

Strategic Positioning of the Province of Groningen

in the development of an Integral Management Plan for the Ems
Dollart estuary

Master Thesis

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Voorwoord

Beste lezer,

Het schrijven van deze scriptie heb ik gecombineerd met een stage bij de Provincie Groningen. Elke morgen als ik naar het Provinciehuis fietste, midden in het centrum van Groningen, fietste ik langs een bouwplaats. Eigenlijk fietste ik langs twee bouwplaatsen, waaronder de grote bouwplaats van de oostwand van de Grote Markt, maar deze bouwplaats bedoel ik niet. Ik bedoel een kleine bouwplaats aan het Zuiderdiep waar een herenhuis in aanbouw was. Tussen de oude panden werd iets nieuws gebouwd. Ondanks dat het me vaak overlast bezorgde bij het fietsen – ik moest uitwijken voor verschillende machines of omfietsen omdat er een wegversperring was – keek ik elke dag of er al vorderingen waren. Ik was soms jaloers op de bouwvakkers, omdat zij zo'n duidelijk en praktisch doel hadden, namelijk het bouwen van een huis, en ik zo abstract aan het schrijven was aan mijn scriptie. De eerste paar maanden hoorde ik een hoop lawaai op de bouwplaats maar zag ik weinig vooruitgang. Een nieuw herenhuis was het laatste wat ik er in kon herkennen. Echter, de laatste twee maanden gebeurde er opeens van alles op de bouwplaats. Grote panelen konden geplaatst worden en het gat tussen de twee naastgelegen herenhuizen leek weer opgevuld te worden. Ik ben de afgelopen maanden door dezelfde ontwikkeling gegaan. Lang heb ik gewerkt aan een, voor mijn gevoel erg abstracte, fundering: het lezen van allerlei boeken, beleidsdocumenten, het bijwonen van overleggen om de processen te begrijpen, en het schrijven van mijn theoretisch kader. Het duurde erg lang voordat er echt iets zichtbaar werd wat leek op een scriptie. En hoe boeiend het bouwen van deze 'o zo belangrijke' fundering ook was, soms raakte ik in paniek omdat ik niet dichterbij leek te komen bij mijn doel: het schrijven van een scriptie waarmee ik mijn M.Sc. Water en Kustmanagement kon afsluiten. En nu ligt het voor u. De laatste twee maanden konden de grote panelen gezet worden en is alles op zijn plek gevallen.

Dat ik uiteindelijk een scriptie heb geschreven waarmee ik mijn studie kan afsluiten, heb ik te danken aan heel veel mensen. Maar allereerst wil ik de Provincie Groningen bedanken voor de ruimte die ik kreeg om het IMP Eems Dollard proces mee te maken. Ik mocht aanwezig zijn bij alle overleggen die in het kader van de Eems Dollard gehouden werden. Hierdoor belandde ik aan verschillende tafels, van een tafel in het provinciehuis met bestuurders tot een tafel in Oldenburg met Duitse collega's, en van een tafel vol ambtenaren in de haven van Delfzijl tot aan een tafel met gebruikers van het gebied. Deze overleggen waren stuk voor stuk interessant om mee te maken. In het bijzonder wil ik David Kooistra bedanken, die mij overal mee naar toe nam, mij motiveerde en met mij discussieerde tijdens mijn stage bij de Provincie. Daarnaast wil ik graag alle personen die ik heb mogen interviewen bedanken voor hun tijd en openheid.

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Het herenhuis aan het Zuiderdiep is nog niet helemaal af. Mijn scriptie wel. De presentatie is gegeven, de conclusie en samenvatting zijn geschreven: het dak zit er op. En hoewel het proces en de lessen die ik eruit heb gehaald belangrijk zijn, het resultaat telt. Wat een opluchting dat ik dat nu aan u kan presenteren!

Ik wens u veel plezier met het lezen van mijn scriptie.

