at decentralised level is currently also burdened by the need to deal with various different spatial challenges. Extra deployment of staff for a particular issue (for example the energy transition) is often at the expense of a different issue (for example housing construction).

The obvious way to meet the capacity requirement is to recruit new staff, but that is no easy matter for municipalities. Almost half the positions in the spatial planning sector are hard to fill (Boonstra, 2021). Apart from recruiting new staff, the lack of capacity can also be remedied by means of collaboration and by hiring in people from outside (market parties, design firms, and consultancy firms), but that does not anchor the knowledge and experience within the municipality's own organisation. A third solution, sharing capacity between authorities, is still underdeveloped. The scarcity of capacity leads to further increasing costs if hiring people from outside is necessary (VNG, 2020, p. 27).

Shortage of knowledge for and about the region

Another factor that severely limits decentralised implementation capability is the lack of subject-specific knowledge, particularly for and about the region. This shortage affects first and foremost decentralised authorities (see Studiegroep IFV, 2020a; VNG, 2020; PBL, 2021a). These often suffer

from a lack of knowledge about the new challenges on the spatial agenda, for example technical knowledge about the heating transition. Knowledge available at national knowledge institutions is not yet reaching regional and local authorities sufficiently. The lack of knowledge is particularly relevant to the challenges in rural areas where 'Land Redevelopment' 2.0' seems inevitable, but knowledge (about design and regional collective policymaking processes, land acquisition, and land consolidation) has drained away with the dismantling of the Rural Areas Department (DLG) and become spread out across various public and private organisations. In many cases, national government does not have specific knowledge regarding regional themes either. Ministries generally work with national figures and averages without any regional breakdown. But the Netherlands is not made up of averages (Caspar van den Berg in Van der Laan, 2021). Decentralised authorities find that national government has little substantive knowledge of what is going on in the regions (Fraanje, 2020; ROB, 2021b).

There are various different reasons for this lack of knowledge. One important factor are the cutbacks at all tiers of government, including the ministries. 'Knowledge can be hired in from outside, was the thinking', resulting in greater dependence on external experts and lobbyists (Tjeenk Willink, 2021). The knowledge and capacity that The Hague still has in house is to a large extent absorbed by internal national government matters and inter-ministerial coordination. And that is immediately the second cause of the lack of knowledge: insufficient intrinsic interest on the part of national government in the concerns and needs of the regions (ROB,



2021b). National sectoral plans are not always sufficiently attuned to the experience, insights, opportunities, and problems in the areas concerned (PBL, 2021b). This does not benefit decentralised implementation capability. A third reason is that in recent years municipalities have been allocated new tasks without expertise and knowledge also being decentralised (VNG, 2020, p. 31; ROB, 2020). Finally, a fourth cause of the lack of knowledge of the regional challenges is that the existing knowledge infrastructure is insufficiently designed for decentralised authorities. National government's priority is to develop knowledge for national policy (PBL, 2013). As a result, a great deal of the knowledge available at national knowledge institutions does not reach regional and local authorities sufficiently.⁸ The national knowledge institutions are very remote from the regions and municipalities (Fraanje, 2020).

Funds are often inadequate and not deployed effectively for area-specific approach

Historically, spatial planning has always had little funding of its own. For a long time, that was hardly a problem because policy was shaped by societal interests, for which funding was in fact available in the budget, such as public housing and agriculture (see Chapter 2). Achieving the goals in the area of spatial planning 'hitched a lift', as it were, with efforts to achieve the goals in these other policy areas. The disappearance of these synergetic interests has also led to the loss of important sources of

⁸ In recent years, steps have been taken to improve this situation, such as the 'Veluwe consultations', involving collaboration between authorities and society in general. The Veluwe consultations focus on translating nationally available knowledge for local and regional needs. This is not, however, a structural adjustment of the knowledge infrastructure.

funding for implementation of spatial planning policy. This is increasingly problematical.

The current flows of funding to the regions from the various ministerial budgets are (a) often insufficient to tackle the regional challenges and (b) often accompanied by formal conditions that impede deployment of the funds for the area-specific approach in the region concerned. This can be explained as follows.

a) Various studies have shown that the financial resources made available to date are insufficient for decentralised authorities to implement and achieve the national targets that have been set (IPO, VNG and UvW, 2020). The most striking shortages are those that concern implementation of the Climate Agreement. For local implementation of the Climate Agreement alone, municipalities, provinces, and water boards will need € 1.8 billion over the next three years: approximately € 1589 million for municipalities, € 108 million for provinces, and € 68 million for water boards (ROB, 2021c). The shortages limit decentralised implementation capability. Municipalities in particular are short of funds (VNG, 2020). A study by the NRC newspaper shows that a third of all municipalities were unable to draw up a balanced budget for 2021 (Ketelaar & Middel, 2021). This means that municipalities have little or no room for investment to tackle challenges in the physical environment, with or without co-financing. To tackle the housing construction challenge, for example, the Dutch government has introduced an incentive scheme amounting to €1 billion. This is subject, however, to the condition of



co-financing, meaning that municipalities that cannot contribute their own share cannot make use of the scheme (VNG, 2020). Moreover, the physical domain, in particular, is feeling the effects of the shortage of funds in municipalities, which is partly the result of overruns of the budgets made available for the challenges in the area of care for young people and the elderly. Municipal expenditure on the physical domain has been substantially reduced in 2011–2020. Since 2015, municipalities have mainly invested any windfall profits from the sale of energy utilities in tackling challenges within the social domain (VNG, 2020; CPB, 2021; Bekkers, 2021).⁹

b) The strict financing rules imposed by national government appear to hinder spending state funds on an integrated area-specific approach. Area-specific arrangements at regional level are a matter of customisation, with regional authorities needing to combine flows of funds from various ministries. This requires a considerable degree of autonomy at decentralised level. At the same time, however, national government is imposing increasing demands on the decentralised authorities (Studiegroep IFV, 2020a). Moreover, the fact that the flows of funds often come from different ministerial budgets means they do not always become available in the region simultaneously, which also makes implementation more difficult. Finally, there are different spending conditions attached to the funding. All this complicates the targeted deployment of the available funds for the regional area-specific approach that is being sought.

⁹ In 2015, national government transferred the work of implementation in the areas of youth, work, and care to the municipalities (Bekkers, 2021).

4.4 Civic engagement often problematic

In the spatial domain, civic engagement in policies and projects for the physical environment is nothing new. It can range from traditional public consultation evenings and co-creation sessions involving authorities, residents and designers, to, for example, broad-based dialogue with the public. The present advisory report does not examine all the various forms of participation and civic engagement but focuses on civic engagement in the development and implementation of policy on the physical environment. The initiative for such engagement often comes from the authority concerned, which wants to involve residents in policy or a specific project.¹⁰

Participation: important, but in practice often a difficult process

In practice, civic engagement in spatial planning policy and spatial projects in the physical environment does not always run smoothly. The processes are often unclear to those taking part. The public often feel frustrated by the lack of results from consultation or participation meetings and feel that they do not have enough influence. They therefore feel they are not taken seriously and sometimes even cease their involvement entirely (Helleman et al., 2021; interviews, sessions).

¹⁰ The report does not deal with citizen initiatives (for example in which residents wish to create something like a neighbourhood garden and often need to engage with the local authority in order to do so).



Civic engagement regarding installation of wind turbines in Culemborg

The municipality of Culemborg says it did 'everything possible' to enter into dialogue at an early stage with residents about the installation of six wind turbines. The basic premise was that the people of Culemborg should be able to share in the profits generated by the turbines. The municipality entered into discussion of the conditions under which a wind farm could be constructed. It ensured that half the turbines would be locally owned and that compensation would be paid. Information evenings were organised, a survey was conducted, and an area consultation body was convened. However, interest was merely lukewarm and it took a great deal of energy to get residents involved in the plans. But once the plans had been made specific, people did take action – but mainly in the form of protests. Residents organised themselves into working groups, residents' committees and interest groups, and sought publicity. They felt that they had not been listened to sufficiently, and complained that the politicians had deliberately kept them in the dark. It will be up to the municipal council to decide whether the wind farm is installed. Sources: Knoop, 2021; Windwinning Culemborg.nl.

The fact that the public cease their involvement is not only bad for the legitimacy of policies; it also detracts from the quality of the decisions that are taken. Without input from the public, the authority lacks opportunities to arrive at better decisions. Successful civic engagement provides access to residents' unique understanding of what is going on in the local community

or neighbourhood, which can improve policy and increase effectiveness (PBL, 2020a; Rli, 2016).

Civic engagement regarding the Slotterplas theatre in Amsterdam

Plans were drawn up for a new theatre, 'De Meervaart', to be constructed in Amsterdam's Slotterplas Lake. Residents of the Nieuw-West neighbourhood took an active part in consultations, with ten participation evenings and many hours of their free time. However, the municipal authorities appeared to be controlling the input: at the meetings, supporters were given free rein, whereas input from opponents was tightly controlled. According to reports in the newspaper Het Parool, the municipality was trying to organise a 'good news show' about the new building. Documents and correspondence that were released show that officials joked among themselves that they were 'in propaganda mode'. Beforehand, the executive councillors had promised local residents and stakeholders that the plans would not be carried out without public support. Source: Het Parool, 2021.

Although public support is not a goal of civic engagement, it can be a significant side-effect. If the public feel more involved, they are more likely to commit to working towards the goals of a policy (PBL, 2020a). This can lead to a smoother planning process and to greater support for the policy (Visser et al., 2019).



