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## **SETTING THE STAGE: A DRAMATURGY OF POLICY DILIBERATION**

Maarten A. Hajer

**Maarten Hajer** is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy

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[HTTP://WWW.ASSR.NL/](http://www.assr.nl/)  
EMAIL: [ASSRWORKINGPAPERS@FMG.UVA.NL](mailto:ASSRWORKINGPAPERS@FMG.UVA.NL)

## **ABSTRACT:**

The paper aims to shed light on the ‘performative’ dimension of participation in policy making. It is argued that we can enhance our understanding of the dynamics of policy deliberation examining (a) *the setting* in which the deliberation takes place as well as (b) the particular *staging* of that setting. Portraying political processes as sequences of *staged performances* of conflict and conflict-resolution, the paper analyses how the design of the setting effects what is said, what can be said, and what can be said with influence. This helps to understand why many of the familiar participatory arrangements fail to satisfy both governments and the public. It also gives a new perspective on joint policy learning and opens a perspective on how to enhance the democratic quality of policy deliberation.

Key words: Policy analysis, participation, dramaturgy, deliberative democracy, governance, policy learning

## Biographical note:

Maarten HAJER is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Amsterdam; he holds MA degrees in Political Science and Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Amsterdam and obtained a D.Phil. in Politics from the University of Oxford. He worked as assistant professor and later as associate professor at the Institute of Sociology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich (Germany) and was senior researcher at the Scientific Council for Government Policy in The Hague (the think tank to the Dutch Cabinet) before taking up the Chair in Public Policy at the University of Amsterdam in 1998.

## 1. RETHINKING PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

Is there a bias in participatory practices? A host of studies suggests that participation, once introduced to open up policy deliberation and allow for the voices of the citizens (and their associations) to be heard, often tends toward practices that have strong exclusionary effects (Mansbridge, 1980; Young, 2000). Ivo Hartman, a reflective practitioner, speaks of a *paradox of participation* suggesting that the more possibilities are created for participation, the greater the cleavage between the citizens that use these opportunities and those that do not (Hartman, 1998). Iris Marion Young argues that participatory practices are often governed by the norms of deliberation that, in her words, “implicitly value certain styles of expression as dispassionate, orderly, or articulate” (2000:6-7), thus excluding those participants that do not confirm to this norm.

This worry about the performance of participatory practices is echoed in a very direct way in the theory of planning.<sup>1</sup> In a recent address to the annual meeting of the American Schools of Planning, Judith Innes, one of the field’s leading theorists, argued in a collaboration with reflective practitioner David Booher:

“It is time to face the facts we all know, but prefer to ignore. The traditional methods of public participation in government decision making simply do not work. They do not achieve genuine participation in planning or decisions; they do not provide significant information to public officials that makes a difference to their actions; they do not satisfy members of the public that they are being heard; they do not improve the decisions that agencies and public officials make; and they don’t represent a broad spectrum of the public. Worse yet, they often antagonize the members of the public who do try to work through these methods. Moreover, they pit members of the public against each other as they each feel compelled to speak of the issues in polarizing terms to get their points across – making it even more difficult for decision makers to sort through what they hear, much less to make a choice. More often these methods discourage busy and thoughtful individuals from wasting their time in

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<sup>1</sup> Hardly a coincidence of course since land use planning was the field in which participatory practices got their legal place in many Western countries in the first place. Planning theory has therefore always had an active debate on participatory practices (Friedman, 1987).

going through what appear to be nothing more than rituals designed to satisfy legal requirements.” (Innes & Booher, 2000)

All in their own terms, these authors raise the issue of *form* in participatory politics. Implicit in their analysis is the idea that it is not so much participation itself that is the problem, but the very conditions under which the exchange of ideas has to take place.

If we understand participation as the attempt to involve a variety of actors from civil society in a discussion on policy interventions, we might, following Young, see how this can be made into “a process in which differentiated social groups (...) attend to the particular situation of others and [are] willing to work out just solutions to their conflicts and collective problems from across their situated positions.” (2000:7) Raising the issue of form, the question then is how one might create the conditions under which various groups can be allowed to create the situated and shared knowledge and understandings and “transform conflict and disagreement into agreement” (ibid. 118).

Yet how can the variety of contributions be related to one another in a meaningful way? Moreover, what conditions need to be fulfilled in order for statements to be made that actually influence decision-making? To understand the bias in participatory practices, we should not merely focus on the type of arguments that are raised but include the conditions (physical, technical, theatrical) as well. This can be done analyzing public participation in policy making in terms of *the setting* in which the deliberation takes place as well as the particular *staging* of an exchange. The first question then is how does the particular setting influence what is said, what can be said, and what can be said with influence. Here one may argue that the setting in which utterances are made has a ‘performative’ dimension: *practices of participation ‘construct’ their participants and some may construct people as protesters, other practices may create collaborators*. There are plenty of empirical studies that illustrate these effects albeit without theorizing the role of setting in deliberation. Wynne’s analysis of the bias in legal procedures is a case in point (Jasanoff, 1990; Wynne, 1982), as is the early work of Amy on environmental mediation (Amy, 1987). Moreover, if the setting of policy deliberation has performative effects, then the active manipulation of the setting of policy deliberation, or what is here called *staging*, becomes a concern for a search for a new deliberative policy making.

Drawing on a case study this paper aims to shed light on this performative dimension of policy making. In a search for a new and more deliberative governance (Hajer 2000; Hajer 2003, in print; Gomart & Hajer, 2003; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003), it elaborates an analytical framework, adding elements of dramaturgy to the discourse-analytical approach to policy processes (Hajer, 1995). The analysis thus not only helps to understand the failure of these participatory arrangements, but also aims to generate fresh ideas on how a policy deliberation may be conducted in a more democratic way.

