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The role of local authorities in initiating sustainable development in the Netherlands, the influence of funding arrangements

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1. Introduction

Agenda 21 is a global policy document adopted by over 150 governments at the Rio Earth Summit 1992. Agenda 21 called for all countries to develop national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs). These are intended to translate the ideas and commitments of the Earth Summit into concrete policies and actions. Agenda 21 also contains arguments for the importance of local government for sustainable development. Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 claims that because *'so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities'*, the participation and involvement of local authorities has to be viewed as *'a determining factor'* in fulfilling the objectives of Agenda 21. Further according to this chapter as the level of governance closest to the people, local authorities *'play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development'* (Agenda 21, para. 28.1, United Nations (1993)). Chapter 28 was a direct appeal to local authorities to draw up local sustainable strategies for their communities. Notwithstanding these arguments for the importance of local governments, national governments have the responsibility for sustainable development and implementation of Agenda 21. Because this national sustainable development can not be reached without the involvement of local authorities, every national sustainable strategy will somehow try to stimulate, convince or force local authorities with communication, financial incentives or command and control instruments to contribute.

Further Agenda 21 recognized sustainable development needed a planned approach, to be laid down in strategies. Therefore environmental planning has attracted growing international interest since the Rio conference in Rio de Janeiro. Some countries like the Netherlands were already working on national environmental plans before the Rio conference, and comparative studies were conducted on national environmental planning in a number of countries during the 1990s (OECD, 1995a; Lampietti and Subramanian, 1995; REC, 1995; Dalal-Clayton, 1996; Janicke, Carius and Joergens, 1997). Local strategies would be LA21's with still a limited presence in the world (ICLE, 1997, 2001) and all sorts of local environmental policy and green plans.

The aim of this paper is to try to understand the role of one particular form of instruments in this context of central local relations, the funding arrangements and their impact on the balance between national and local strategy development.

The case we consider here is the Netherlands. The Netherlands present a very interesting case for two reasons.

- In the first place it offers an transition of a top down implementation with one of the most extensive environmental and sustainable policy funding schemes for local authorities in the world, to a more bottom up implementation in the last years.
- Secondly, the Netherlands were one of the first countries to adopt sustainable development as a key policy concept. Although the Netherlands are generally recognised as an advanced country in environmental policy and sustainable development which has

to deal with severe economic, demographic and physical pressures on the environment (OECD, 2003).

To understand the impact of funding on a substantive change in the direction of sustainable development we need to extend our timeline to 'pre-sustainable-development'. We therefore explicitly address here both local sustainable development and more traditional types of local environmental policy.

National Dutch experiences with environmental policies and strategies are very well documented in international literature, (For instance Keijzers, 2000, Liefferink, D. , 1999, Van Muijen, M-L., 2000 Dalal-Clayton, B., 1996, Johnson, H.D., 1997), but relatively little until yet has been documented on the position of the Dutch local authorities

The lesson we want to draw from the Dutch case is what role funding arrangements play in the factors influence the balance between a more top-down imposed achievement of local sustainable development and an alternative bottom-up local authorities policy involvement. In section 2 we will discuss arguments from literature and policy practice that an imperative centralized approach will bring about a successful shift to local sustainable development and counterarguments that stress the importance of a bottom-up policy involvement.

Key word here is local autonomy. Local autonomy basically depends on the constitutional arrangements. Constitutional arrangements determine the boundaries between dependence and autonomy, control and self-determination. In section 3 we will discuss categorisation of these constitutional arrangements. As we will discuss in this section in these categorisations little attention is given to funding in a specific policy area and focus strongly on the general autonomy of local authorities. For a discussion on the role of local authorities in initiating sustainable development the specific scope of autonomy with respect to this policy areas relevant for environmental policy and sustainable development, and the local capacity for action as measured by the resource levels and competencies of local authorities (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 1998: 247–249) are also of great importance.

Funding arrangements are not just the economic dimension of local-central governmental relations in terms of local resources. Funding arrangements are also an expression the political power dimension of local-central governmental relations and indicate the power of discretion in the allocation of specific tasks. They play a role as 'golden threads' that steer these specific tasks.

Every country is looking for a balance between central and generic policy and area specific policies and national standards and local priority setting. Partly this balance will already be given in the political-administrative system of a country and partly this is a matter of choice in allocating tasks through regulation (decentralization) and financial arrangements. In section 2 we will discuss central local governmental relationships, i.e. the institutional place of local government in sustainable development strategies in terms of top down and bottom up strategies. In section 4 we will we describe the development of national strategies of sustainable development in the Netherlands as put down in the national environmental policy plans and analyze the role of local authorities in these national strategies, with a particular accent on funding and capacity building, and the (autonomous) strategy development on the local level.

The papers tries to answer two questions:

- *How did the balance between top down and bottom up implementation of sustainable development in the Netherlands evolve?*
- *How did financial arrangements influence the role and contribution of Dutch local authorities in sustainable development strategy evolution?*

2. Top down and bottom up strategies to implement sustainable development

Issues in implementation are typically analyzed according to top-down or bottom-up evaluation of policy outcome. This conceptualization represents the view of how the behaviour of actors is seen to influence the outcome of a policy. Important in the balance between national and local strategies is how the role of local authorities is seen. In a top down perspective is about clear and operationalise sustainable development goals that are communicated early on (Janicke et. al, 1997). A top down approach presumes a top-level hierarchical control over municipalities as implementation agents. Internationally Rio paved the way for a more bottom-up approach to sustainable development implementation. In a bottom up perspective these goals and the ways to reach them are developed together with the policy target groups. Part of a top down or bottom up strategy is the funding arrangements. Typically for a top down strategy is the use of command and control and financial instruments. In a bottom up approach we would find processes of joint commitment building were financial autonomy and local priority setting would be more appropriate. Arguments for a bottom up development of sustainable development strategies follow from general arguments for decentralisation of policies:

Local knowledge. Local decision-makers have access to better information on local circumstances than central authorities. Bottom up developed strategies would therefore be better respond to a variety of local problems and priorities. This arguments is typically found in the functional-instrumental approach to participation (Coenen, Huitema and O'Toole, 1998).