Civic engagement is set to become increasingly important in the future. Various major challenges need to be tackled, which will involve large-scale intervention in the physical environment. In such cases, it is advisable for residents to be involved in the challenge, and in tackling it, at an early stage (PBL, 2020a; SCP, 2016).

'Government policy ambitions for tackling the major spatial challenges can only succeed if [the government] is able to connect with the public.' (PBL, 2020a)

The Environment and Planning Act, which will enter into force in 2022, encourages authorities to organise engagement in the planning process at an early stage (BZK, 2021c). However, it stipulates only that engagement must take place, not how. Authorities often find it difficult to come up with an effective form for this. This is a learning process, for both politicians and civil servants, that requires time and practice (Visser et al., 2019; PBL, 2020a). It should be borne in mind that there is no single recipe or roadmap for achieving successful engagement. It is always a matter of customisation (Visser et al., 2019). Within the authority concerned, skills will need to be developed for facilitating engagement processes and for dealing with uncertain outcomes. How can one prevent too much being demanded from residents, meaning that they become victim to 'engagement fatigue'? Dealing with the increasingly polarised nature of debate (overcoming suspicion and mistrust among groups of citizens) also requires new skills. This makes civic engagement a challenging element in the development of spatial planning policy.

Factors impeding effective use of civic engagement

There are various factors that often lead to insufficient use being made of civic engagement in the spatial domain:

- *Expectations not always clear in advance*

What often stands in the way of successful civic engagement is that authorities do not establish clearly beforehand what exactly the aim of such engagement is, and what the degree of engagement is to be: which components of the plan are open to discussion and adjustment, and which are not (or not any longer)? Nor is it made sufficiently explicit what will actually be done with input from members of the public. Raising false expectations can lead to disappointment, resistance, and frustration among the public, thus achieving the opposite of what authorities have in mind with civic engagement (source: interviews; session).

- *Blank space: participation on a regional scale*

Civic engagement generally takes place when dealing with issues on a local scale, within a municipality. Engagement at the higher scale levels of region or province is more difficult, because it is then more abstract issues that are concerned, which are more difficult to link to the everyday physical environment of the public. One example is the development of regional energy strategies. Regions are working hard on this, but it is difficult to get the public interested (PBL, 2020c). Policymakers then tend to fall back on involving civil-society organisations, umbrella organisations, interest groups, and so forth. Participation then mainly involves administrators, policymakers and organisations, rather than ordinary members of the public. Since the regional scale is becoming



increasingly important in tackling spatial challenges, we do not think this is a positive development.

- *Representativeness: not everyone makes their voice heard*
It is difficult to ensure that the members of the public who are involved are representative. This problem applies particularly at regional level, where (see previous point) umbrella associations and interest groups often raise their voice rather than individual members of the public. As a result, the input provided does not really reflect what members of the public actually think, even if they are members of the organisations concerned. One example is the ANWB motoring organisation, which people usually join so they can access roadside assistance and not because of the organisation's views on spatial issues (source: interviews). But more importantly, this lack of representativeness has to do with the fact that engagement requires time, energy, and skills, which not everyone has to the same extent. That fact, too, makes it difficult to make good use of the instrument of civic engagement. It is often the same people who get involved: well-educated, articulate individuals, or a certain like-minded group of residents of a neighbourhood. As a result, the representatives are generally not a reflection of the population, but a restricted group of residents who participate: the frontrunners or the opponents (Verhoeven, 2020; Bouma, 2021). This leaves out a group who do not participate and do not make themselves heard, but who do often have an opinion. It is difficult to address this 'wait-and-see middle bracket' (Bouma, 2021). The trick is to engage that group. The extremes should not be the only representatives, so as to prevent polarisation and growing public uneasiness (source: interviews).

4.5 Pressure on collaboration with the market, corporations, and implementing organisations

A cohesive approach to tackling transition challenges in the physical environment requires authorities to collaborate with various different types of parties, such as housing corporations, nature and landscape managers, and area and project developers. Entering into partnerships with these parties is indispensable for successful implementation of spatial plans. In recent years, however, national government's collaboration with semi-governmental organisations (independent administrative bodies), civil-society organisations, and market parties has come under increasing pressure. This is partly due to the fact that in recent years the spatial planning organisations have been organised along efficiency lines. *New Public Management*, with its emphasis on accountability, cost control and business-like operations, has shaped the relations between the authorities and these organisations.

Collaboration with housing corporations

Housing corporations play a major role in achieving the authorities' spatial planning goals: they represent significant implementation capability. Their position has, however, weakened in recent years. Their opportunities for investing in new social housing construction have been reduced by the (financial) regulations imposed by national government. As a result, they mean less and less as a partner for national government as regards spatial planning policy. Where landholdings are concerned, housing corporations are often dependent on municipalities and developers, but they have limited influence on social housing construction in favourable locations.



Moreover, in recent years, corporations have been called upon to undertake an increasing role in connection with societal challenges: making the existing housing stock more sustainable and ensuring a sufficient supply in the social housing sector (affordability). This is putting even more pressure on their room for investment.

Collaboration with nature and landscape managers

Many other parties that are important for implementation of spatial plans in the regions have also seen their position altered in recent years after privatisation or the redistribution of tasks. They have had to deal with cutbacks and have been forced to behave more and more like entrepreneurs. The State Forest Service, for example, has received much lower state funding since 2010, with funding being reduced to less than 15% of the service's total operating costs. With the decentralisation of nature-related tasks to the provinces, a great deal of funding has been transferred to the Provinces Fund. As a result of these changes, the State Forest Service must generate more of its own income, including through the sale of natural raw materials such as timber and biomass (Staatsbosbeheer, 2021). Green entrepreneurship can be at odds with ensuring added value for society and achieving other government objectives such as protection of biodiversity. Similar developments are taking place among nature and landscape managers such as Provincial Landscapes and the Dutch Society for Nature Conservation in the Netherlands. In our opinion, national government should not lose sight of the importance of such organisations for implementing government plans for the physical environment, and

should position them more effectively to function as organisations that 'reinforce' the authorities.

Collaboration with project developers

Since the end of the 1980s, the private sector and collaboration between the authorities and market players have become increasingly important in Dutch spatial planning. Market parties were given a larger role in the creation of large-scale housing projects, for example the 'Vinex' housing estates. Public-private collaboration also emerged in the form of joint development companies, in which municipalities, developers, and corporations worked together. From the interviews conducted for this report, two developments emerge that are now putting pressure on collaboration between authorities and market parties.

In the first place, development today must be different to that in the era of the Vinex estates. The housing construction challenge is no longer singular (achieving housing quality) but multiple, with attention being paid to climate change, biodiversity, and circularity (sustainable building, water collection, nature-inclusive building, and the like). As a result, there is an increasing accumulation of government requirements. Within a context of strictly regulated procurement procedures and/or calls for tenders, that is a problematic situation (source: interviews). Procurement procedures sometimes lead to promises being made that the developer cannot keep. Interim renegotiations then become necessary, leading to delays in project and area development.



Secondly, since the 2008 financial crisis, municipalities have become reluctant to conduct an active land policy. Many of them no longer purchase land, so as to avoid risks or simply because the available funds are insufficient. Developers usually do acquire land, however. If the municipality wishes to develop an area and achieve specific public goals (such as construction of low-cost owner-occupied housing), effective collaboration with the market is therefore important. Municipalities must not just sit back complacently in this regard, but proactively prepare for it. Creating relatively new public values in area development – such as sustainability, reduction of heat stress, or social inclusiveness – makes this necessary. A lot of municipalities struggle with this (Kuitert, 2021). We will deal with this issue in greater detail in Chapter 5.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have surveyed the main issues on the process side of managing space: the governance from the different tiers of government. National government appears to be taking insufficient control of a cohesive and integrated approach to major spatial challenges. The regions represent an increasingly important scale on which to tackle such challenges, but regions in the Netherlands are poorly organised from the administrative point of view. Among other things, the democratic legitimacy of decision-making on regional issues is poor. For their part, provinces and municipalities are insufficiently equipped with the knowledge, financial resources, and manpower needed to tackle the various spatial challenges effectively. Public engagement and support for projects with a spatial

impact are important, but they prove difficult to achieve in actual practice. The collaboration between authorities, housing corporations, implementing organisations, and market parties that is important for tackling the national spatial challenges is also under pressure.





5 RECOMMENDATIONS

We argued in the preceding chapters that current national spatial planning policy is inadequate. There are serious shortcomings in substantive management by national government of the major spatial (transition) challenges that lie ahead. The same applies to management of the process (i.e. governance) by the various tiers of government. The choices concerning these points were made in the past for understandable reasons, but the current (transition) challenges impose different demands, meaning that substantive and process management are no longer sufficient. That is alarming, but a lot can still be rectified, provided that national government, provinces, regions, and municipalities fulfil their roles more effectively. In this chapter, we present a number of recommendations for increased direction by national government, a stronger role for the middle tiers of government, strengthening of implementation capability, and increased civic engagement.

5.1 Reinforce substantive management of national physical environment policy

In Chapter 3, we explained that there is currently no robust substantive management by national government of the implementation of national physical environment policy in the regions. We offer a number of suggestions below for improvement in this regard.