## **2. THE CASE OF THE HOEKSCHE WAARD**

The role of setting and staging in policy deliberation is examined in the debate on the future of the Hoeksche Waard in the Netherlands. It is a case with many familiar characteristics of contemporary regional planning. The Hoeksche Waard is a major island south of Rotterdam with, until now, mainly agricultural land use. Given its strategic location between the industrial and harbor complexes of Rotterdam to the North, and the Belgian harbor city of Antwerp to the South, the Hoeksche Waard faces considerable pressure from developers, both from within government and the private sector. To many protagonists, the Hoeksche Waard is the 'obvious' location for various new forms of urbanization and development. Within the span of five years it was the proposed location of a second national airport, the site to relocate glass house horticulture (a major industry in the Netherlands), and for a major extension of harbor-related industrial activity. As we write the construction of the High Speed Rail link to Brussels and Paris is under construction, chipping of a slice of the island. The extension of a motorway from the north to the south is being debated, potentially resulting in the creation of a major intersection in the heart of the island. At the same time environmentalists consider the southern side of the island as the ideal site for the large-scale creation of new wetlands, an obvious way to act on the government's commitments under the European Habitat Directive. For their part, policy makers from the national Department of Public Works see this southern part of the island as an ideal 'water retention area' to cope with the newly recognized threat of downstream floods of the major rivers flowing from Germany, Belgium and France.

The case of the Hoeksche Waard allows for the study of the role of setting and staging for three reasons: (1) there was a intensive controversy on the future of the

island; (2) there actually occurred a marked shift in terms of discourse and discourse-coalitions<sup>2</sup> and (3) we can discern a series of quite distinct practices that channeled the discussion. Over the last five years, five practices can be meaningfully distinguished, in each of which the debate was enacted in a markedly different form.

Whereas the first two practices were more or less traditional (respectively a scenario study and the statutorily required participation in a regional land use plan), the third practice was a cultural manifestation ‘AIR Southbound’, the fourth a ‘bottom up’ citizen initiative. The fifth practice can be seen as the typical product of modern techniques of ‘network management’ in which interdependent policy actors were brought together to address a particular problem (Kickert, Klijn, & Koppejan, 1997).

Over the course of the five years, the public’s involvement changed from an apathetic outlook which assumed that outsiders would decide on the future ‘anyway’ to a more self-confident stance based on an alternative plan for its future. Interestingly, it was a cultural manifestation, i.e. a seemingly non-political practice that fulfilled a central role in this change of outlook. Initially this manifestation met with a lot of skepticism on the island. As one of the principal protagonists put it: “there have been so many plans for the Hoeksche Waard. The people are tired. They think: yet another plan that will not be implemented”.<sup>3</sup> Other politicians plainly saw the manifestation as a ‘threat’: ‘We are being prepared for changes to come’, said a Mayor of one of the municipalities.<sup>4</sup> The manifestation *AIR Southbound* was the ‘arty vanguard’ of the coming columns of Rotterdam-based industrialists. AIR was seen as ‘yet another plan’, ‘for us, but not by us’, and a row emerged over the fact that the cultural foundation had not set aside enough tickets for local people to attend its meetings and that even councilors were expected to pay a entry fee of \$50 a day.<sup>5</sup> This incident was seen by the public as emblematic: it indicated precisely what the Hoeksche Waard could expect from *AIR Southbound*.

Taking this initial reception into account, the question is of course how the subsequent reframing could occur. The setting and staging of the debate are key elements of an explanation. Hence this paper will examine in some detail the way in which the setting and staging of *AIR Southbound* differed from the other practices of participation.

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<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of these terms, cf. Hajer, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Councillor K. van den Heuvel of Korendijk, quoted in *Algemeen Dagblad*, 19 June 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Mayor B. Kolbach in *Kompas*, 10 September 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Kritiek op manifestatie AIR neemt toe, *De Dordtenaar*, 15 October 1998.

### 3. ANALYZING THE SETTING AND STAGING OF POLITICAL DEBATES

While the literature manifests a strong awareness that people do things with words (Austin, 1955), we sometimes forget that settings do things with people too. A discussion is not merely talk, it is an act as well. And every act takes place in a particular ‘contexture’ (Lynch, 1991) that influences the quality of that act. The concepts of setting and staging are introduced to analyze precisely that.

The idea to examine the setting as a variable for understanding the quality of deliberation is, as such, not new. Aristotle and Pericles discussed the preconditions for deliberation in governing; Rousseau suggested that the authoritarian aspects of institutions would influence the cognitions and attitudes of those involved in the deliberation; while Burke and Mill each criticized Rousseau’s ideas on the mandated representative as this form would delimit the quality of the deliberation. All were examples of thinking about the contexture in which discussions were to take place, and were inspired by a concern over the quality of the deliberation.

Signaling an effect is of course one thing but how should we understand deliberation as a performative moment? In one of the few statements in which deliberation is directly related to setting and staging Jon Elster speaks of the ‘deliberative setting’ (Elster, 1998). He makes the argument that a “deliberative setting can shape outcomes independently of the motives of the participants ... Deliberation about constitutions requires the creation of what I called a deliberative setting. The procedure must go beyond the simple recording of votes and allow for communicative interaction. Also, the setting must steer this interaction towards arguing and away from threat-based bargaining.” (1998: 104-105) Yet this statement begs the issue: after all, the interesting question is *what sort* of setting or staging allows for this sort of discussion. Elster assesses the influence of size, publicity and threat of force on the quality of debates and decisions. Yet when he talks about setting he refers to ‘norms’: “Because there are powerful norms against naked appeals to interest or prejudice, speakers have to justify their proposals by the public interest. Because there are powerful norms against the use of threats, they have to disguise them as warnings.” (1998:100) Norms are too limited a category to explain the role of the setting. At the very least the concept of setting should include the actual ‘things’ (e.g. the stage set, the artificial devices that are employed). Moreover, in arguing his

case, Elster refers to precisely those norms that others, most notably Iris Marion Young, deem to be problematic for creating a truly democratic discussion (i.e. the proper and well articulated argument and the orientation towards a common good, cf. Young 2000:7). To avoid this sort of confusion and really get a handle on the role of settings it is best to leave the normative concern for deliberation for the moment and go back to those social theoretical sources that tried to analytically come to grips with the role of setting without necessarily relating it to a normative ideal of a democratic discussion.