Democratic quality. This is the argument from Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 that the closer government gets to the local level, or the "grassroots", the more it is democratic and representative of "the people". Since local governments are closer to the expression of need of citizens strategies are more tailored to local needs and preferences (Ward, 1998).

Democracy accountability and transparence The quality of strategies improves because the public provides input on local decision-making processes and holds local decision-makers accountable for their actions and increases transparency, since locally administered functions are more "visible" than functions administered in central or remote regions.

Commitment. Finally bottom up developed strategies are said to enhance the willingness of local actors and people to implement the strategies, change their behaviour and pay taxes and fees to fund these strategies.

Typical arguments contra bottom up strategy development would focus on:

Local capabilities of local government. If administrative and management capacity in the local government body is inadequate, bottom up developed sustainable strategies may not meet its intended objectives because agents may mismanage finances and waste resources.

Inequality. Bottom up developed strategies may lead to inequalities between areas and target groups in environmental protection and ecological quality. Arguments are found in the extensive literature on environmental justice (for instance Bullard, 1990, 1998)

Local priority setting. Bottom up developed strategies can be contra productive if local governments only pursue their own political agenda driven by a four year political horizon aimed at the here and now, instead of the 'there and then' necessary for sustainable development (Lafferty, 2001). Further local powerful groups (ie companies) may use their influence to limit the intended objectives of sustainable development policy

These arguments play a role in the balance between national and local strategy development. As mentioned above part of a top down or bottom up strategy are the funding arrangements and form arguments for national government to intervene in the municipal domain or even (re)centralise (Fleurke, 2004):

- interventions where central norms and goals are laid down in regulation;
- interventions with the aim to restrict the municipal instruments and/or strengthen the own policy instruments;
- interventions were control, accounting and information duties for municipalities.

2. Central local relationships and funding arrangements

2.1 Central local relationships in the Netherlands

The Netherlands have a decentralised unitary state constitutional system. The administrative system comprises three levels of government: 467¹ municipalities (gemeenten), twelve provinces (provincies) and the central government. The unitary nature of this type of state is based on agreement between the three layers of government and not on central government. The communities are responsible for their own affairs and can to a limited extent take their own initiatives. This constitutional freedom of initiative is restricted by the constitutional obligation to take account of legislation passed by higher authorities.

The Dutch Constitution (1848) and the Municipalities Act (1851) give the constitutional position of Dutch municipalities. Certain factors limit the autonomy of Dutch municipalities. The mayor is centrally appointed and budgets and other important financial and planning decisions require higher approval. Central government also possesses the power to overrule any action by local government that is considered to be contrary to the public interest or illegal. A large part of local-authority activities is covered by legislation within a system of co-government.

Analysis of the autonomous position of Dutch municipalities

In literature we find different categorizations of types of local government (see for example Page/Goldsmith 1987, Hesse/Sharpe 1991) failure. According to Page and Goldsmith local government systems in Europe can be classified into a North and a South European group.

Communities in the South European group (France, Italy, Spain) are characterized by a 'Napoleonic' structure of the state with a strong central power, strong central control over local governments and a low involvement of the local level in the delivery of welfare state services. The degree of decentralization in this group is obviously low. Contrary, local government systems in the North European group are characterized by a long tradition of local self-government. They are important actors in the provision of welfare state services. They are relatively free from central control (United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, Sweden) and possess a comparatively high degree of 'legal autonomy', indicating a higher degree of decentralisation. Being more comprehensive and also taking federal systems into account, Hesse and Sharpe (1991) classify the West European local government systems similarly although distinguishing between three groups. Local Government systems belonging to the 'Franco-group' are characterised by their constitutional status and their rather political than functional role within the country. They depend strongly on the central power which implies formal control and a low degree of autonomy (France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, partly Greece). Far more autonomous are the local government systems in the 'Anglo-group' (Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand). Here local government is not secured by the constitution. Nevertheless it is rather free from central control and has a relatively high degree of local autonomy for day to day policy making. The highest degree of local autonomy, however, is found in the countries of the 'Middle and North European group' (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands). "Local government in this category enjoys both a strong constitutional status and relatively high degree of policy-making autonomy and financial independence. It also seems to have absorbed a larger share of 'personal', client-oriented welfare state functions than local authorities in the other two types" (Hesse/Sharpe 1991: 607).

The difficulty with the place of the Netherlands in these type of categories is that the Dutch system of local government like the Franco type of local government also has some Napoleonic roots. In this Napoleonic roots local government were considered to cover territorially defined communities and to form structures of territorial interest mediation at the lower level of government. The mayor is expected to represent the interests of this community towards higher government levels. The 'Napoleonic' system is characterised by a history with a relatively high degree of centralised state control. In the Netherlands the mayor was appointed by central government. In contrast with the Franco group countries Dutch municipalities have a strong position in providing public services. But in contrast with the *North and Middle European* group where it is placed by Hesse and Sharp there is a relatively high financial dependence on the nation-state and the decentralized level of autonomous democratic policy-making depends much on the policy area.