Draw up a NOVI-plus with clear national goals

In the years ahead, various parties in the regions will need to work together to tackle the challenges in the physical domain: municipalities, provinces, water boards, regional partnerships, housing corporations, market parties, and various land management and implementation organisations. As noted in Chapter 3, the government's National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI) does not, in its current form, provide a sufficient basis for them to undertake this wide range of tasks. We therefore believe that the NOVI needs to be supplemented,¹¹ for example when the document undergoes its next annual update.

The NOVI can then be supplemented, first of all, by specific, clearly formulated national goals, with the spatial implications being considered in combination. The goals should be linked to specific years by when they must be achieved: short, medium, and long term.

We believe that the setting of clear national goals by national government can help the implementing parties in regional and local elaboration of the physical environment challenges and the spatial planning decisions they consequently need to make. Having national goals provides support for decentralised authorities, for example regarding existing goals in the fields of housing, nitrogen and water, but also new goals such as land subsidence: a 70% reduction in subsidence in peatland meadow areas by 2050 (see Studiegroep Inrichting Landelijk Gebied, 2021; Rli, 2020).

¹¹ This is in line with the nature of the NOVI, which is designed as a living document. That set-up lends itself to adjustment if necessary (BZK, 2020b).

Secondly – like the authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021) – we think it is important that the national goals are translated as far as possible into goals for each province. Translating goals in this way enables national government to provide more direction to the regions. The provinces can then translate the provincial goals into results to be achieved at regional level. Regionally and locally, consideration can then be given to how the goals can best be achieved, and which area-specific challenges can be tackled in combination. How the national goals are achieved regionally may therefore differ (see box).

In short, it is about giving *direction* at national level and then *offering the region scope*. The latter also presupposes organisational and financial support from central government if that is necessary to achieve the regional goals.

Details of national goals differ per region

A national strategic goal for reducing emissions may be worked out in detail differently in each region. In a region with peatland meadow areas, it will involve reducing land subsidence and CO₂ emissions, whereas in a region with sandy soils, the focus will be on reducing emissions of nitrogen. Each region contributes to achieving the national goals in its own way. At regional level, the national policy calls for a variety of different strategies, such as raising the groundwater level, creating wetland areas or switching to more nature-inclusive farming, and, for example, reducing the number of cattle. National policy thus works out



differently for each region, but regional efforts all contribute to achieving the national strategic goals.

But there is another aspect. In the NOVI Implementation Agenda for 2021–2024, the government has rightly asked for attention to be paid to *monitoring* progress. After all, merely setting goals is not enough. The extent to which they are achieved must be monitored and there must be consequences if they are not achieved in good time. With that in mind, monitoring and evaluation points have been incorporated in the Implementation Agenda (BZK, 2020b).¹² The PBL's first NOVI Monitor is expected to appear in 2022 and its first major policy evaluation in 2024. It has been agreed in the arrangements (2021) for collaboration between national government, the Association of the Dutch Provinces (IPO), the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), and the Union of Water Boards (UvW) that they will call one another to account for the results achieved. We endorse the importance of attaching consequences to the results achieved. If they fail to be achieved properly, a stronger commitment (to policy) will need to be agreed on.

An additional point of concern as regards implementing national goals is the profusion of national and inter-authority programmes that now

¹² The PBL, together with other research agencies, monitors developments in the physical environment every two years. By comparing the findings with the goal or the intended trends, the PBL indicates which issues require additional effort or support (p. 38). The monitor is sent to the House of Representatives as a matter of course. In addition, a four-yearly policy evaluation of the NOVI takes place (BZK, 2020b, p. 38-39).

have to be implemented in each region. There are far too many of these programmes, and that situation is no longer manageable for a region. National government should be far more selective in this regard. It is up to the minister whose area of responsibility includes the NOVI Implementation Agenda to determine how that can best be arranged. It is conceivable, for example, to limit the number of national programmes to a maximum of one per Directorate-General. An implementation paragraph could also be included in the NOVI-plus with an agenda for a selection of, for example, four themes that will be the focus of attention in the next four years.

Pay greater attention to future value and experiential value in physical environment policy

In order to better guarantee the future value of physical environment policy, the physical foundations of that environment must be strengthened, namely the quality of the soil and water systems. This means that physical environment policy must be based far more emphatically on the limits that those systems set for spatial development (PBL, 2021a; Deltares et al., 2021). After all, water and the soil form the common foundation for tackling the major challenges in the fields of urbanisation, climate, nature, water management, and agriculture. We endorse the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency's (PBL) plea for using the condition of soil and water as a guiding principle in physical environment policy (PBL, 2021a). The authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021) and the Study Group on the Development of Rural Areas (2021) also advocate this.



Greater weight must also be given to experiential value within the triad of utilisation value, future value, and experiential value that together make up spatial quality. This involves components of the physical environment that are difficult to express in monetary terms: open landscapes, magnificent views, silence, green walks in the neighbourhood. These aspects contribute just as much to spatial quality as components that can be expressed in monetary terms, such as educational and medical facilities in the neighbourhood or housing construction and business parks. By positioning the integrated (and integrating) perspective of broad prosperity at the centre of spatial planning (we will return to this later), it is precisely those values that stand out.

Ensure that there is a conceptual foundation underlying national policy for the physical environment and restore the government's design capability

As we have noted in this report, the NOVI lacks guiding spatial concepts and visions for the future ('vistas') for the desired spatial structure or organisation of the Netherlands (and within it the regions). Such a conceptual foundation is particularly important for land use in rural areas – as was also noted by the authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021) and the Study Group on the Development of Rural Areas (2021). In this report, we do not wish to introduce any new concepts; that would require a different approach to the advisory process. We do, however, advocate the revival of (investigative) design capability within public authorities, or at least for national government to embrace the wealth of ideas generated within society (see 3.2 for some examples). After all, designers, in collaboration with other professionals in the spatial

domain, play an important role in conceiving and formulating spatial concepts and visions for the future. We therefore advise authorities to increase their level of in-house design capability. In our opinion, the PBL too should strengthen the design capability within its organisation. The 'design-based approach' (see box) can then be utilised to bring about conceptual innovation in national spatial planning policy.

Design-based approach

The design-based approach is a thinking and working process that takes place in several cyclical phases (Rli, 2016). It is an approach that can be utilised when seeking creative solutions to abstract challenges. During that search process, design-based research can visualise the impact of spatial challenges and how they relate to one another. It makes futures conceivable. It can show from the perspective of practice what is needed to tackle challenges in conjunction, and it helps create new connections (Rli, 2019).

Three components are central to this process of 'design-based discovery' (Van der Linden & Daamen, 2019). First of all, the interests of the area are linked to various sub-interests: those of residents, businesses, professionals, authorities, clients. Secondly, this approach integrates analyses by professionals (behavioural scientists, economists, natural and environmental scientists, and so on) with the knowledge and values of residents and other (future) users of an area. Finally, the design-based approach explores and depicts the possible futures of an area. The entire process is accompanied by sketches or, for example, map images, models, or 3D animations.



Adopt 'broad prosperity' as the basic principle

In our opinion, the diversity of areas in the Netherlands requires an approach to managing space that is tailored to the specific features of an area. A cornerstone of this report is therefore the recommendation to make a stronger connection in the national physical environment policy between the spatial domain on the one hand and societal developments on the other. This can be done using the concept of 'broad prosperity' (ESB, 2021; Janssen, 2020); see box.

Broad prosperity

The concept of broad prosperity does not revolve around material prosperity in the form of income and consumption, but around 'everything that people find of value' (CBS, 2018). It is about a link between economic, societal, and ecological aspects. It also comprises, for example, health, education, the environment, and social connection. The region plays a crucial role in the pursuit of broad prosperity (PBL, 2019; Janssen, 2020). That is unsurprising when one considers that for many people it is the region that is the scale for their daily lives. Happiness and well-being are to a great extent determined by where (and how) people live and by the opportunities offered by their living environment for work, education, recreation, and social interaction. In short, it is a matter of quality of life but also the physical environment. Because regional conditions can vary greatly, broad prosperity issues are by definition context-specific.

As a concept, broad prosperity offers the opportunity to look at regions and the relationships between them in a less one-sided manner than is usually the case. For example, regions on the periphery of the country are often characterised negatively: as shrinkage areas with hardly any economic activity and no agglomeration capability. The concept of 'broad prosperity' can help us look at such regions in a more positive, future-oriented manner (Molema, 2021): at aspects such as the quality of the landscape, social quality, the extent of greenery, and so forth. This will lead to a fuller understanding of the qualities of regions. In short, the concept of broad prosperity can assist national and regional authorities to arrive at a more inclusive picture of spatial quality in the Netherlands.

Next, it is important to use the perspective of broad prosperity to identify spatial challenges and to make choices; in other words, to manage space from the integrated and integrating perspective of broad prosperity. We believe that the broad prosperity approach should be reflected in all phases of the policy cycle, from spatial agenda-setting to decision-making, and from implementation to monitoring and evaluation. This can be done as follows:

1. For national government, the broad prosperity perspective can be a means of getting an idea of the qualities of all the country's regions. In what areas do regions score well and in what areas less well? This involves not only how they are doing economically (material prosperity) but also how they are doing in terms of well-being (intangible prosperity) and how people feel. The broad prosperity perspective also helps to get an idea of the differences between regions. Various national and also



regional monitors for broad prosperity are now available, such as the Statistics Netherlands (CBS) Monitor of Well-being, the Frisian monitor, and the Better Wellbeing Index constructed by Utrecht University and Rabobank. An unambiguous, widely utilised system should be developed in the coming period. This will allow comparisons to be made between regions.