There is some helpful scholarship that can guide our thinking on how settings influence the act. Settings and staging have been an explicit theme in the work on political symbolism, most notably the work of Murray Edelman. Writing in 1964 he stated that “Although every act takes place in a setting, we ordinarily take scenes for granted, focusing our attention on actions.” (Edelman, 1964). Edelman analyzed politics as drama, and the setting was a key element of his analysis of politics. Once politics is conceived of in dramaturgical terms, the *mise-en-scène* or ‘setting of the stage’ is an obvious intervention in the play of politics: “In the drama, the opera, the ballet, in the display of paintings and in the performance of music setting is plotted and manipulated, just as often is in the staging of governmental acts.” (1964:96) Note that here it is not the norm that constitutes the setting: it is the creation of a ‘contexture’. This can be sequential ordering of political moments, or staging of the political act. It is what I call the setting of the stage.

Edelman drew on Kenneth Burke and in particular on his *Grammar of Motives* (Burke, 1969). Burke introduced the concept of ‘scene-act ratio’ “...whereby the scene is a fit ‘container’ for the act, expressing in fixed properties the same quality that the action expresses in terms of development” (1969:3).<sup>6</sup> In arguing that scenes have to be regarded as ‘fit containers’ for certain acts, Burke meant that acts could not be understood without understanding the setting within which the acting took place.

Note that Burke conceives of the relationship between form and act as a more or less constant. The scene-act ratio is seen as an institutionalized relationship. Here the concept of contexture allows us to take the analysis of setting and staging one step further. In Lynch, the concept ‘contexture’ signifies that the setting *defines* the act.

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<sup>6</sup> Exploring the essentials of motives Burke introduced five key terms of dramatism: act, scene, agent, agency and purpose. In Burke’s conception ‘scene’ stands for the ‘the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred’ (Burke 1969:xv). According to his analysis the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene.

Dramaturgical analysis then draws out the way in which scenes are scripted and staged, as well as how the multifold players then subsequently act *within and upon* those scripts and stagings.

This constructivist approach allows for a more plausible analysis of contemporary politics in which stable institutional contexts are often absent and political action takes place in between orders or indeed in new political spaces outside these orders (Dryzek, 2000). Indeed, one reason to draw attention to the role of setting and staging at this particular historical conjuncture is that *the very variability of the setting and staging of politics calls for more explicit attention to the dramaturgical side of political processes* (Hajer, 2003 in print).

From a poststructuralist perspective the existing work on the dramaturgy of politics is regarded with some suspicion, as it seems to run the risk of overemphasizing the stability of the relationship between act and scene.<sup>7</sup> Despite the concerns about the structuralism in the work of Burke, he presents us with a theory for analyzing the dramaturgical dimension of politics. Key is that we see political processes as a sequence of *staged performances* of conflict and conflict-resolution in a particular setting (cf. also Hariman 1995). These performances are a shared production in which actors might be positioned in the role of audience for a while but nevertheless always contributes to the performance.

In an analysis of the dramaturgical dimension of policy making, discourse is not seen as being determined by settings, nor is it considered meaningful to try and establish the ‘scene-act ratio’ of participatory practices in general. What we can do, however, is analyze the way in which scene and acts interrelate to produce a particular

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<sup>7</sup> Yet as Robert Hariman rightly pointed out, Burke did take into account aspects such as the situational transformation and synthesis, or even subversion of particular pre-given ideas (cf. (Hariman, 1995) Yet on the other hand in the one section of his *Grammar of Motives* where Burke explicitly addresses the relationship of setting and staging to democracy, there is, however, the structuralist orientation is obvious. In the section in which Burke employed his vocabulary to the issue of democracy emphasizing he started from the notion of a scene-act ratio suggesting that it implied a markedly different take on democracy than the act-agent ratio: “Many people in Great Britain and the United States think of these nations as ‘vessels’ of democracy. And democracy is felt to reside in us, intrinsically, because we are ‘a democratic people’. Democratic acts are, in this mode of thought, derived from democratic agents, agents who would remain democratic in character even though conditions require the temporary curtailment or abrogation of basic democratic rights. But if one employed, instead, the scene-act ratio, one might hold that there are certain ‘democratic situations’ and certain ‘situations favorable to dictatorship, or requiring dictatorship.’ The technological scene itself, which requires the planning of a world order, might be thought such as to favor a large measure of ‘dictatorship’ in our political ways (at least as contrasted with the past norms of democracy). (...) By the scene-act ratio, if the ‘situation’ is itself no longer a ‘democratic’ one, even an ‘essentially democratic’ people will abandon democratic ways.” (Burke 1969:17-18)

staging of public involvement. Moreover, by analyzing political processes as a sequence of staged performances we might be able to infer under what conditions a variety of people and voices emerge in the political discussions, how the variety of contributions can be related to one another in a meaningful way and under what conditions such statements can be made with influence on the actual decision making.

We will draw on the above to examine the role of setting and staging in the Hoeksche Waard. Elaborating on Lynch (1991), Burke (1969) and Benford and Hunt (1992) I will employ the following concepts:

- *Scripting*: those efforts to create a setting by determining the characters in the play ('Dramatis Personae') and to provide cues for appropriate behavior;
- *Staging*: refers to the deliberate organization of an interaction, drawing on existing symbols and the invention of new ones, as well as to the distinction between active players and (presumably passive) audiences;
- *Setting*: the physical situation in which the interaction takes place, including the artifacts that are brought to the situation;
- *Performance*: the way in which *the contextualized interaction* itself produces social realities like understandings of the problem at hand, knowledge, new power-relations.

Finally, to avoid confusion in the case study, we will here also clarify the usage of three interrelated terms that are often conflated but here each have their own meaning in discourse analysis: discussion, discourse and deliberation. In the below 'discussions' are the empirical *object* of analysis; 'discourse' is seen as a particular *pattern* to be found in a discussion (hence 'discourse' is used as a term reserved for something the analyst finds (Hajer, 1995)). 'Deliberation' is to be used to refer to a 'good' discussion, i.e. a particular normative *quality* in a discussion process, found by analyzing the way in which a debate is conducted.