Municipal revenues in the Netherlands

The paper concentrates on funding arrangements to stimulate local sustainable development. Funding arrangements for local sustainable development fall in the general arrangements for municipal revenues. In the Netherlands more than 70% of municipal revenues come from the national budget, Specific grants, which fund the joint administrative tasks, are the main source

of the municipalities' income. The State generally makes the funds available when these tasks are imposed on the municipalities. The grants have to be spent on achieving the specific goals assigned to the municipalities by the ministry concerned, such as urban redevelopment or the social assistance programme. Specific grants (of which there are over 100) account for around 40% of the total municipal income.

The general grant from the Municipal Fund is used to finance autonomous tasks and general statutory tasks imposed on the municipalities. Each year the municipalities receive a grant from the Municipal Fund, calculated in accordance with the allocation system stipulated by the Allocation of Finances Act. This is based on a number of objective allocation criteria reflecting firstly the costs associated with structural characteristics of the municipalities, such as the number of inhabitants, the social structure and whether or not they perform a regional function, and secondly, the municipalities' tax-raising capacity.

In addition to the grants from central government, the municipalities also have their own independent income from taxes (including levies and fees) and other revenues (such as charges and interest). Municipal taxes are used to finance local priorities and also help to cushion financial setbacks encountered in their operations. The property taxes on ownership and use of real estate, which are related to property values, are the principal municipal taxes. As well as taxes, there are also municipal charges and levies, which have to be used to cover the cost of performing tasks assigned to the municipalities by law such as refuse collection and construction and maintenance of the sewer system. Administrative fees are charged for the issue of passports, driving licences and other licences. The municipalities also generate revenue from charges for use of all kinds of facilities, from municipal facilities such as museums and sports and leisure centres to social facilities such as day-care centres. Independent income accounts for about 30% of total income.

4. The position of Dutch local authorities in sustainable development strategies

To describe the position of Dutch local authorities in sustainable development we first sketch the period till the Brundtland-report (1987). Then we describe the development of national strategies of sustainable development in the Netherlands as put down in the national environmental policy plans. Next we analyze the role of local authorities in these national strategies, with a particular accent on funding and capacity building. Finally we discuss (autonomous) strategy development on the local level.

Prehistory: the local roots of environmental policy

Many people think that environmental protection is something of the last decades. But the first forms of environmental protection go back to city regulation in the Middle Ages and even earlier. What is interesting in these first forms of environmental protection is the role of local government. Environmental protection concerned the typical situations where city government interfered in the relations between individual citizens, often neighbours. If one citizen was hindering other citizens by his activities, like leather tanning or butchering animals within the city walls, city government interfered as a kind of arbitrator. Of course

there were also general regulations with regard to the general interest for health and safety protection like the prohibition to throw dead cattle in the city canal or for the use of open fire in the city.

With the industrial revolution the relation between citizens changed. Now one of the neighbours could be an industrial activity. In the first environmental laws the role of government was still that of a referee trying to settle nuisance problems between neighbours. These first environmental laws in Western Europe date back to the Napoleon times of the beginning of the 19th century. The basic principle of these laws, allowing certain activities within restrictions set by permits to protect the neighbours interest, was the backbone for environmental policy till the 1960's and 1970's.

The build up of national environmental policy

Following the first environmental wave of public and political attention for ecological problems end of the sixties the local approach of environmental policy changed in the 1970's. National governments took more responsibilities and administrative capacity was built, including new ministries of environment and new laws formulated to express the new found insight in the complexity of ecological problems. There was also a recognition of the problem of scale and the necessity to have sufficient expertise to grant permits and conduct controls. As a consequence the permitting and control of larger companies and more complex industrial installations was taken away from the municipalities and passed on the provincial scale level. Evaluation of the implementation of the Nuisance act by municipalities gave some shocking results (Twijnstra Gudde, 1976, 1979). Basically only a quarter of the firms that were supposed to have a municipal permit did have an actual and valid permit. Control and enforcement of these permits only occurred if local residents complained. There was a lack of political will to implement the Nuisance Act according to the goals of the law. Municipal environmental departments were severely understaffed and lacked knowledge. The result of a Berenschot (1983) study was the start of a 25-year discourse on who has to pay for the implementation of environmental laws. For the national level it was the municipalities because the Nuisance act was a traditional autonomous task. For the municipalities with the new tasks in the 1970's they found that their capacity was overstretched. New tasks should be followed by new money.

To improve the implementation of the Nuisance act the central government started a funding scheme for the programming of the implementation of the Nuisance act. On a voluntary basis the municipalities could get money to draw up a programme to systematically organise the implementation of the Act, often with the help of an external consultant. The national government subsidised the preparation of two types of operational management plans. First, the Nuisance Act Implementation Plan (NIP) for the implementation of the Nuisance Act in nearly every municipality, and later the broader Environmental Implementation Plan (EIP) for a smaller group of municipalities.

These programmes were supposed to break the circle of 'peep and act' towards a more active implementation of permits and control. These programmes led to more permits but not significantly to more controls (Ten Elshof, 1988). There was still the problem of capacity on the local level. Similar programmes were also introduced for other laws.

The Dutch national sustainable development strategy development process

Almost immediately after the publication of *Our Common Future* in 1987, the Dutch government adopted the concept of 'sustainable development' as the major guideline for overall Dutch government policy. This concept was then incorporated into the first National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP). Dutch environmental policy is being conducted according to a long-term strategy laid down in these NEPP's.

The Dutch attempt to shape environmental policy through environmental policy plans has attracted international attention. In 1995 the OECD described Dutch environmental planning as an indicative, comprehensive and implementation-oriented planning of a remarkably high standard, from which other countries had much to learn (OECD, 1995b).