2. Within a region, the perspective of broad prosperity helps get an idea of the challenges that should be prioritised in the region concerned. Which dimensions of broad prosperity and related choices are important? What will make the greatest contribution to enhancing the well-being of people in the region and how they feel? Take the energy transition, for example: does it or does it not increase social divisions in the area, and can everyone participate? The insights gained from the monitor can be used to identify challenges and place them on the agenda of the regions. An example can make this clear: the recent CBS Monitor of Well-being shows that at regional level policy challenges in different areas present a mirror image. In urban areas there is generally good access to facilities, but social cohesion and health are under pressure; in rural areas the situation is often the other way round.
3. It is important that national government then makes a connection. Up to now, the approach seems to be that problems defined by national government, such as excessive nitrogen deposition and the declining quality of nature, must be solved unilaterally in rural areas. In order, however, to prevent discontent in the regions, the problems defined by national government in rural areas must be linked to the problems of rural areas, for example the decreasing range of facilities, certain

demographic developments, or the cluttering up of the landscape (Van den Berg & Kok, 2021). Because that is not currently happening, national government policy is leading to dissatisfaction among residents and administrators: 'are they actually listening to us in The Hague?'

5.2 Strengthen national government's role in directing spatial management

In Chapter 3, we argued that national government takes too little control of how space is managed. In the previous chapter, we argued that this should be improved by greater cohesion as to the national goals for the physical environment that are to be achieved, translation of national goals into provincial goals, and monitoring of the progress made towards achieving those goals. We offer a number of other suggestions for improvement below.

Position spatial planning under the direct responsibility of a minister

In our opinion, it is high time for a substantial reevaluation of the spatial planning portfolio. The major spatial challenges (and how they interconnect) demand structural attention for a longer period of time. Spatial planning must be given the attention it deserves. Regardless of any possible rearrangement of ministerial responsibilities with regard to the physical environment, we believe this implies that spatial planning should be included as the direct responsibility of a minister in his/her portfolio, and thus reflected in the name of the ministry concerned. That minister's task would be to position the spatial challenges and choices on



the government agenda, and also to represent the combination of spatial challenges vis-à-vis the region, with a balance between sectoral interests and integrated solutions. This is badly needed for the next 30 years. Another important task for the minister would be to further intensify the necessary inter-ministerial collaboration in the field of the physical environment.

Ensure a better balance between sectoral and integrated approaches at national level

In this advisory report we have established that national policy for the physical environment is highly compartmentalised between ministries. It is important to find a better balance between sectoral and integrated approaches at national level. This means that national government should (a) aim policy more explicitly at synergy effects between sectoral challenges and (b) deploy decompartmentalised government budgets for regional solutions that connect up different (fragmented) spatial challenges with one another (see also Section 5.4). Examples include investing in climate adaptation at the point when major investments are made in housing construction, restructuring, and transformation; increasing the groundwater level in peatland meadow areas with benefits for the climate, nature, landscape, and recreation; and utilising a buy-out scheme in the agricultural sector that contributes both to reducing nitrogen emissions and combating groundwater depletion. Such integrated approaches need to build on the experience gained in the Inter-Authority Vital Rural Areas Programme and in the Region Deals for broad prosperity (see PBL, 2021b; LNV, 2021a).

Like the authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021), we advocate the establishment of a *sub-council of the Council of Ministers* in order to identify synergies at national level. This should then focus on the spatial aspects of the various sectoral policy areas. The various ministerial claims on space can be weighed up against one another by that sub-council. Because such a sub-council does not currently exist, decision-making (and preparations for decisions) on space, the environment and nature, and the quality of the physical environment takes place within different bodies. Opportunities are thus being missed. The sub-council that we envisage can be seen as ‘topping’ the existing consultations between officials of the various ministries regarding the physical environment: the Physical Environment Steering Group and the more informal, inter-ministerial BRON consultations.¹³

Make a budget available to the minister whose portfolio includes spatial planning

Historically, spatial planning has always had little funding of its own. The primary purpose of spatial planning has traditionally been to steer investment by other parties (public authorities, the market, and society in general) (Rli, 2018a). A disadvantage of the lack of financial resources for implementation of physical environment policy is that it can lead to a lack of interest on the part of spending departments and other authorities. Examples from the time when the then Minister of Housing, Spatial

¹³ BRON = Netherlands Spatial Planning Consultations. These consultations involve the Directors-General (DGs) of various ministries in the physical domain considering what is happening in the Netherlands from a strategic perspective. These are more informal consultations than in the Physical Environment Steering Group, including at DG level too. The latter body also deals with official documents.



Planning and the Environment had his or her ‘own’ budgets available for spatial planning – even if they were relatively modest – show that the best way to direct spatial planning was to link budgets and funds to particular challenges. This makes clear that dedicated budgets are a crucial precondition if national government wishes to take on a stronger directorial role as regards spatial challenges. These budgets can be deployed so as to ‘oil the wheels’ or as adhesive money to link up sectoral investments’ (Rli, 2018a, p. 10). We therefore recommend that the minister whose portfolio includes spatial planning should have a separate budget available for it.

Actually utilise instruments from the Environment and Planning Act

The Environment and Planning Act, which is expected to enter into force on 1 July 2022, provides instruments that can be used both for a reticent role on the part of government and for a more robustly steering role (BZK, 2021a). The Council welcomes this arrangement (Raden voor de leefomgeving en infrastructuur, 2011). By utilising such instruments as the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI), national government can give direction and manage effective interaction. The instruction rule and project decisions also allow national government to be more directive where necessary. Moreover, the Act offers instruments for authorities to strengthen their position on the market for land. The instruments of the Rural Areas Development Act (Wilg) have also been included in the new Act. In our opinion, the latter therefore provides enough instruments for both a cooperating government and a government with overriding authority. The authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning also consider that the instruments available to all tiers of

government are sufficient for tackling the spatial challenges (IBO Ruimte, 2021, p. 28).

We wish to emphasise, however, that it is important that those instruments are actually *used*. This is a call to the Dutch government (and also the provinces) to actually deploy the powers that are assigned. In practice, national government does not sufficiently direct matters or take responsibility for urgent spatial challenges. That is not due to a lack of the necessary instruments but to a lack of decisiveness and knowledge, or due to political risks.

In anticipation of the entry into force of the Environment and Planning Act, practice is already taking place in various locations with the instruments that it provides. One point that demands attention is the paradoxical situation that the Environment and Planning Act needs time to incubate and requires (mutual) learning, at a time when it is action that is actually necessary. It is therefore a good thing that steps are being taken towards knowledge development by means of programmes such as ‘Getting down to work with the Environment and Planning Act’, meetings, and publications in professional journals, by organisations such as Binnenlands Bestuur and Platform31. Knowledge of what instruments are in the new act’s ‘toolkit’ is indispensable, including in communication with the Dutch House of Representatives. In addition, the previously noted strengthening of (staff) capacity will also be important so as to create room for decentralised authorities to actually start working with the new act.



Use land already owned by public authorities to direct management of space and investigate the option of additional land purchases by national government

Dealing with the major spatial challenges requires land. In order for national government to be able to direct matters more effectively, we therefore recommend, firstly, better utilisation of the land that the State already owns. Secondly, we recommend that national government set up a national coordination system (for example in the form of an autonomous administrative authority (ZBO)) for land owned by other authorities. Public authorities themselves have the authority to use the land concerned for societal purposes if they so wish.

However, this overview does not yet provide a solution for the need to exchange landholdings ('displacement space') across provincial boundaries. In order to achieve national and provincial goals regarding nature and nitrogen, land may be needed for relocating agricultural operations that are located near nature conservation areas and for enabling land consolidation. We therefore advocate, thirdly, the development of a portfolio of substitute farms for farmers who do not wish to cease farming but want to relocate. This can be helpful if displacement space across provincial boundaries is needed in order to allow for developments to take place in the right place at the right time.

As its fourth and final point, the Council recommends investigating whether the acquisition of additional land for other important national functions, such as sustainable energy generation or housing construction, would be

beneficial. Land can be purchased through a national land bank to be set up to purchase land and then re-issue it. Unlike a land agency or the Central Government Real Estate Agency, a land bank would not aim for maximising profits. For a national land bank, the added value for society that can be generated with land value would be primary.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to setting up such a national land bank. After all, owning land involves financial risks. Moreover, as Buitelaar (2021) argues, there is a more fundamental objection. If public authorities are both market players and market supervisors, then they are taking part in a game whose rules they themselves determine; this is the 'wearing two hats' problem. There can therefore be an incentive for land owned by the public authority itself to be developed more quickly and in a more commercially attractive manner than land owned by private parties elsewhere. Active involvement in the market for land therefore always demands careful consideration (Buitelaar, 2021). Building on the study commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and carried out by Deloitte (Deloitte, 2021; BZK, 2021d), further investigation should therefore examine the possibilities for a national land bank in the light of the other instruments of (land) policy, such as expropriation, preferential right of purchase, and/or revocation of permits.