#### **4. SETTING THE STAGE IN THE HOEKSCHE WAARD<sup>8</sup>**

Discourse formation is a process that takes place at a variety of overlapping sites. The discussion over the future of the Hoeksche Waard is no exception to this rule. In many

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<sup>8</sup> A first analysis of this case can be found in (Gomart & Hajer, 2003) That paper focuses on the potential of an enhanced exchange between science and technology studies on the one hand and political science on the other.

regards, the policy practices that I discuss may be ‘merely’ the front stage of policy making. They were accompanied by an intense interpretative struggle in the newspaper media and intense back stage activity aimed at influencing the course of events. Yet the focus of this paper is on how participation changes face because of the settings in which it takes place.

The curious fact of the matter is that *the arguably most important political moment actually occurred at a site that many would not even include in an analysis of politics in the first place.*<sup>9</sup> If we analyze *how* and *why* this cultural manifestation could take on this political role, we find that it had everything to do with the staging of politics, as well as the unusual scripts that co-determined the political performance that took place. As this is a complex argument, we first examine the five practices of participation.

#### **4.1 Practice 1: The development of an ‘Area-oriented sketch’**

The first practice was the so called *area-oriented sketch* (‘Gebiedsuitwerking’<sup>10</sup>) which is best understood as a scenario study. The script for this drama called for bringing together policy makers from various levels of government and well-established organizations from civil society to discuss their preferred models. The scenario study was intended to facilitate national strategic planning in the years to come. Key protagonists were the planner-experts from the national government that were to propose different ‘possible futures’. The practice of the area-oriented sketch was marked by expert-deliberation, and construed the Hoeksche Waard as an ‘object’ for future development. As the results were meant to be policy-input no effort was made meant to generate a broad-scale debate and the document was written primarily with expert-participants and like-minded readers in mind. The plan performed in precisely that way: the Hoeksche Waard was regarded as a ‘free space’ for new national planning initiatives and the aim was to avoid unnecessary unrest by keeping the local public at a distance.

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<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere I have called these sites ‘new political spaces’, cf. (Hajer, 2003 forthcoming)

<sup>10</sup> Officially called the “Gebiedsuitwerking Hoeksche Waard 2010-2030 / Verkenning Inrichting Lange Termijn Hoeksche Waard (VILT-HW).

#### **4.2 Practice 2: Participation in the determination of the draft-regional plan**

Under Dutch planning law, Provincial governments are legally required to periodically update their regional land use plan or 'streekplan'. An official draft of the newly updated plan came out in 1998. The spatial developments in the Hoeksche Waard were placed in the context of 'the general socio-economic developments in Northwest-Europe'. In this light, major new issues were put on the agenda, such as water management, nature conservation policy and infrastructure development. In terms of concrete policy measures the regional plan proposed to develop a very substantial enterprise zone in the middle of the island. To enhance the connectivity of this enterprise zone it also proposed to extend the A4-motorway from the north to the south. Apart from this, the provincial plan suggested the creation of a new large location (265 hectares) for glasshouses for intensive horticulture.

Once again, the Hoeksche Waard was seen as a logical 'free space' for new plans of higher government. This was legitimated by quantitative research showing an assessment of future 'spatial claims' of various sectors of trade and industry in the Province. The scripting foresaw a role for the provincial government as visionary and leader, proactively acting upon a changing world on behalf of society. In the newly created 'North-western European' perspective, provincial planners conceived of their task as catering for 'claims of provincial interest' in a global economy, thus logically superseding the local interests of particular regions. It actually drew on the four models from the 'area-oriented sketch' and, along with other techniques, produced the idea of planning as an expert-led matter of finding the optimal location for various spatial claims.

In many regards this scripting seemed effective as the plans initially generated the targeted support in the political and administrative elite. This was symbolically reconfirmed in the staging of the joint signing of a 'Declaration of Intent' by various politico-administrative bodies on 7 April 1999. It argued for a "qualitative positioning of the Hoeksche Waard" in its larger urbanized context<sup>11</sup> and aimed at signaling a shared sense of loyalty expressed in the argued need for 'enhanced co-ordination'. It

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<sup>11</sup> In Dutch: 'Kwalitatieve positionering van de Hoeksche Waard in het spanningsveld van het stedelijk gebied van Rotterdam en de Drechtsteden en het landelijk gebied van de Rijn-Schelde Delta.' The agencies involved were the province South-Holland, the watermanagement board (Waterschap) De Groote Waard as well as the six municipalities from the Hoeksche Waard: Binnenmaas, Cromstrijen, 's-Gravendeel, Korendijk, Oud-Beijerland. en Strijen.

announced a yearly program of implementation. In inimitable policy language, the ‘ambition’ was summarized as follows:

“... conservation, development and strengthening of the qualities of the area, that have been marked as carriers of identity; recognition of the *internal impulses* for change and evaluation thereof in terms of potential value to exploit or strengthen the qualities of the Hoeksche Waard; recognition of the *external impulses* for change (spatial claims) and evaluation thereof in terms of chances to exploit or strengthen the qualities of the Hoeksche Waard.” (emphasis added)<sup>12</sup>

The vague reference to internal and external ‘impulses’ underlined the appreciation of the specific needs of local and provincial governors respectively. The Declaration (with no official status in land use planning) was a first symbolic string to hold together an already complex – politico-administrative -- coalition: local authorities were pleased with the recognition of ‘internal impulses’, the province claiming success because of the recognition of the right to use the Hoeksche Waard as search space (‘external impulses’). A ‘steering committee’ with representatives from the various agencies was announced to oversee the implementation. The committee, aiming to further strengthen the legitimacy of this discourse, announced that actors from civil society (‘maatschappelijk middenveld’) would be involved later on, and not at the level of strategic planning but in the context of individual projects.