The goal of Dutch environmental planning is sustainable development. The foundation of the first NEPP was the probing analysis in the report *Zorgen voor Morgen [Concern for Tomorrow]* (RIVM, 1988) of what might happen if we do nothing. This report not only provided the scientific basis for the NEPP, but also indicated the emission reductions that were needed if we want to meet the conditions for sustainable development. The core is a long-term process in which a series of actors (ministries, other government authorities, industry, social groups) were allocated tasks in the design of specific implementation measures. Objectives were agreed with these separate groups. The most important changes to the planning approach to environmental problems in the last fifteen years are summarized in Table 1

	<i>NEPP1/NEPP Plus</i>	<i>NEPP2</i>	<i>NEPP3</i>	<i>NEPP4</i>
<i>Publication date Period / time horizon</i>	<i>April 1989 / June 1990 1990–1994</i>	<i>December 1993 1995–1999</i>	<i>February 1998 1999–2003</i>	<i>June 2001 2030</i>
<i>Primary environmental problems</i>	Need to reduce emissions for sustainable development	Need to reduce emissions for sustainable development	Decoupling of environmental pressure from economic growth	Quality of life core concern; persistent problems as well as manageable and solvable environmental problems
<i>Approach to solving primary environmental problems</i>	'Technical' solutions within one generation	'Technical' solutions within one generation	Maintain goal of absolute decoupling; major choices	Solve persistent environmental problems through long-term changes in society
<i>Secondary environmental problems</i>	Integration within environmental policy and integration of environmental	Implementation	Finding a balance between environment and economy	Policy for persistent problems

	policy with other policy sectors and actors			
<i>Approach to solving secondary environmental problems</i>	Phased implementation; policy for priority themes and identification of social target groups as important implementing agents	Shift of responsibility to implementing agents (self-regulation within given frameworks)	Means for decoupling (Environment and Economy policy document 1997)	Policy renewal; fully internalise environmental costs in prices
<i>Object of planning</i>	Technocratic vision of sustainability geared to reducing environmental impacts	Technocratic vision of sustainability geared to reducing environmental impacts	Addition of the economic dimension of sustainable development	Quality of life is the core concern
<i>Planning process</i>	Agreements with other actors based on the plan	Agreements between government and the business community set down in covenants	Market players given an important role in implementing measures for decoupling environment and economy	Criticism of covenants; the plan is the starting point for negotiation on persistent environmental problems
<i>Function of the plan</i>	<i>Result of negotiation:</i> 'Blueprint' plan based on environmental carrying capacity	<i>Result of negotiation:</i> 'Blueprint' plan based on environmental carrying capacity	<i>Core task:</i> Decoupling economic growth from pressure on the environment	<i>Political communicative manifesto:</i> Starting point for negotiation
<i>Signatories</i>	Ministers of Spatial Planning, Housing and the Environment; Economic Affairs; Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality; and Transport, Public Works and Water Management	Plus the Minister for Development Cooperation	Plus State Secretary for Finance	Plus Ministers of Health Welfare and Sport; Urban Policy and Integration; and Finance

Table 1: The changes in Dutch environmental planning, 1989–2001

After Rio in July 1993, Parliament was presented with an overview of the changes deemed necessary in Dutch policies and law (States General 1992-1993, number 22031, 16) to implement Agenda 21. The departments responsible had compared present policies with the contents and prescriptions of Agenda 21. The main conclusion was that the goals and actions of Agenda 21 were, to a significant degree, already being pursued under current policies in the Netherlands. It was also pointed out, however, that there were numerous recommendations and actions that still had to be put into effect. For this reason the emphasis in the Netherlands was therefore placed on implementing the National Environmental Policy Plan as the major strategy for sustainable development.

However in January 2001 the Dutch cabinet decided to start working on a 'national strategy for sustainable development'. Until that moment there had been no efforts in the Netherlands to draw up such a strategy over and above the existing National Environmental Policy Plans. This Dutch national strategy for sustainable development was prepared for the review of Agenda 21 implementation by the United Nations in 2002. Municipalities, non-governmental organisations, youth organisations as well as the business community were explicitly invited to contribute to the preparation and formulation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development

The perspective of the Dutch Strategy is long-term (25 to 50 years) and framed within international and European contexts. The Strategy builds on existing policies in the areas of spatial planning, environmental planning, nature and water management, infrastructure, agriculture, public housing, national and local economic and technological development, urban development, social security, developing co-operation and foreign affairs. The Strategy includes recommendations for implementation and follow-up by government bodies on all levels as well as within the private sector.

The National Strategy was a highly political profiled document developed under control of a Ministerial Governing Committee chaired by the Prime Minister². Part of the process was a consultation of societal actors. The process included bilateral talks with the most involved Departments and non-governmental organisations. Further there was a series of workshops with different actors, like with representatives of interest groups (non-governmental organisations and governmental bodies) including the business community, with scientists, representatives from advisory councils and others sustainable development experts, from the perspective of their expertise. During the process the Ministerial Governing Committee decided to present a government exploration document for the National strategy and a complementary societal exploration document. In the discussion with societal actors it was verified in how far citizens, business, governments and other organisations could identify themselves with the national governments exploration. This societal exploration made use of other initiatives in preparing the Dutch contribution to Johannesburg.

National government worked out the government exploration in several actions. Some of the major advisory boards were asked for advice, the planning bureau's worked out indicators of sustainable development that are contained in the exploration document, their were experiments with sustainable development assessment of decisions and all ministries will report on their contribution to sustainable development in their yearly budget.