5.3 Strengthen the middle tier of government: provinces and regions

In Chapter 4, we observed that the regions represent an important scale level for tackling spatial challenges. However, we also noted that regions are not well organised administratively. There are problems with the profusion of regional structures, the lack of administrative effectiveness, and the lack of democratic legitimacy. These problems are by no means new: the Netherlands has been struggling with administration at the regional level for the entire post-war period (see, for example, Zonneveld, 2021; ROB, 2021b). The province is often too big and the municipality too small to tackle regional challenges. Many proposals for, and experiments with, an additional regional tier of government were considered – in each case with a great deal of discussion – only after a while to be abandoned. This raises the question of whether such a struggle is not inherent to the country's administrative system, and whether the administrative complexity at regional scale should not simply be accepted. In our opinion, that might be conceivable, were it not for the fact that in recent decades more and more tasks and challenges have ended up on the shoulders of the regions. The regional scale has also become increasingly important for tackling spatial challenges. The energy transition is a recent example. If the Netherlands really expects the major challenges to be tackled in the regions, it will be necessary to take a serious look at where the problems and powers lie that need to be addressed in order to fulfil the promise of the regional scale.

In this section we outline our main recommendations in this regard. Those recommendations are based on the premise that the region represents an

important scale for tackling spatial challenges and that the implementation of spatial planning policy at regional level should be facilitated as much as possible. We explicitly do not opt for structural changes to be made in public administration. Doing so would probably lead to lengthy discussions¹⁴ that would distract in the short term from tackling urgent challenges that do not allow for delay. Our recommendations therefore focus on strengthening the role of the provinces, in terms of both substance and process, as regards coordination between the regions that lie within their territory. There must, however, be room for differentiation. Variation must be allowed for in the division of roles between provinces and regions. Provinces must adapt to the context in which they find themselves. Next, it is important to ensure integrated consideration of spatial interests on a regional scale, in provinces and regions. We explain all this below.

Province: play a stronger role in spatial planning policy

We believe that the provinces should play a much stronger role in the implementation of spatial planning policy. At present, some provinces lag behind in that regard; they have not substantially compensated for the declining involvement of national government in spatial planning in recent decades. Calls in the recent past (by the Ladders Commission, among others) for the provinces to be positioned as area directors in the physical domain have not had the desired effect. Despite having been allocated the necessary options and resources, the provinces have only partly taken on the required guiding and steering role. There has been

¹⁴ Precisely also because regional collaboration is broader than the spatial domain and also includes social and economic aspects, such as care, security, work, and income.



criticism, for example, of the lack of control by the provinces as regards ensuring housing construction, the planning and integration of distribution warehouses and data centres, and the agricultural transition.

An important reason why we are (again) advocating a stronger role for provinces in the spatial domain is that they are the regional tier of government that the Netherlands already has. That tier can be put to much better use, both in terms of substance and process. The provinces can play an important role in coordination between (cooperating) municipalities. They can also translate provincial goals into results to be achieved at regional level and ensure that an integrated perspective on the challenges within a region is maintained. Moreover – not unimportantly – by conducting debate about this sum total of challenges within the Provincial Councils, democratic legitimacy is also guaranteed to a greater extent.

The question is, of course: how does a stronger role for the province relate to a strong role for the region in the field of spatial planning? The current situation in the province of Zuid-Holland is a good example of what the division of roles between province and region can look like in practice; see box.

An example of the division of roles between province and region: housing policy in Zuid-Holland

Housing policy in the province of Zuid-Holland is an example of what the division of roles between province and region can look like. The province has eight housing regions, i.e. regional partnerships in the field of housing. Each housing region draws up a regional housing strategy. If no agreement on that strategy is reached in the region, then the province draws up a strategy for the region. In practice, this ups the pressure considerably. Once a regional housing strategy has been drawn up, it must be approved by the province. As part of its assessment, the province considers whether the strategy does justice to supra-regional interests. If it does not do so sufficiently, then the province will reject it. This means that the province now actively intervenes in every municipal zoning plan adopted in the region. If a regional housing strategy is in fact approved by the province, the municipalities within the region are given every opportunity to initiate the desired developments by means of zoning plans. But even then, the province keeps its finger on the pulse: if a municipality does not keep to the regional strategy during implementation, the province will intervene.

The role of the provinces in public administration – more specifically the (supposed) weakness and the administrative (in)capacity of this tier of government – has been a point of discussion for quite some time. We are well aware of this. It also applies to the provinces themselves. They agree that they need to fulfil their role in the spatial domain more



effectively (interviews).¹⁵ The director of the Association of the Dutch Provinces (IPO) has said that ‘the provinces can certainly be more forward about themselves’ (Pieter Hilhorst in ROB, 2021d, p. 94). As far as we are concerned, they should already start doing so right now. If the provinces do not quickly take up their management role as regards the major spatial challenges that lie ahead, it may well be time to set up a different administrative structure for the Netherlands, not excluding a possible redivision of the country. For provinces it is therefore a matter of sink or swim: they will need to position and profile themselves more forcefully in the coming period. Fulfilling a role as area-specific director requires integrated thinking and acting, and also daring to make tough choices. The provinces can benefit in this regard from the return of national government to the spatial domain. National government can place the provinces in a better position.

Allow differentiation in the relationship between province and region

We recommend working with greater differentiation in regional administration. Many previous proposals for the formation of regions received insufficient support because they did not do justice to the great level of diversity in the country. The Netherlands must not fall into that trap again. As far as we are concerned, differentiation means that sometimes the province, as a tier of government, can be an effective solution for tackling regional challenges, while at other times a regional partnership can be chosen, in which municipalities work together (and the province is

a supporting or cooperating authority). Depending on the situation and the context, provinces should concur as much as possible with the regional partnerships in their region.

In making this plea for differentiation in regional administration, we – like the Council for Public Administration (ROB) (ROB, 2021b, p. 19) – are basing ourselves on a map of existing long-term partnerships between municipalities on a regional scale. Three categories can be distinguished; see the box and map below.

¹⁵ See also the internal document IPO Denktank Strategie (2020). Post-Corona advies: gebied en brede welvaart centraal. The Hague.



Long-term partnerships between municipalities on a regional scale

The map (Figure 6) of existing partnerships between municipalities (a minimum of five to a maximum of fifty) shows that such partnerships look different in each province. In some parts of the country, municipalities collaborate relatively little (Flevoland), while in other parts they do so intensively (South Limburg). The map also shows that in some parts of the country regional collaboration takes place largely within the boundaries of the province. Three categories are apparent:

1. Provinces that coincide with the region

The first category comprises provinces where regional collaboration largely takes place on the scale of the entire province. The region coincides, as it were, with the territory of the province. That is the case with the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Zeeland, Drenthe, and Flevoland.

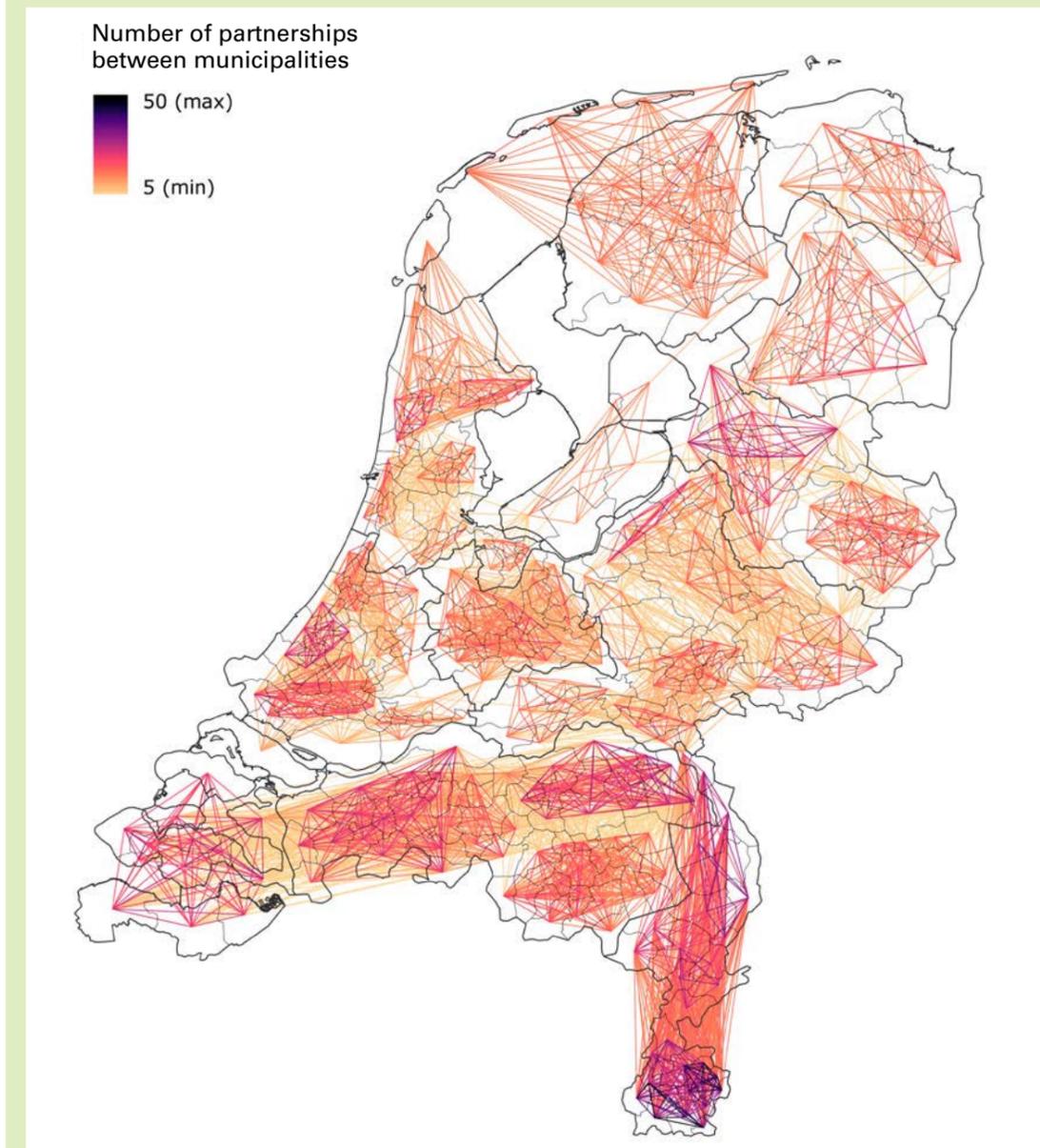
2. Provinces with various different regional partnerships within their territory

The second category comprises provinces where various different regions are located within the borders of the province. That is the case with the provinces of Overijssel, Gelderland, Limburg, and Noord-Brabant.