In many regards the setting was one of traditional elitist policy making, which aimed at creating an alliance among policy makers and key players from business and politics. The script required them to agree on a plan, with others clearly being regarded as a passive audience. If the performance provided cues for appropriate behavior, it must have been to signal that there was not much point in complaining. After all, the plan could count on widespread administrative support, ranging from individual municipalities to the national government.

Following statutory requirements, a round of public consultation started after the acceptance of the concept-regional plan by the Provincial parliament on March 26, 1999.<sup>13</sup> People had a right to comment on the draft-plan, by means of written

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.pzh.nl/index.html?actueel/streekplan/szh-4-3.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Please note that this differentiation between policy making and participation was always seen to be a positive feature of the Dutch planning system. The idea being that the state should not bother its citizens with plans that it was not in complete agreement on. As a consequence, the plans are only announced once the various governmental players are in agreement (and in this case some key players

comments to the Province. As the time for participation closed on June 28, 1999 more than 6.000 letters of protest had been handed in. In actual fact, nearly all of the 6000 letters were a pre-printed letter of protest, handed out by an organization that fought a purely conservationist cause, aiming to stop all further development of the Hoeksche Waard and targeting in particular the intended enterprise zone in the middle of the island.

The combination of an inward looking administrative-political practice and the classic form of political participation performed political deadlock. The development plan was adding up various wishes, while the public simply said 'No'. In the face of 6000 letters of protest, the national Parliament -- which has the statutory duty to approve or refute all regional plans -- was unwilling to give its approval. On April 25, 2000 the draft-plan was withdrawn by the Province.

### **4.3 Practice 3: Air Southbound**

In the nearby city of Rotterdam there emerged alongside the official planning process a cultural manifestation called *AIR-Southbound* – *where the landscape begins*. Starting on September 4, 1998, 'AIR' was to investigate the changing relationship of the country and the city. Over the previous years, the AIR Foundation had gained a reputation for causing cognitive shifts among the minds of politicians, experts and citizens on a variety of issues in urban design and planning. Each manifestation of AIR was meant to

*“confront and stimulate policy makers, politicians and the world of urban renewal in Rotterdam via international ideas on local problems of urban planning and architecture, by posing relevant questions for research, hand out commissions for design and raise attention to developments in urban planning and design.”*<sup>14</sup>

*AIR Southbound* was the first AIR effort to attend beyond the city boundaries. It chose the Hoeksche Waard because the initiators were convinced this was an area in which many of the problems of the relationship of city and country could be examined.

If anything, *AIR Southbound* was scripted as an intervention in the debates in Rotterdam and the national debate in The Hague. Moreover, its focus was on the

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from trade and industry as well). For an explanation of the peculiarities of the Dutch Planning model, see (Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; WRR, 1999)

<sup>14</sup> Notitie Programmawerkgroep AIR-Rotterdam Zuidwaarts, april 1997.

quality of the landscape, not on economic development or the improvement of citizen involvement. In the national debate AIR sought to challenge the then prevailing ‘Vinex-strategy’ which, it was becoming obvious, created very repetitive suburban extensions to Dutch cities.<sup>15</sup> According to AIR, this “Vinex-landscape” was not merely a conceptual choice: it was seen as the result of the dominant *way of conducting politics*, a politics which was a matter of negotiation among politicians and administrators. The resulting compromises, according to AIR, were leading the Dutch landscapes to ruins. In the circles around the Foundation AIR this was a big theme.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, *AIR Southbound* was based on the assumption that planning practice stood in the way of better approaches to relating the city to the countryside. It saw ‘good design’ as the way out. In all its previous manifestations AIR had started from the assumption that merely saying ‘No!’ was not a good strategy. It wanted to put the value of good design and professionalism across, not by playing in the context of the existing political practices, but by showing the value of concrete design interventions. Although the cast was not that different, *AIR Southbound* provided an alternative staging of planning politics. Instead of expert-led policy making, the search for politico-administrative compromise and finally public participation, it promoted a notion called ‘research by design’ (‘onderzoekend ontwerp’), blurring the typical division of labor in planning processes. According to the ‘research by design’ practice, designers, researchers and stakeholders were to interactively produce a plan. Through this particular staging, conflicts would be part of the development of the design and the support for a plan could gradually grow.

The ‘research by design’ strategy of AIR implied two types of research<sup>17</sup>: (1) research to generate *images*; and (2) research to find “*real [actually] existing meanings and adherences*” (‘*reëel bestaande betekenissen*’) in the area. Here we see an appreciation of discursive politics in action. The provincial planners had employed the ‘general socio-economic developments in Northwest-Europe’ as a starting point of

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<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the third meeting of the program committee, 4 November 1996. ‘Vinex’ was the acronym of the then binding national white paper on urban planning.

<sup>16</sup> One of them, Joost Schrijnen, deputy-director of the Rotterdam Department of Housing and Urban development, had argued for a new role for ‘design’ in the country, both in the city as outside it. As the manifesto did not reach its intended audience, he and others searched for new sorts of interventions. A few years later the *New Map of the Netherlands*, was presented: it showed all the plans that had already been accepted but had not yet been built. This strategy, of visualization of a looming catastrophic event, was effective and caused a major upset in politics and the media.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the Sixth meeting of the program committee, 5 March 1997.

their intervention in the Hoeksche Waard. The Program Committee of the manifestation saw this as an illustration of the shortcomings of the prevailing planning practice. Arguing like this, an island like the Hoeksche Waard would be overrun by the “inevitable of the new ‘network society’”, ruining the landscape and alienating the public.

The appreciation of the discursive dimension of politics came out in the idea that *the best way to protect the landscape was to create another ‘story line’ for the area* (D. Sijmons). Moreover, for this story line to have political power, it had to be widely shared. Here the discursive meets the dramaturgical: just as run-of-the-mill politics produces run-of-the-mill landscapes, only a new staging could lead to a new appreciation of the qualities of the Hoeksche Waard.