The national government exploration combines environmental themes (climate, water, biodiversity) with other themes (population, knowledge) in one document to express the range of sustainable development. Guide for policy development is a so-called sustainable development matrix.

	Economic aspects	Social-cultural aspects	Ecological aspects
Here and now			
There			
Then			

For all themes future scenarios and policy challenges are described. The key issue is the coherence between the ecological, social and economic sustainable development. Further the exploration contains a first set of sustainable development indicators as a first step towards a monitoring system for sustainable development. Further the cabinet decided to work on some new instruments to enlarge the coherence in government policy.

The role of local government in developing and implementing the national strategies

The statutory planning system propagates the principle of ‘open planning’. Open planning means involving others (such as citizens, businesses, environmental bodies and other government authorities) in the planning process at an early stage. In the first three NEPPs, the planners sought to obtain prior agreements with the target groups who would be affected by the measures in the plan, and so these NEPPs were largely the result of a series of negotiations. These agreements are later drawn up as covenants. For municipalities a ‘Central Plan for Enacting the National Environmental Policy Plan’ was negotiated. This implementation process we address separately in the next subsection under the heading ‘capacity building and funding’.

Similar rounds of consultations were held for the NEPP-4, but opportunities for compromise in the last phase were curtailed. The NEPP-4 is also openly critical of these voluntary agreements, or covenants. It is more of a *starting point for negotiation* than the result of negotiation, in the nature of a political manifesto, and appeals to other actors to take up the challenge.

The NEPP-1 and NEPP-2 take quite a technocratic view of sustainable development: the restriction of trends within a given *environmental carrying capacity*, with an emphasis on the ecological dimension of sustainable development. They both focus strongly on reducing environmental impacts rather than promoting social change. The NEPP-3 pays more attention to the economic dimension of sustainable development. It looks more closely at the social trends needed to decouple continuing economic growth from increasing environmental pressure. The NEPP-4 adds a social dimension to this by giving priority to quality of life and social welfare. It introduced the concept of persistent environmental problems. These persistent environmental problems each require a different approach. Moreover, environmental issues have turned out to be more complex than originally thought, and tackling them will require radical social changes that cannot be brought about in one

generation. Problems are no longer solved by planning, but through social change initiated by planning. Some obstacles, particularly in our economic system, prevent us tackling the persistent problems directly. Removing these obstacles requires system innovation: a long process of change, called *transition*, affecting the technological, economic, cultural and institutional foundations of our society.

Criticisms of this first NEPP from public administration experts centered on the drawback of the 'central rule approach' to national environmental planning, the blueprint character of the first NEPP, and the 'implementation gap'. The main thrust of the environmental planning system is making national plans under a recognizable 'rational-central-rule approach', especially towards other government authorities. Other authorities are forced to fall in line by drawing up more specific regulations. Neither do these other government authorities have a role to play in preparing these plans (van Geest and Ringeling, 1994). The planning process for the first NEPP is specifically criticized as an example of this internal and closed process (Dalal-Clayton, 1996; Ringeling, 1990). Although all NEPPs have been preceded by extensive negotiations between ministries, the criticism of the NEPP-1 is that it was made *not with, but over the heads of* those actually involved in implementing it (the business community, lower tier authorities, and target groups). Individual citizens, in particular, seemed to play a marginal role in the planning process, and political integration with lower tier authorities was limited (van Geest and Ringeling, 1994).

A related criticism is that the first NEPP displayed signs of blueprint planning (Ringeling, 1990). The situation to be achieved at the end of the plan period (1994) was presented in advance; there was too much plan and too little planning process. A further criticism was that certain objectives and measures were declared desirable without clearly stating whether adequate measures, resources and power were available to implement the plan (Ringeling, 1990). An important problem with the first NEPP was that the measures were very 'soft' (Opschoor, 1989). Getting the first NEPP implemented proved to be a political stumbling block and led to the fall of the government. The second and subsequent NEPPs paid particular attention to those implementing policy and have taken a different view of the execution of power. The NEPP-4 states that '*a government that dictates solutions cannot change society*' and thus forms the starting point for a joint planning process for the persistent environmental problems.

In the national sustainable development strategy the role of local authorities is explicitly addressed, particular in chapter 7 of the exploration, entitled 'Towards a strategy'. In the first place national governments requests municipalities, provinces and waterboards to consider to draw their own strategies for sustainable development, also to implement the national strategy. These local strategies should also contain themes and indicators. National government recommends the other government layers to build upon experiences from the last years. Particular remarks are made about some integral environmental plans of provinces. Secondly the exploration documents states that LA21 will not be stimulated through separate policy and subsidising programmes. LA21 initiatives will be stimulated trough other programmes on environmental quality in the living environment, the major city policy, rural development programmes and urban renewal programmes. All these other programmes have

an integral character with a strong accent on social cohesion. Future and existing local initiatives can be part of the municipal and provincial sustainable strategies.

Capacity building and financing

In the nineties there has been an ongoing process of local environmental policy administrative capacity building. Since 1990 the municipalities and the provinces have been allocated extra funds to improve and expand their administrative capacity. Reason for this assistance program was the dissatisfaction with the implementation of environmental policy at the local level, largely caused by the lack of capacity within municipalities.