3. Randstad provinces

Finally, there are the three Randstad provinces (i.e. the provinces in the large conurbation in the west of the country), where the regional scale is obscured by a dominant role on the part of the big cities.

Figure 6: Number of partnerships between Dutch municipalities



Source: BZK, 2021b; based on data from Proof Advisors/KWINK group¹⁶

¹⁶ Elaboration by Dreef, S., Clemens, S. & Van den Berg, C.F. in collaboration with Geodienst CIT, Groningen University, on the basis of data from PROOF Adviseurs/KWINK Groep commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

Like the ROB, we propose a different strategy for each of the three categories:

1. *Provinces that coincide with the region:*

These provinces can be designated 'region provinces'. In practical terms, this means that the province will have the legitimating role for what happens in the region. The great advantage of this is that the democratic deficit in regional collaboration in five provinces can be resolved all at once. Zeeland has already gone a long way with this, working as it does with a group of fifteen authorities: thirteen municipalities, the water board, and the province. Within this Zeeland Public Authorities Consultation Body, the province acts as director of the process. Powers that are legally still the preserve of the municipalities (the municipal councils) have in practice been transferred to the central level of – in this case – the province (the Provincial Council). Pilot projects can be initiated with 'region provinces', experimenting with an exchange of powers between authorities. Such pilot projects would take place on a voluntary basis.

2. *Provinces with various different regional partnerships within their territory:*

Here, the region province does not offer a solution. These provinces will need to step out of the shadows more so as to play a connecting role with regard to regional partnerships. The provinces have an important task here in coordination between regions within the provincial borders, and in fostering integrated solutions to regional spatial challenges.

3. *Randstad provinces:*

Here, it is still a matter of finding the appropriate relationship between provinces and regions. In Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland, for example, the provincial tier of government could adopt a more supportive position as regards the metropolitan agenda of the major cities and their surrounding areas. The metropolitan regions must then be prepared to allow the provinces to do so. There is also enough rural area in these provinces where support from the province in tackling regional challenges is welcome.

This proposal therefore entails there being differences between provinces. Sometimes the province is the party that takes the lead, while sometimes it is a partner and cooperating authority in regional consultations.

Integrated assessment of spatial interests: integrated consultation bodies

As the regional scale becomes increasingly important in the approach to spatial challenges, the question arises as to where in the region the integrated assessment of these challenges can best take place. Is it on the scale of the province, on the scale of regional partnerships, or of both? Where are the issues considered in conjunction, and where are the provincial goals to be worked out in the form of an area plan? Like the authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning (2021), we advocate a central consultation body in each region, where sectoral issues are considered in conjunction at regional level. Especially in rural areas, integrated regional consultation bodies are currently sadly absent. They are also important in urban areas, however. The urbanisation strategies of



urban regions, for example, will need to become more integrated, taking into account such aspects as climate adaptation, work, health, nature, the subsoil, etc.

Just what an integrated regional consultation body will look like in concrete terms may differ from one province to another. Here, too, we therefore advocate differentiation. Where integrated assessment can best take place depends on the relationships that exist between province and region. In the region provinces described above, a single central integrated consultation body will be sufficient. In the other provinces, there may be several such bodies in each province. These can be newly established consultation bodies or existing ones. The parties that are involved within the area know best what form lends itself to making integrated decisions. Democratic legitimisation of decisions can take place within municipal councils and – in the case of region provinces – in the province’s Provincial Council, or by means of a pre-agreed mandate for administrators.

We believe that the integrated regional consultation bodies should be allocated three tasks. To begin with, they must ensure that the sectoral plans for the region are coordinated. A regional consultation body does not need to duplicate the work of sectoral consultation bodies, but it should gather that work together. Secondly, the regional consultation bodies should discuss where they might take over tasks from the sectoral consultation bodies. After all, as the authors of the Inter-Ministerial Policy Study on Spatial Planning noted, the formation of regional consultation bodies can create room for discontinuing a number of sectoral partnerships (IBO

Ruimte, 2021). Thirdly, the regional consultation bodies must draw up an integrated area plan, setting out in detail how the provincial and regional goals in the area are to be achieved. For example, the physical foundations of the area (soil and water), the opportunities for multiple use of space, or the linking up of issues in the urban and rural areas will be considered.

As partners in these regional consultation bodies, the provinces will need to ensure that integrality is guaranteed and that there is coordination between regions. Besides the province, national government will also need to be represented in the regional consultation bodies; see below.

Ensure that national government is present in the region

In line with the broad prosperity approach, the structural presence of national government in all the regions is important, not just in a number of NOVI areas or via sectoral programmes (Rli, 2019; Rli, 2021). The question is how that presence can best be given shape. It used to be that some ministries worked with provincial or regional divisions, but regional presence has since mostly taken on a different form. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, for example, works with a team of regional ambassadors, many of whom also live in the region concerned. The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality works within the framework of the Region Deals (in which it acts as the coordinating ministry) with regional representatives who support the partners in the various different parts of the country.



Despite the current efforts of national government, parties in the region sometimes have the impression, as we noted in Chapter 3, that it is not sufficiently in touch with the region. Remedying this situation requires not only the development of more knowledge about the region (see Section 5.4) and a receptive attitude to the question of how national government programmes can be implemented in different regions, but also the presence of national government in the region. To that end, we advocate the establishment of interdisciplinary regional teams of state civil servants with a sufficient mandate to make cross-sectoral choices together with the region on the basis of integrated considerations, including the joint deployment of sectoral funds (see Section 5.4). The state must be represented within the regional consultation bodies as a permanent partner and must participate in each of them. In our opinion, it is the nature and complexity of the regional challenges that should determine the intensity of national government's involvement in a region.

Summary: approach to tackling challenges in the physical environment

1. National government:

- sets national goals.
- works on an integrated basis and considers decisions with a spatial component in conjunction with one another, including within a sub-council of the Council of Ministers.
- translates, where possible, the sectoral goals into goals per province, in consultation with each province.

2. The province and the region:

- The province plays a substantive and process role in translating, where possible, provincial goals into results to be achieved at regional level and in monitoring the sum total of regional plans; in ensuring an integrated perspective on the challenges that apply within a region; and in ensuring coordination between regions.
- The province facilitates the establishment of integrated regional consultation bodies.
- The province participates in the regional consultation bodies together with representatives of national government.
- The integrated regional consultation bodies draw up an area plan for achieving the regional goals in the area, in consultation with other parties involved.
- When the area plan is drawn up, civic engagement processes take place on a regional scale based on the 'design-based' approach.

3. Feedback loops between region and national government:

- Reciprocal interaction: regional plans are coordinated with one another on the basis of national policy; conversely national plans are coordinated with the experience, opportunities, and problems in the region. If necessary, the national plans will be amended accordingly.