#### ***4.3.1 The conflict over the ‘discovery’ of the Hoeksche Waard***

The script of the program committee of *AIR Southbound* aimed at bringing about a cognitive shift among the key policy actors. It therefore wanted those actors to ‘discover’ the unknown qualities of the island they had thus far merely regarded it as a ‘search space’. In the first phase of the manifestation visual artists, photographers, designers, anthropologists and writers were sent out to try and capture the qualities of the Hoeksche Waard, all under the banner of ‘The discovery of the Hoeksche Waard’. Key to this staging was the intention to break through the then dominant deductive-analytical reasoning (the inevitabilities of the network society) and the related planning concepts of ‘urban landscape’ and ‘carpet metropolis’. To create a breakthrough it investigated the particularities and special qualities of the concrete case of the Hoeksche Waard. The results were published in the first magazine of *AIR Southbound*, entitled ‘The Discovery of the Hoeksche Waard’.

Yet this scripting only provided cues for appropriate behavior for the policy makers. To the people living in the Hoeksche Waard the title of ‘discovery’ had a different meaning. For them, the idea of ‘being discovered’ was offensive and the reactions to this unintended positioning were negative: “We are not some rare tribe from the rainforest”.<sup>18</sup> Locally the term ‘discovery’ was interpreted in terms of a frame of reference in which the city of Rotterdam (with its ever expanding harbor) was primarily seen as a ‘well-known oppressive force’.

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<sup>18</sup> Mayor B. Kolbach in *Kompas*, 10 September 1998.

Hence the AIR staging, which was intended to be a critique of the prevailing way of conducting the politics of planning, was locally understood *in terms of* the very practices it aimed to criticize. This was not only due to the title of the first magazine. In actual fact it had not considered the dramaturgical effect of its overall staging of the manifestation. For instance, as part of the exploratory phase, AIR had sent busloads of students of architecture (a group not easy to overlook because of its ‘arty’ dress codes) to the island to take notes; had politicians (including a Minister from the Dutch Cabinet) looking at the area from the top of a mobile crane; had others traveling over the island in a hot air balloon, while various artists and anthropologists were individually exploring the island. It was all part of its attempt to document the ‘meanings’ on the island. This was of course a performance on the island that was easy to interpret as a regional imperialism. The intervention of artists put off the tightly knit local communities (part of which is known to be the Dutch ‘bible belt’). Hence the staging of *AIR Southbound* had an unintended effect: it appeared as a clever variation by outsiders with ideas *for* not *by* the people of the area.

#### ***4.3.2. Setting the Stage: the presentation of designs as alternative setting***

So far *AIR Southbound* might serve as a useful example of the role of actual dramaturgy in policy making, but it is still unclear why the AIR manifestation had a positive impact on the policy discussion. Indeed, if anything, it reinforced the tendency to regard the non-organized local citizenry as a passive audience and added to an adversarial atmosphere. It was only when it became obvious what sort of plans this exploration made possible, that AIR started to gain this more positive role.<sup>19</sup>

A new phase within the manifestation *AIR Southbound* started when the six designer teams presented their plans.<sup>20</sup> Some designs gave people the idea that the future of the Hoeksche Waard could be discussed in several different ways. Without going into details, in this phase AIR became a stage at which the Hoeksche Waard was discussed in different terms. This phase was illuminating in another regard: not only were the plans different than the ones from previous occasions, *the setting* was different too. Provincial administrators and politicians, accustomed to having a central role in planning meetings, saw designers and landscape architects occupying center

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<sup>19</sup> The AIR Southbound manifestation took 8 months and comprised of four phases: (1) exploratory research; (2) an international conference on the city and the country; (3) the commissioning of six designs for the area; and (4) the exhibition and discussion of the designs.

<sup>20</sup> See Devolder, 2000.

stage. The designers that had been commissioned to elaborate a plan, presented these plans and got comments from some selected specialists. After that a discussion with a wide variety of people in the audience followed. Hence it was not so much that policy makers and politicians were not present, but rather that the scripting did not give them an explicit and dominant role to fulfill.

Depending on the type of design and the way in which the designs were presented, the debate took a particular turn.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, if we look at these meeting we can see how each design in fact created its own audience, and influenced to what extent the audience could actively contribute to the deliberation. Whereas the more conceptual proposals fell on deaf ears or merely aroused irritation<sup>22</sup>, some others opened up the debate, with new people contributing to the discussion. Most notable was the opening up that occurred in the discussion of a plan by H+N+S landscape architects. Whereas most presentations triggered questions and queries from colleagues, their presentation drew in many others.

*Key question is of course why one plan drew in many more people that also represented a much wider variety of citizens.* To observers the audience had, until then, seemed to be composed of the ‘usual suspects’ of policy makers and representatives from organizations all knowing one another pretty well. During the H+N+S presentation for the first time it became obvious that there had been, in fact, many citizens from the Hoeksche Waard among the audience too. ‘Somehow’ they had not until then contributed to the discussion on the future of their island.

So the presentation of designs not only robbed politicians of their central role, in one particular case it *created* an active public. At least three aspects might help understand this change in the policy deliberation: (1) the style of presentation; (2) the type of plan; and (3) the ‘contrast space’ of the presentation. First of all, whereas most presentations laid out their formal research leading to the actual design, the presentation of the plan by H+N+S landscape architects started with a series of slides that was about the many ways in which different people used the Hoeksche Waard. It showed people fishing, cycling, plowing, mowing, driving, eating, going to church, sporting, shopping, etc. This bombardment of slides suggested that the designers were

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<sup>21</sup> As part of our research we attended these meetings as observers.

<sup>22</sup> This was particularly true for the plan of the French team led by architect Francois Roche, ‘unfolded landscape’. It foresaw in the relocation of housing and industry under the natural surface of the Hoeksche Waard, with a hilly landscape as result (Devolder 2000: 100 – 107). The German team of Dettmar, Beuter, Fritz and Hastenpflug got a similar reception because it proved extremely difficult to ‘read’ (idem, 108 - 113).

aware of the variety of ways in which people used the island. Of course, it was a festival of associative images and it was by no means clear how the slides informed the actual plan. Yet the presentation signaled an appreciation of the variety of ways in which people used the island.