Joleen Wierenga

Groningen, 9 augustus 2014

Abstract

This study deals with the development of the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen. The theoretical background shows a transformation in planning theory and practice and a changing role of governmental authorities towards a communicative, bottom-up and integral approach of planning issues. The organizational identity of provinces in general, and of the Province of Groningen in particular, has changed according to the transformation in planning theory and practice. Nowadays, the 'new' organizational identity of provinces is changed towards being a communicative, external-oriented organization. Provinces name this 'new' role *area director*. Following the framing theory, the 'official' and general identity of the Province of Groningen is called the 'master frame' of the Province. By analyzing the case study of the IMP process, it becomes clear that the master frame can be recognized in practice as well. The Province of Groningen emphasizes on being external-oriented by emphasizing on the involvement of stakeholders and by establishing a project, the E&E project, in which regional stakeholders are motivated to cooperate and negotiate. Though, it is concluded that the master frame influences practice so strong that the Province seems to be more focused on its stakeholders than it is on its own vision and responsibilities to serve the public interests.

Keywords: Framing theory, planning theory, Dutch planning practice, organization development, strategic positioning, Dutch provinces, Province of Groningen.

Samenvatting

In de afgelopen decennia vonden verschillende maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen plaats in Nederland. Deze ontwikkelingen hebben een invloed op de politiek en op de rol van overheidsorganisaties. Een centrale en sectorale sturing heeft plaats gemaakt voor een gedecentraliseerde situatie waarin lagere overheden, provincies en gemeenten, meer verantwoordelijkheden hebben. Een consequentie hiervan is dat de positie van onder meer provincies sterk is veranderd. De nieuwe rol van provincies wordt *gebiedsregisseur* genoemd. Van het hebben en uitdragen van eigen politieke en maatschappelijke belangen hebben provincies nu de rol van een bindende factor tussen verschillende sectoren en gemeenten (INTERPROVINCIAAL OVERLEG, 2010).

De identiteit van de Provincie Groningen is ook in transitie. Het is moeilijk om een beginpunt aan te wijzen, maar rond 1999 werd de Provincie zich bewust van de veranderende maatschappij en veranderingen in vraagstukken. De Provincie werd steeds meer een actor in verschillende netwerken met verschillende regionale partners (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2001, p.53-1). Hoewel de Provincie nog steeds bezig is haar identiteit te ontwikkelen zijn de karakteristieken van een *gebiedsregisseur* al wel herkenbaar in de visiedocumenten die hierover geschreven zijn de afgelopen jaren. De Provincie Groningen kiest er voor zich te richten op de 'nieuwe' rol als *gebiedsregisseur*: het zijn van een bindende en extern-gerichte organisatie en een betrouwbare partner.

In dit onderzoek is de '*framing* theorie' gebruikt om een onderscheid te maken tussen de algemene identiteit van de Provincie Groningen, het 'master frame', en hoe deze identiteit terug komt in de dagelijkse praktijk en positionering van de Provincie Groningen, gebaseerd op individuele interpretaties. Het master frame van de Provincie Groningen, de identiteit van de Provincie, is dus vooral gebaseerd op de 'nieuwe' rol als *gebiedsregisseur*. Hoe deze identiteit terug te zien is in de praktijk wordt geanalyseerd aan de hand van een concreet planproces: de ontwikkeling van een Integraal Managementplan voor het Eems Dollard estuarium (hierna: IMP proces). Het IMP proces wordt uitgevoerd in samenwerking met Duitsland en aan de Nederlandse kant in samenwerking met het Ministerie van Economische Zaken, Rijkswaterstaat en de Provincie Groningen. Daarnaast zijn verschillende regionale stakeholders betrokken bij het proces.

De hoofdvraag van dit onderzoek is: In welke mate is de ontwikkeling van de strategische positionering van Nederlandse provincies herkenbaar in de manier waarop de Provincie Groningen zich positioneert in een multi-actor-project?

Gebaseerd op verschillende interviews kan de conclusie getrokken worden dat de Provincie Groningen zich positioneert als *gebiedsregisseur* in de ontwikkelingen rond het Eems Dollard estuarium. Zowel de werknemers als de extern geïnterviewde personen herkennen de Provincie Groningen als *gebiedsregisseur*. De Provincie Groningen is nadrukkelijk gericht op de participatie en belangen van de regionale stakeholders en brengt de stakeholders 'letterlijk' samen in het 'Economie & Ecologie in Balans' project. En hoewel de Provincie niet de leiding heeft in het IMP proces en gedeeltelijk afhankelijk is van andere partijen voelen de betrokken provinciale beleidsmedewerkers zich verantwoordelijk voor de belangen van de regionale partners. Ook in het IMP proces positioneert de Provincie zich als *gebiedsregisseur* en ligt de nadruk van de Provincie vaak op de samenwerking met andere partijen.