Figure 7: Approach to tackling challenges in the physical environment

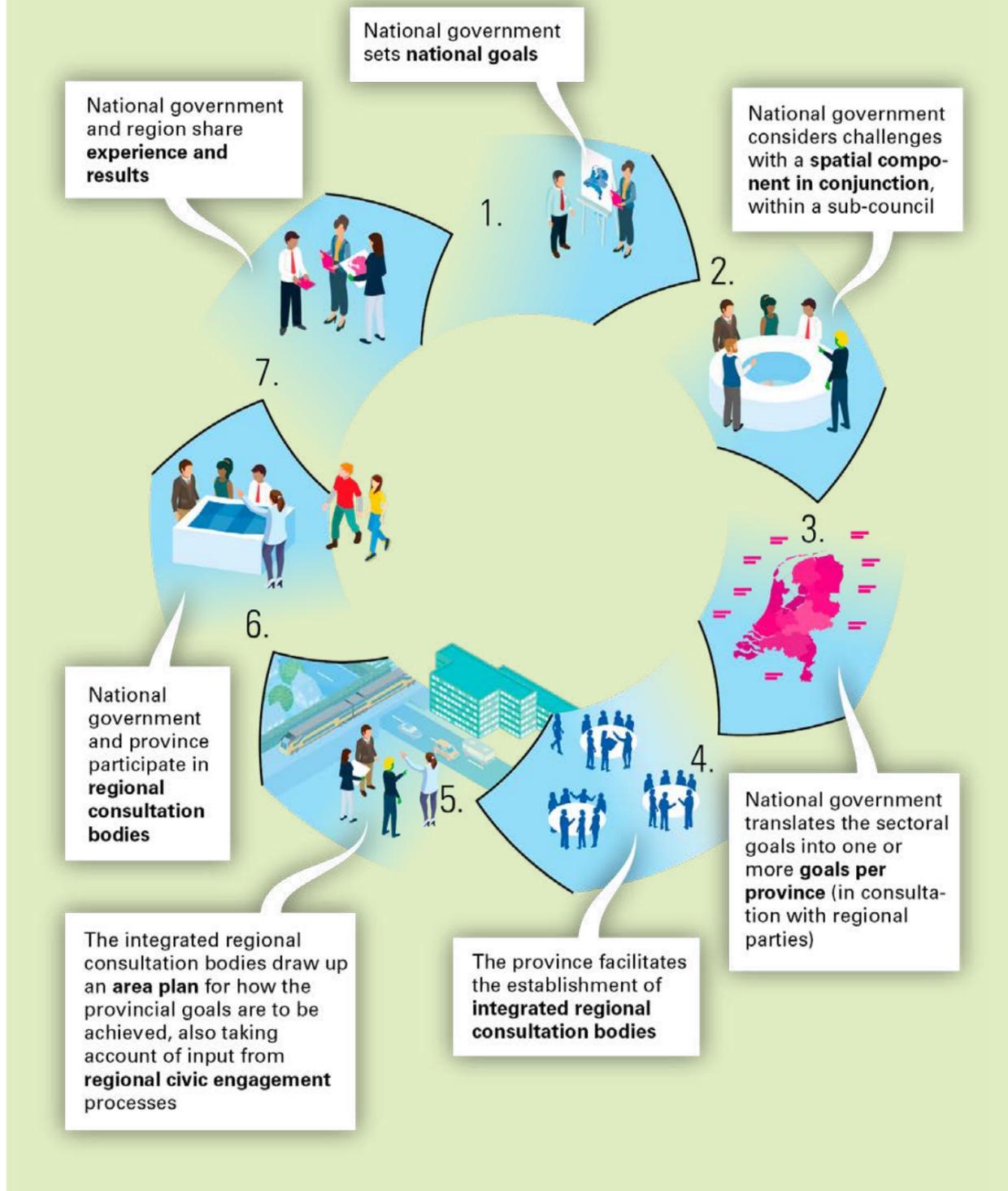
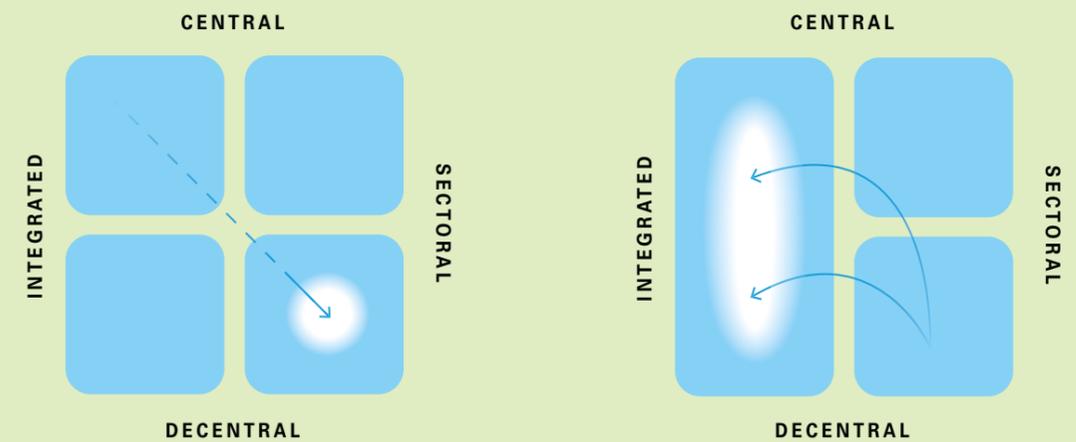


Figure 8: Current and desired situation

It is thus becoming more important, at both national and regional levels, to view challenges in combination. Projected into the quadrant from Chapter 2, this means a shift:



5.4 Invest in decentralised implementation capability

Provinces, regions, municipalities, and water boards are faced, to a greater or lesser extent, with a lack of implementation capability. There are various reasons for this: a lack of capacity and skills within municipalities, a shortage of knowledge, and insufficient funding. We make some recommendations below for improving this situation.

Increase the staff capacity of decentralised authorities

To tackle the major challenges facing the Netherlands, it is crucial that the staff capacity, with knowledge and expertise, of local authorities is in order – both so as to be able to tackle the challenges themselves and to be an effective commissioning body vis-à-vis market parties. We see two possibilities for increasing staff capacity in the short term:

- Focus on *sharing capacity*. According to the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), this is currently an insufficiently developed concept, but it fits within the principle of ‘a single government’ and deserves wide application so as to prevent increasing costs for hiring in capacity (VNG, 2020, p. 27).
- Set up a *civil-service pool* of experts and specialists who are familiar with area-specific processes. Staff that pool with professionals who are familiar with the problems and resistance in the region and with the administrative relationships. To that end, expand the existing flexible pool at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. We do realise that staffing such a pool may not be an easy matter: there is little staff capacity at municipalities right across the board, and at national level it is sometimes difficult to staff regional consultation bodies with representatives of national government.

National government: increase knowledge of regions and gear national knowledge infrastructure towards decentralised authorities

The lack of knowledge about the regions at national level can be overcome by proactively addressing two points. First of all, more knowledge must be assembled and made accessible at the scale of the regions. Ministries

can then work with regional rather than national figures and averages. In addition, the regions themselves will also benefit; they can then make much better use of the knowledge available at national knowledge institutions. If national government wishes to develop a more intrinsic interest in the needs and concerns of the regions (see earlier in this text), regional data can assist them in doing so. We consider that the necessary knowledge generation for and in the region is not limited to a particular discipline. Knowledge about aspects that form part of the broad prosperity in regions is in any case important, for example for weighing up interests or goals. This is in view of the central position that the Council believes the perspective of broad prosperity should occupy in spatial planning.

Secondly, the national knowledge infrastructure must be better geared to the regions. National government should have its national knowledge institutes – such as the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) and the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) – work not only for national government, but also for local and regional authorities. To that end, the knowledge institutes can cooperate with provincial knowledge institutes and support centres such as BrabantKennis, Trendbureau Overijssel, Trendbureau Drenthe, Sociaal Planbureau Groningen, Zeeuws Planbureau, and the Frisian Sociaal Planbureau. Developments are already underway in that direction. National government and the decentralised authorities are examining whether it will be possible to set up regional ‘knowledge hubs’ (IBO Ruimte, 2021, p. 63). This is a step in the right direction, but it requires a more structural follow-up that also receives financial support.



National government: make additional financial resources available to decentralised authorities for tackling new challenges

To tackle the major challenges facing the Netherlands effectively, it is important that decentralised authorities have sufficient funds available to them. That is not now the case. We believe that national government should make money available for the additional tasks arising from the major challenges. It should have the CPB calculate the costs for the four major transition challenges: the transition to a clean energy supply, the transition to a circular economy, the transition to a sustainable food system, and the transition to a climate-resilient, sustainable physical environment. We believe that the budgets for the regions need to be adjusted accordingly.

National government: decompartmentalise budgets for the regions and investigate the options for doing so

We find it important to ‘decompartmentalise’ national budgets, so that they become available as a single budget per region and not as separate budgets from different ministerial budgets. The current inter-ministerial accountability structure as laid down, inter alia, in the Government Accounts Act (2016) has so far hindered this. In practice, the current legislation means that each minister, and the entire civil service, focuses on the (often sectoral) goals in their own budget. The minister is held accountable for the lawful and efficient spending of the resources in his or her own budget. Against that background, management and control of issues and flows of funds that transcend the responsibility of a single minister are difficult. This way of working perpetuates sectoral flows of funds and impedes integrated, area-specific funding.

However, decompartmentalising national budgets in the regions is no easy matter, impinging as it does on the entire accountability structure and thus forming a fundamental constitutional issue. Although it is a long-standing issue, no solution has yet been found to make possible the decompartmentalisation of national budgets.

But despite it not being an easy matter, the Council believes that national government cannot avoid carrying out further investigation of the possibilities for decompartmentalisation. There are three reasons for this. First of all, if national government focuses increasingly on the regional scale for tackling challenges in the physical environment, it must also make serious efforts to equip the regions with sufficient resources. It is only with the right knowledge, capacity, and resources that the regions can implement spatial planning policy effectively. Secondly, the fact that each sectoral money pot now sets its own conditions and that national government budgets do not become available in the regions at the same time is inefficient. Thirdly, there are increasing calls to make the perspective of broad prosperity part of overall decision-making on the spending of public money and the shaping of policy. The Netherlands Court of Audit is also in favour of this (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2020). It may be possible to explicitly establish broad prosperity gains as a higher goal in national government policy – in addition to the sectoral goals. This would also allow the benefits of synergetic goals to be taken into account in allocating resources and in the related accountability. In this way, accountability will involve looking beyond the boundaries of sectoral policy. The more one wants to direct matters from that perspective of broad prosperity, the



more necessary it becomes to also think about revising the accountability arrangements.

It goes without saying that the Council is also aware of the risks associated with directing matters based on broader, more integrated goals. The grip that the House of Representatives has on expenditure (its right to approve and amend budgets) diminishes as the policy incorporates more spending freedoms to achieve a higher and more integrated objective. The Council believes, however, that that is no reason to continue on the current path. It is, after all, the sectoral approach on the part of the Dutch parliament and the ministries that produces the compartmentalisation that the Council wishes to combat with its recommendations.