The particular style of presentation also came out in the map that is the usual centerpiece of a presentation. Interestingly, the designers from H+N+S spoke of their map in apologetic terms. “It is almost a Hergé-type map”, they said, referring to the Belgian author of the comic book *Tin Tin*.<sup>23</sup> In a way the map did not meet the criteria for a map that the designer community would normally adopt. Yet clarity of the map also made it easier to ‘read’ it. Indeed, reconsidering the dynamics of policy deliberation, it was *in response to this map* that many new people took to the floor. Interestingly, their critical comments suggested that the map was ‘inaccurate’ or that proposed plan was ‘doomed to fail’. One example was a farmer arguing that a particular kind of crop could not be grown at the suggested location: “we have tried that before, and it did not work”. But by speaking up and making all sorts of suggestions (even if they were predominantly negative), the map *drew* in the audience and created a ‘dramaturgical loyalty’ (Benford & Hunt, 1992) to the process. The map, the cornerstone of the H+N+S plan *intrigued and motivated* many to participate in the debate.

A second explanation relates to the type of plan that was presented. The plan most certainly did not suggest anything extravagant should happen. Whereas some other plans suggested either to chop the island into smaller units to allow for a new sort of urbanization of small harbor villages (Calthorpe), or to hide much of the ‘program’ of urbanization under the agricultural surface (Francois Roche), this plan clearly also catered for local needs. Yet it also contained potentially controversial elements. It was for instance a clear development-oriented plan that could easily put off the strong conservationist lobby on the island.

The third element to the explanation, the ‘contrast space’ helps understand why such a development-oriented plan could go down relatively well. ‘Contrast space’, a phrase of Alan Garfinkel (Garfinkel, 1981), means to explain occurrences in terms of the interpretive context in which they take place. In a way the success of the H+N+S presentation might be explained by the level of frustration among the

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<sup>23</sup> Dirk Sijmons, interview.

audience with the very abstract presentations that preceded it. The audience rediscovered its voice via the presentations of H+N+S.

So despite its unfortunate start, *AIR Southbound* changed the parameters of the discussion on the future of the island. It created a widely shared awareness of the multifold qualities of the island and also showed possible ways of acting upon those qualities. The staging of *AIR Southbound* as a cultural manifestation was key to its success. After all, in terms of the cast ('Dramatis Personae') nothing much had changed. In actual fact the same politicians, journalists, designers, policy makers and academics were involved. Yet what had changed significantly was the allocation of roles. This was partly according to the script, partly it emerged during the manifestation.

#### **4.3.3. The discursive dynamics**

A manifestation like AIR is of course completely dependent on subsidies. In this particular case it had received considerable amount of money from the provincial government. Initially, the province considered the manifestation as 'sjeu in de besluitvorming'<sup>24</sup> -- as 'divertissement' or as an entertaining companion to a complex decision making process. The subsidies had probably been given with the development-oriented reputation of the Foundation AIR in mind. As the provincial discourse saw the Hoeksche Waard primarily as *search space* the local politicians were probably right in arguing that AIR was merely to prepare for things to come (see above). Yet as the manifestation progressed, provincial administrators showed themselves seriously disappointed with the effect of the manifestation. Whereas the province had hoped it would 'prepare the ground' (sic!) for the implementation of the provincial plans<sup>25</sup>, it led to the creation of a much more locally-based coalition with its own ideas about the future of the island. To understand this, we need to further trace the process of discourse-formation.

#### **4.4. Practice 4: Air Plus**

If *AIR Southbound* had sparked off new ideas about what the future of the Hoeksche Waard might be, it still had a relatively small reach. Five individuals -- a dike warden, a businessman, an architect, an architectural historian and a journalist -- that had

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<sup>24</sup> *Algemeen Dagblad* 19 juni 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Pieter Hordijk, interview.

participated in the manifestation, all coming from the Hoeksche Waard, felt that the type of reasoning and visioning might help to bring the political debate on the Hoeksche Waard back to life. In order to facilitate this, they started the ‘Hoeksche Waards Initiatief’ or *Initiative Hoeksche Waard*. As a first step they brought the exhibition of the AIR designs to the island. Until then the AIR exhibition ‘Where the Landscape begins’ had only been on show in the national Architectural Institute in Rotterdam. The initiative brought it to the hall of the headquarters of the water management board in town of Klaaswaal.

It was the first element of what became ‘*AIR-Hoeksche Waard: what is next?*’ - a series of regional debates on the future of the Hoeksche Waard. Eventually, the exhibition, guided tours and debates resulted in a relatively broadly shared vision on the future of the island. This was then laid down in *Het Hoeksche Waards Manifest*. Here AIR Southbound was the basis for a well-argued critique on the plans the provincial government. An alternative idea for the development of the area was promoted, based on respect for key qualities such as ‘emptiness’ and ‘greenness’, and acknowledging the fact that the area represents different qualities to different groups. Without too much preparation and without a professional publicity policy they intrigued more than 1000 people with the exhibition and the debates, including farmers, teenagers, ‘urban import’ and politicians.

#### **4.5 Practice 5: ‘Spatial Organization Hoeksche Waard’**

The fifth and final practice was the initiative *Ruimtelijke Inrichting Hoeksche Waard (RIHW)*. The RIHW was essentially a practice of administrators and politicians that had emerged to accommodate the need to coordinate policies and interventions. Yet the RIHW acquired a new role through the protest against the draft regional plan and the discussions following AIR. RIHW was a practice that connected these debates back to the circles of government. It published its own manifesto “*The Hoeksche Waard knows what it wants!*” (*De Hoeksche Waard weet wat zij wil!*) in 2000. This was the first time that the politicians from the six municipalities who had come up with a vision for the island, could rejoice in widespread support from the residents on the island. In this sense it was a marked development from the earlier ‘Declaration of Intent’ of 7 April 1999.