These funds have been provided under the BUGM and FUN programmes³ (from 1990 to 1995) and their successor the VOGM⁴ (from 1996 to 1998). The targets to be achieved at municipal level of government were based on the notion of 'added value for funds' and laid down in the 'Central Plan for Enacting the National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP)' for the municipalities. This implementation plan acted as a form of contract between the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) and the Ministry for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment. To guarantee the minimum level of resources necessary for effective implementation, a population threshold of 70,000 inhabitants was set to qualify for funding. This meant that smaller municipalities had to enter into co-operative alliances to take part in the scheme. The Environment Inspectorate was responsible for annual inspections and for monitoring the licensing. The second funding scheme, the VOGM, was designed to strengthen the role of municipalities in implementing the second NEPP for the period 1996 to 1998, and gave municipalities more freedom to set their own priorities.

The period of earmarked funding for environmental policy in terms of contracts and 'value for money' was in contrast with the general tendency in the nineties towards decentralisation and growing self-responsibility for local authorities.

From 1998 the funding is no longer earmarked for environmental purposes but is part of the general municipal fund. The end of this assistance program in general meant that environmental goals have to compete for funding in local politics for funding with sport, welfare and other policy issues. For sustainable development as a rather complex and broad initiative for which it is difficult to show concrete result, this is a disadvantage. Some other funds provide money for possible local environment and local sustainable development. Within urban social regeneration policies like the so-called mayor town policies and the urban renewal (ISV) fund, projects on social, urban and economic revitalisation particular in rundown urban areas with specific needs are funded. These considerable funds are donated on the basis of a set of criteria, including sustainable development criteria. The policy is funded and stimulated by national government on the basis of agreements with the cities. To receive funding the cities have to develop plans and submit these to national government.

More specific funds for local sustainable development focussed strongly on the funding for local stakeholders. In 1998 the Ministry for Environment made through the NCDO money available in the so-called 'Local Agenda 21 Fund'. This fund was not aiming on municipalities but on local NGO's and citizens. Local groups, organisations or individuals wishing to implement or initiate a Local Agenda 21 or LA21 activities could apply for funding.

Another policy initiative worth mentioning is the so-called 'Learning for sustainable development' –programme. A whole range of ministries (Agriculture, Environment, Foreign Affairs, International Development, Education) and the national associations of municipalities, provinces and waterboards draw up a collective paper and co-finance this project. The starting point is that sustainable development asks for knowledge, insight, skills, commitment and the willingness to act from societal actors. These capacities of actors necessary for sustainable development are not self-confident but have to be learned. The programme was discussed in parliament in September 1999 and a first phase was implemented during the period 2000-2003 and is prolonged for a second phase. The provinces co-ordinate the implementation. The draw up so-called provincial ambition statements and allocated money over proposed projects.

Another indirect way of stimulating local sustainable development are pilot projects funded under the flag of the so-called GIDO (Collective initiative sustainable development) and the NIDO (national institute sustainable development).

The firework disaster in Enschede and the café fire in Volendam lead to new attention on the way municipalities implemented their environmental regulations. The Oosting Commission concluded that the Enschede disaster (explosion of a fireworks storage depot) could never have happened if the existing safety policy had been pursued and existing regulations enforced. The recommendations of the commission have some implications for central local relations. The Commission recommended that enforcement be tightened up and that an inventory had to be drawn up of all high-risk situations. According to the commission to improve external safety, proper enforcement of existing legislation is more important than introducing new policies. National government has set aside considerable sums of money for municipalities for safety-related matters to improve high risk situations and second rank inspections by the Inspectorate have been intensified.

Finally an important stream of funding for local sustainable development are funding arrangements within the field of energy and climate. Energy and climate goals were closely related with the NEPP goals and measures were part of the Central plan for the implementation. For instance in 1995 more than half of the municipalities had drawn up an energy-saving plan using the GEA method.

During 1995, however, national government and the Climate Alliance observed a serious bottleneck; many municipalities were experiencing great difficulties in the implementation of the formulated policy. Local authorities were facing barriers in terms of finances, political commitment and organisational match. This led to a new initiative, the so-called LOREEN⁵ programme, specifically designed to support municipalities and remove obstacles to the municipal implementation process. Since 1996 through the Loreen programme Dutch municipalities that applied for it have received extensive support for overcoming these barriers in local energy and climate policy. Evaluation of this stimulation programme shows that both energy and climate policy development as well as policy implementation in these municipalities improved considerably (Coenen et. al, 2001). Evaluation research shows that many options for greenhouse gas reduction do not become common practice (Burgers et.al., 2001b).

After the period of earmarked funding in 1998 many local governments had to improve their environmental policy and further extend their own responsibility. In the process of concluding new agreements between national and local government, climate change was raised as an issue. All parties agreed a so-called climate voluntary agreement. Individual municipalities could agree on their municipal climate policy with the national government to give climate policy a prominent place on the local policy agenda in exchange for national government support (financial resources, knowledge, adequate legislation, etc.).

Local initiated sustainable development strategies

After the appearance of the Brundtland-report in 1987 there was a great interest in the idea of sustainable development at the municipal level as well. Environmental issues played a major role during the local council elections of 1990, and sustainable development was an issue in many of the political programmes of the newly elected municipal councils.

The first Dutch municipal green plans, called Environmental Policy Plans (EPPs), appeared in the seventies. These early plans had the character of environmental charters. During the eighties nearly all municipalities turned to operational management plans (NIP and EIP) for environmental policy as a solution to the problems with environmental regulation at the local level as mentioned before.

Between 1988 and 1993 the number of municipalities with more than 30,000 inhabitants with an environmental policy plan went from 34% to 68% with another 12% working on an EPP (Coenen, 1996). An analysis of the content of these local environmental policy plans showed that they can be considered comprehensive in the sense that they cover the whole range of environmental compartments (waste, air, noise) and related policy sectors (traffic, housing, spatial planning). Most plans, even the most recent ones, take a sectoral approach (70.5 %) and only one third (29.5 %) adopted a thematic or combined thematic and sectoral approach. But the well-known themes from the Dutch National Environmental Policy Plan (e.g. acidification, the manure problem and groundwater depletion) were not very common in Dutch municipal plans. A really comprehensive approach causes difficulties within municipalities. The structure of municipal authorities, in particular, and the specialization of local government officers can stand in the way of a comprehensive approach.