Provinces: commission a new round of land redevelopment and work together with partners and stakeholders when implementing it

A new round of development planning would seem unavoidable in order to be able to tackle the major transition challenges and other spatial challenges in rural areas. Although national government has an important role to play in this (for example by working out national goals for circular agriculture), elaboration of this 'Land Redevelopment 2.0' will need to be carried out regionally.

An area-specific approach is needed that takes account of the specific spatial conditions (soil, water system, landscape, and types of land use) and of the specific demand for space in the various areas. For example, circular agriculture requires more land for extensification and water buffering, while

solar parks and wind turbines must be located in suitable places – not on good agricultural land or in areas that are needed for water buffering or far from the grid infrastructure, as is still sometimes the case. Financial considerations involving farmers who wish to cease farming and energy developers are now often the leading factor where these kinds of choices are concerned, rather than effective and sustainable land use for the area. It is a matter of the right function in the right place, based on the carrying capacity of the natural capital (i.e. the soil and water systems).

In line with our proposal regarding strengthening the role of the provinces in managing space, we believe that it is the provinces that should take the lead here. In doing so, they will need to utilise the existing instruments for land redevelopment in rural areas. The provinces will need to work towards effective commissioning and management of land redevelopment, in cooperation with parties such as farmers, water boards, and other landowners and - managers. Where necessary, national government – by means of an instruction under the Environment and Planning Act – can explicitly allocate tasks and powers to provinces that are currently still hesitant. In the National Rural Areas Programme (still to be developed), programmatic arrangements can then be made regarding the required goals to be achieved by all the provinces together, and about instruments and budgets. The land redevelopment instruments will need to be dusted off in order to do this. That is possible legally, given that these instruments from the Rural Land Redevelopment Act (Wilg) have also been included virtually unamended in the Environment and Planning Act.



The *water boards* can play an interesting role in this new round of rural land redevelopment because they have the necessary experience as regards implementation, for example as regards organising area knowledge, capacity, and skills. With their agenda for a sustainable water and soil system, water boards also have a natural, connecting role in organising cohesion between the claims to space (and wishes) of various parties active in rural areas, from land management organisations to agricultural and drinking water companies.

Farmers' reasons for participating are a point that demands attention in the new round of land redevelopment. Their reasons used to be clear: to optimise agricultural land, to have access roads constructed, or to acquire more land near their farm. But what are their reasons nowadays? At first glance, the benefits of land redevelopment do not seem to accrue to the individual farmer, but somewhere else (in the form of sustainable energy generation, housing construction, and climate adaptation). In our opinion, reasons for farmers to participate can be found in the clarity and certainty that they will obtain from the new round of land use planning as regards the future development of an area for the next 20 to 30 years. Based on that perspective, a farmer can make plans and choices for his farm. Moreover, the new round of land redevelopment may offer opportunities for improving farmers' revenue model. Such opportunities can be exploited, for example, by setting up area funds to support farmers in financing the conversion to sustainable agriculture, CO₂ sequestration (turning peatland meadow areas into wetlands), supplying biomass, and/or nature development.

5.5 Take civic engagement seriously

The major interventions in the physical environment that will be necessary in the coming years so as to achieve the (transition) challenges require the support of the Dutch population. Involving the public in those challenges is therefore a matter that demands serious attention. Here are a number of recommendations for increasing civic engagement.

Ensure that civic engagement is always followed by regular democratic decision-making

If legitimised along the lines of representative democracy, greater civic engagement can lead to better planning. That 'if' is however crucial here. We are concerned about the danger that civic engagement will leave the silent majority and hidden minorities out of the picture. Experience so far shows that it is often only a select group that is mobilised in civic engagement processes. A greater focus on civic engagement will make this problem bigger rather than smaller. If a portion of the population feel they are not sufficiently involved, their unease will only increase.

It is for this reason that we emphasise the importance of representative democracy above all else. Civic engagement must not be allowed to replace the regular democratic process. Innovative forms of civic engagement, such as citizen panels, are a useful instrument – but only as long as the outcome is transferred to the political arena as advice and politicians are not bound in advance to accept that advice.



Develop new forms of civic engagement in addition to the existing ones bestaande

The sometimes disappointing experience so far gained with civic engagement in projects that impact the physical environment show that such engagement must take a different form. We advocate two relatively new forms of civic engagement. These can be utilised in addition to existing forms, such as the formal opportunities for consultation of the public (whereby they can express their views on plans and projects) and the informal co-creation processes on a local scale (whereby they can actively co-design plans). We recommend the following additional forms of civic engagement:

1. Organise dialogue with the public at national level about the urgency and goals of the major transition challenges. Such dialogue was lacking as regards the climate agreement. It must be agreed in advance what politicians will do with the results, as has also been advocated by the Civic Engagement in Climate Policy Advisory Committee (2021). We believe that serious account must be taken of the results in political decision-making, although they should not be deemed binding in advance. In their letter on public input in drawing up climate and energy policy, the caretaker State Secretary for Economic Affairs and Climate and the caretaker Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations endorse the need to take seriously the results of public dialogue. They keep the option open that an obligation can be agreed upon to include the results in policy and regulations (EZK & BZK, 2021). If there is no democratic confirmation for this, we are not in favour of it.

2. Organise civic engagement on a regional scale when regional area plans are being drawn up. Such a plan will set out how the provincial goals can be achieved in the area concerned. The challenge itself (and the agreed goals) are then no longer a matter for discussion. This type of engagement involves public authorities, the public, businesses, and other parties 'putting their heads together' to arrive at desirable visions for the future (co-creation). This can involve utilising a 'design-based approach' (see Section 5.1).

Explore the significance of the physical environment for residents during planning processes

How the public experience the physical environment is extremely relevant in participation programmes. Our advisory report on the landscape (Rli, 2016) shows that positive use can be made of the way residents feel connected to their physical environment. It may be worth investigating what the physical environment means for them, namely what different values the area represents for them, such as how it is perceived, beauty, tranquillity, emotion, stories. The core values revealed by such an investigation can be used to guide a strategy for the physical environment. The history of a place can also contribute. Paying greater attention to such matters will increase the likelihood of support for the spatial plan. Moreover, if people's thinking is based on the values that they consider important in their physical environment, it is possible for them to transcend conflicts of interest and connect with one another within a common interest. Moreover, something that is not unimportant, the plan can be improved by input from residents. Experience gained in Amsterdam and Utrecht when drawing up the strategy



for the physical environment shows that input from cities' residents can lead to a quality boost, with greater attention for experiential value and greater room for tranquillity and opportunities to meet within the city. This also translates into broad prosperity at local level.

Be explicit right from the start about what the public can expect from their engagement

As the organiser of a civic engagement process, it is prudent to be transparent about what people can expect and what their level of influence is to be. How much room is there still to raise matters for discussion, and what matters are no longer open to discussion? What will be done with input from the public? Close consideration of all these issues in advance can avoid causing cynicism rather than engagement. It is important to set aside enough time and money for this. That applies to all tiers of government and to market parties that organise a civic engagement process. As part of preparing, they can benefit from recent insights on ways to prevent 'engagement fatigue' (see, for example, Helleman et al., 2021).

5.6 Utilise one another's qualities in collaboration with the market, corporations, and implementing organisations

It is important for public authorities, housing corporations, and market parties to be able to make optimum use of one another's qualities regarding area and project development. This facilitates the creation of attractive new areas, districts, and neighbourhoods. More frequent use can be made of public-private collaboration to develop an area, formalised in the form

of a land development company, for example. This requires realignment, however, because today's spatial tasks are more complex than in the past. Various claims must be accommodated within much more limited space, where the sustainability transitions must also be given shape. Under the new circumstances, an effective way will need to be found (once more) to enable control of substance and process by the municipality and/or province to go hand in hand with the deployment of capital, knowledge, expertise, and capacity of private developers.

This demands a lot from both public and private parties. It calls for an open attitude on both sides and the will to work together towards the agreed goals. The public authority concerned must act as an effective, stable, and reliable commissioning party. A proactive attitude is needed, and the public values that are to be developed in the area or the project must be carefully thought through beforehand. To that end, use can be made of the broad prosperity perspective. Other public values then also come into play, such as a healthy physical environment and social inclusiveness. Furthermore, the authority must make use of the policy instruments offered by the spatial planning regulations, such as the municipality's preferential right if the municipality does not itself own the necessary land.

Area and project developers must, in turn, be transparent about the conditions and variables under which a project is feasible. They must avoid making promises they cannot keep, thus requiring interim renegotiations. If, for example, a design is requested in a procurement procedure or call for tenders, the developer will need to state, from the point of view of



transparency, that residents have not yet been consulted about their ideas for the plan concerned and that the changes that may arise from such civic engagement must be taken into account.

Housing corporations have seen their investment capability restricted in recent years, while at the same time they must contribute to tackling major social challenges such as making the existing housing stock more sustainable (Rli, 2018b). We believe that national government should take more notice of the importance of a strong position of corporations for implementing national spatial planning policy. We are currently preparing an advisory report on the future of the housing corporation system and the preconditions for housing corporations to contribute to societal goals.

Other parties too are important for implementing spatial plans, for example nature and landscape managers and the aforementioned water boards. National government needs to appreciate the importance of such organisations for implementing government plans for redesigning the physical environment because it is they that contribute a major portion of the necessary implementation capability.



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OVERVIEW OF PUBLICATIONS

2021

National Growth Fund. [‘Investeren in duurzame groei’]. October 2021
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Towards an integrated accessibility policy. [‘Naar een integraal
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January 2021 (Rli 2021/01)

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2018

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