The RIHW has many of the features of what in public administration is called ‘network management’. The key is not to have decision-making powers but to

organize coalitions that cut through the diverse governmental agencies and to create visions with which people can work. On 30 March 2000 the RIHW staged a debate with approx. 120 councilors and representatives from the water management boards to discuss the future of the Hoeksche Waard. On 11 October 2000 it handed its manifesto to the national Minister for Spatial Planning, Jan Pronk. Following this, the Minister announced his intention to make the Hoeksche Waard into a national landscape, thus effectively obstructing the idea that it merely was a search space.

## 5. CONCLUSION: THE DRAMATURGY OF POLICY DELIBERATION

Public participation is not merely a matter of allowing the public to have its say. The case study has brought out the performative dimension of policy deliberation showing that deliberation is not merely about persuasion of the better argument. In actual fact, successful deliberation also is a performative act *creating* a public of its own. The paper shows that groupings and communities are best seen as fluid so as to be able to see how they too can change over time in the policy process.

Following the findings of this paper, the failing of the practices of public participation might also be understood in dramaturgical terms. Over the years the fixed statutory based modes of participation have produced their own dramaturgy, one in which the dramatis personae are well known and different actors play their roles from a generally known script. The case study showed that -- even with the same cast -- policy deliberation can change face through experiments with new settings and stagings. It thus suggests we a need to rethink the settings of public participation.

The public becomes what the setting makes it. The case of the Hoeksche Waard illuminates the performative dimension of policy making showing how each practice of participation constructed its own participants. Like the traditional post hoc participatory practice (symbolized by the 6,000 letters of protest) which produced an effective blockade, the subsequent practices indicate how *a new public emerged* over the sequence of settings and stagings. The debate wandered, taking several - mostly unplanned – turns, but over time a broadly shared new idea emerged.

This can be explained in terms of setting and staging. The case study showed how most of the time the *players* in this debate, were comprised the same core of politicians, planners, policy makers and key stakeholders. It was the meandering of the debate *in the context of changing settings* that produced new insights and new

ideas. The central role of the seemingly non-political cultural manifestation sheds light on the constraining power of the implicit scripting and staging of ‘ordinary’ policy making practices. Initially politicians and administrators did not recognize the political force of the cultural manifestation. Yet it was the risky form that transformed the politics of planning in the area. Several explanations can be given.

First of all, the discursive component: compared to the two preceding settings it was the first staging of policy deliberation that broke through the conventional ‘policy talk’, the mystifying expert-dominated conceptual way of talking planning with its well recognized exclusionary effects (Stone, 1997; Torgerson, 2003; Tribe, 1972). *AIR Southbound* created new entry points into a complex policy conversation, not always pleasing its audience(s) but constantly refracting the debate. In this sense *AIR Southbound* might be considered to be what Foucault called a ‘heterotopic’ space in which various discursive power-effects mutually defract one another (Foucault, 1986). While standing in relation with a variety of sites, *AIR* had the capacity or propensity to change the imbedded relationships of power and interpretation of those other sites. This included the interpretation of public participation in land use planning. This capacity was imbedded in its practice of ‘investigatory design’: it involved a blurring of the discourses and practices of research, narrative, art, design and planning.

One particularly effective way of breaking through the discursive code was the wide employment of visuals: slides, video, photos, maps. These artifacts created an active public allowing people a way into the policy conversation. It was not a matter of the employment of visuals per se, but should be explained as it showed the ‘field work’ that had been done by those particular landscape architects. The presentation made clear that the designers had really made an effort to try and understand the various ways in which people related to the area, and thus legitimized their contribution to the actual presentation itself.

Secondly, compared to other policy related practices *AIR Southbound* actually had a very different dramaturgy. There was a clear sequential side to this staging of a policy deliberation. Apart from its public presentations, *AIR* introduced various ‘staged’ acts: excursions, openings and presentations. Over time this sequence of staged events helped produce a dramaturgical loyalty, something that was meticulously monitored by the people from the Foundation *AIR*, and later by the activists from *AIR Plus*.

Furthermore, the paper sheds new light on the dynamics of policy learning. The dynamics in the case study cannot be explained as a matter of rational cognitive ‘learning’ through reiterated deliberation. The outcome is hard to explain without taking into account the ‘scene-act-ratios’ of the various policy practices. The case suggests that the initial ‘search space’ discourse also failed because of its poor dramaturgy. The declaration of intent took too limited a view and produced a weak dramaturgical loyalty on part of some governmental players only (based on the adding up of a variety of wishes). Civil society actors quickly employed the existing legal possibilities to crash this approach. AIR on the other hand allowed people to *experience* learning, and, arguably even more important, to *share events as moments of learning*. Hence, just as there is a symbolic dimension to power and control, there seems to be a dramaturgy to policy learning as well. The build up through a sequence of events, the lead up to a climax, the constant capacity to meander and adjust, help to explain the creation of a broadly agreed upon plan for the region. Here the rootedness in the world of arts seems to have facilitated an unusual trajectory: the idea of a ‘vernissage’ of policy plans would have been hard to conceive, but here it worked and facilitated the creation of a new discourse coalition. In this sense the cultural manifestation *AIR Southbound* allowed for the creation of the dramaturgical climax needed to persuade a fragile coalition to move ahead. Hence this article has shown that there is often an element of drama in a cognitive shift in complex policy situations. Perhaps that should not come as a surprise as changes of commitments require people to leave positions they previously defended. Successful policy learning is a collective experience and also has to do with the dramaturgy of policy deliberation.

Finally these research findings speak to the search for new forms of, and for, democratic governance. Following Benhabib (1986) we would argue that the quality of the setting here is one that allows for, or indeed triggers or provokes, an interplay of opinions that allows for interactive preference formation. We also have created some counterintuitive conclusions. The case study shows that the most desirable characteristic in terms of democratic governance is not necessarily one of maximum openness. Indeed, much is to be gained in that regard by the provision of clear guideposts for debate, or what Gomart and Hennion have called ‘generous constraint’ (Gomart & Hennion, 1999). So, more important than openness in policy deliberation

is the usage of particular techniques that create a meandering conversation that allow a variety of people into the policy deliberation.

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