In 1999 the Environmental Inspectorate (IMH, 200) concluded that nearly all municipalities had an established local environmental policy. But in 70% of the cases this concerns thematic or compartmental plans for specific themes, like waste treatment. About 30% of the municipalities had developed an integral plan. These were particularly the bigger and more urban municipalities.

An evaluation of municipal environmental policy plans (Coenen, 1996) shows that the actual use of these plans in decision-making in environmentally relevant areas like spatial planning, traffic planning, housing, etc. depends on the relevance of the plan to these other sectors. In the municipalities studied the relevant environmental policy in the green plan was often first translated into a specific sectoral plan (like a traffic or urban development plan) before it had influence. The second conclusion is that the resistance to the incursion of environmental policy into other policy sectors depends on how far the green plan is considered to be an 'environmental initiative'. The third lesson is its relation to national policy. Inter-policy

integration, in particular, could be given form at the local level because this is where policy areas meet on the ground. But in many areas inter-policy integration is given shape at the national level and then implemented locally. For example, sustainability principles are taken into account in spatial and traffic planning at the national level and then implemented at the local level.

A evaluation in 2003 (ECW, 2003) came to similar conclusions. Although environmental policy had an established position in local political arena there are still walls between the different policy areas and environmental goals have a limited influence on other policy areas. The existing policy and organisational culture determines this influence. So in many cases we can not really speak of local environmental policy plans as local sustainable strategies. But also the Dutch LA21 can not really be considered as local sustainable strategies

The Dutch position towards LA21 has since 1992 always been ambivalent. In the Netherlands LA21 was not a turning point in policy like it was in other countries like Great Britain. The national story line for the Dutch case is that the interpretation by key actors of LA21 as an initiative with an only limited added value to existing initiatives in Dutch political culture explains for a large part the current state of affairs.

Dutch LA21's can hardly be seen as real local sustainable strategies (Coenen, 2001) because:

- in general LA21 take the form of activity-agendas, visioning processes are limited to a very small part of the municipalities;
- the content of LA21 concentrates often on issues from the surrounding environment like dog dirt and litter or on concrete projects in areas like sustainable building or energy saving.
- integration of ecological, economic and social aspects of sustainability is very limited, LA21 is mainly concerned with the issue of environment;
- the global dimension gets relatively little attention in Dutch LA21's;
- links with existing decision making procedures are weak which makes LA21 often an isolated activity.

During the earmarked funding period in many Dutch cases LA21 became a separate process with weak links to ongoing planning and policy processes. Many good municipal sustainable development initiatives such as sustainable building and green transport often do not become associated with the Local Agenda 21. Some municipalities tried to link LA21 with their non-mandatory environmental planning process, but this is then largely limited to environmental policy.

What has been missing in the last eight years is a clear strategy where to go to with LA21. Although all key actors basically support the ideas behind LA21-concept there are some important differences. The ministry of Environment from the beginning stressed that much of what is done in the Netherlands more or less covers Agenda 21. And thus implementing the successive NEPP's is an implementation strategy for Agenda 21. There was no separate strategy or goals for LA21. At best LA21 was mentioned as an important initiative that fitted in the implementation of the NEPP's.

The VNG claimed that Agenda 21 is not restricted to the municipalities that are formally engaged in LA21 under the VOGM funding scheme, in line with earlier views that Dutch municipalities were in fact indirectly complying with Agenda 21 (Dordregter, 1994), and that

a number of municipalities are working on LA21 without using the name itself (VNG, 1996). There are clear similarities with the policy formulation and implementation aspects of some of the other VOGM actions and in other aspects of municipal environmental policy making. Examples from the VOGM programme are sustainable building projects and energy conservation. Other examples include local mobility plans and neighbourhood policy making.

Conclusions

The first question we tried to answer in this paper was: *how did the balance between top down and bottom up implementation of sustainable development in the Netherlands evolve?*

In 1995 the OECD praised the virtues of the Dutch environmental planning system, but it is a compliment that should set us thinking. In 1995 the OECD described Dutch environmental planning as an indicative, comprehensive and implementation-oriented planning of a remarkably high standard (OECD, 1995b). Our overview over the years shows the negative facets of the 'ration-comprehensive long-term' character of the national planning for local authorities. Basically it is a form of 'blueprint' type plans that assume that implementation is just a question of finding the right means and the exercise of power. A specific problem in this orthodox planning is the 'rational-central-rule approach'. In this approach the emphasis is on the level of national planning and not with lower tier authorities and other actors.

The analyses show that the national planning efforts are not matched with similar strategical efforts on the local level. Neither the local initiatives on local environmental plans nor the Dutch LA21's lead to integrated, comprehensive local sustainable strategies.

In section 2 we discussed several advantages and disadvantages of a bottom up and top down approach to sustainable development. Basically the first NMP's neglected the existence of *local knowledge* that would plea for a more local problem analysis and priority setting.

Arguments for *democratic quality, accountability and transparency and local commitment* played a very limited role.

The Dutch case shows two transitions in the funding arrangements. Basically till the end of the 1980's local environmental tasks were seen as a autonomous task for municipalities to be paid from the general municipal budget. When finance appeared to be a major barrier in the process of implementing the first NEPP, there was a recognition that serious capacity building on the local level could only be reached with extra funds. The choice was made to provide extra funds on the basis of 'value for money'. Till today there is an ongoing discussion the need for more capacity on the local level because of the growth of the number of works that need a permit and the growing number of environmental tasks for local government (ECW, 2003).

In contrast arguments against bottom up strategy development played a more important role. During the years there were doubts about the capabilities of local government to manage environmental protection properly. For instance by the subsidising of the operational management plans and the strict Environmental Inspectorate controls on the BUGM and VOGM tasks. This is related to the issue of expertise. In the seventies the responsibilities for the big companies were taken away, and with the BUGM and VOGM funding national government tried to scale up implementation to larger units of intergovernmental corporations because of the shared expertise in such corporations. Recently after the firework explosion in

the city of Enschede responsibilities for firework production and storage were largely taken away from municipalities and scaled up to the regional level. The argument of equality played a role through the standardisation of norms for problems like noise or soil pollution

From 1998 onwards we see a change in the planning approach. Instead of pursuing the implementation of global and national sustainable strategies with a top-level hierarchical control approach over local authorities as implementation agents a more communicative approach was chosen. In such a communicative approach, the aim is to try to implement plans not by wielding power but by convincing implementing agents and target groups to act. The plan plays a communicative role. Advocates of communicative planning emphasize an open planning process, shared responsibility and internalisation of the goals of the plan (Healy, 1992, 1993; Fischer and Forester, 1993; Woltjer, 2000).

Since the mid nineties there has been a general tendency towards more policy freedom in the environmental policy field on the local level. Existing regulations and national standards in the field of spatial urban planning, noise abatement and soil remediation, were often considered as being too rigid and formal application would severely hinder urban development. It would not fit in the present time to force any commitments, if even international commitments, on municipalities.

There was now an acceptance of a difference in environmental quality between areas, if a certain nationally defined basic quality was preserved. Further more forms of local priority setting were accepted. Norms for permitting and control, for instance on how much which category of firms had to have a new permit or had to be controlled, were less dictated by the Environmental Inspectorate. Municipalities are allowed to make their own choices which 'bad' companies to control severely and which 'good' companies less often. Cynics on the local level say that problems that could not be solved were given back to the municipalities like noise and soil pollution, passing on insoluble problems to the local level.

Our second question is: *How did financial arrangements influence the role and contribution of Dutch local authorities in sustainable development strategy evolution?*

The Dutch development process shows both the importance and restrictions of funding for the development of local sustainable development policies. Basically national government recognises the importance of the local level for implementing sustainable development. Generally spoken sustainable development is seen as such an urgent and important task that it can not be left to local political processes.

The influence of funding has to be seen in the context of national top down implementation of the national strategies. So the development of local strategies very much related with the planning approach to environmental policy have taken place in the last ten years. The emphasis in planning has shifted from tackling technically solvable problems within one generation towards a long-term approach consisting of various 'transition processes'. And the environmental plans have changed from a blueprint plan based on scarce environmental carrying capacity into a political and communicative manifesto.

There are very different ways to intervene on the local level. Funding is just one of the ways. Communication and regulation are two other important intervention strategies. In the

Netherlands funding played an important role in a central lead planned implementation of top down implementation of sustainable development.

We see a wide array of funding arrangements that affect autonomy in a very different way:

1. support for programming municipal activities;
2. earmarked funding for pilot municipalities
3. capacity to perform earmarked by all municipal activities;
4. grants for investments
5. funding for local stakeholders that eventually will influence local politics

These funding arrangements combine with very different forms of national government control and influence like:

- political through the local councils (yearly reporting obligation of the alderman)
- the Environmental Inspectorate
- participation by citizens
- best practice awards

There has also been a change in the way equality of funding is seen. The principal changed from granting all municipalities in principle the same to the funding of pilots and forerunner municipalities

What probably most hindered the development of local sustainable strategies was the way the funding was organised. The VOGM and BUGM funds were seen as environmental and did not pull down the policy area wall in the municipalities. It strengthened the idea that a sustainable development strategy was something that belonged in the environmental department. Secondly local capacity building and working on local sustainable strategies are two reforms at the same time. The municipalities were in the nineties so occupied with fulfilling the obligations of the funding arrangements that no time was left for comprehensive local strategy development. Further this local development was not encouraged by the strong presence of the comprehensive on the national level.

All reforms demand excess energy and resources. A similar thing happened in Norway, where LA21 came on the scene just as a previous broad-scale reform was taking root (Laferty and Eckerberg, 1999). The Norwegian Ministry of the Environment had sponsored the establishment of 'environmental officers' in every municipality, with a mandate to represent and promote environmental concerns throughout the local administration (the so-called 'MIK-reform'). The reform represented an enormous effort, both financially and administratively, so that Norway's 'local authorities' were less than ecstatic about starting a new round of change related to LA21.

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Notes

¹ On January the 1st 2005

² Other members of the Governing Committee are the Dutch minister of Transport and Public Works, the minister for Urban Policy and Integration of Ethnic Minorities and the minister for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM). All participating Departments have a contact person who is responsible for the contribution of his or her Department. The contact persons from all Departments meet once every month. The nine persons NSSD project team carries out the daily operation of the project.

³ BUGM is a government-sponsored programme called 'Contribution to implementing the municipal environmental policy decree'; FUN stands for 'Funding the Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Plan'

⁴ VOGM in Dutch refers to the government-sponsored programme 'Supplementary contribution scheme for developing municipal environmental policy'.

⁵ LOREEN in Dutch refers to 'Program for Regional and Local Energy Saving'.