Het lijkt erop dat het zijn van een succesvolle *gebiedsregisseur* het voornamelijk belang van de Provincie Groningen. Daarentegen zijn de inhoudelijke belangen vaak niet herkenbaar voor de externe partijen. Het dilemma uit de planning theorie van de 'nieuwe' rol van overheidsorganisaties, het zijn van een gelijke partner in samenwerking met regionale organisaties in combinatie met het dienen van het maatschappelijk belang (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007), komt hierin naar voren. De Provincie Groningen is vooral gericht op de samenwerking met regionale organisaties maar blijkt niet altijd duidelijk te zijn over haar inhoudelijke en juridische verantwoordelijkheden.

De Provincie Groningen heeft zich de afgelopen decennia aangepast aan de maatschappelijke veranderingen. De 'nieuwe' identiteit, het master frame, van de Provincie Groningen van *gebiedsregisseur* past in de huidige maatschappij. In de praktijk geven werknemers hier betekenis aan door een extern-gerichte houding. De Provincie Groningen blijft niet in haar 'oude' rol maar zoekt haar grenzen in het zijn van een open, communicatieve partner in ruimtelijke ontwikkelingen.

List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
E&E project	Project 'Ecology and Economy in Balance'
IMP	Integral Management Plan (<i>Integrierter Bewirtschaftungsplan</i>)
IPO	Interprovincial Consulate (<i>Interprovinciaal Overleg</i>)
LGW	Department of Rural Areas and Water (<i>Afdeling Landelijke Gebied en Water</i>)
Ministry of EZ	Ministry of Economic Affairs (<i>Ministerie van Economische Zaken</i>)
Ministry of I&M	Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment (<i>Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu</i>)
MIRT	Multi-year Program on Infrastructure, Land Use Planning and Transport (<i>Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport</i>)
N2000	EU Natura 2000 policy
<i>Rijkswaterstaat</i>	Department of Public Works
WFD	EU Water Framework Directive

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1 Introduction

The last decennia several political and societal trends took place in the Netherlands. These trends caused a change in policy-making. A centralized and sectoral political situation has been replaced by a decentralized situation in which lower authorities, provinces and municipalities, get more responsibilities. As a result, the strategic positioning of the Dutch governmental authorities is in transition. For land use planning, water management and nature conservation, the policy sectors that are of relevance for this study's case study, two trends are seen as most influential and relevant in the Dutch case for the transition. There has been a trend from top-down governmental steering towards a communicative and participative governance process. The second trend has been towards an integral approach in planning issues, which includes taking into consideration the societal, environmental and economic context in a particular area.

Caused by the changes, the positioning of provinces, including the Province of Groningen, in terms of land use planning has changed to what we call today: *area director (gebiedsregisseur)*. From having and carrying out their own political and societal interests and responsibilities, provinces have the role of a binding factor between sectors and local governments and other involved parties (INTERPROVINCIAAL OVERLEG, 2010). Tasks of a province as *area director* are: developing integral

development visions; weighting and adjusting interests; and guarding and raising complementarity between cities and regions in the province (MINISTERIE VAN INFRASTRUCTUUR EN MILIEU, 2012, p.11).

Thus, the organizational identity of the Province of Groningen is in transition as well. Currently, the Province of Groningen is closely involved in several collaborations and developments around the Ems Dollart estuary, including in the development of a management plan for this area. One characteristic of the plan is that it is bilateral: a cooperation of the Netherlands and Germany. Another characteristic of the plan is that it is integral: the involvement of the many sectors that have interests in the estuary. The area is not only crucial in terms of nature, as part of the Wadden Sea and its specific estuary functions. It is also important in terms of industry and economic developments as the Eemshaven, the harbors of Delfzijl, Emden en Leer and the shipyard of Papenburg are dependent on the shipping lanes of the estuary. Additionally, many other sectors as tourism, fishery and agriculture have interests in the area. The Integral Management Plan (hereafter: IMP), its official name, aims to take the entire estuary and every interest in consideration.

Besides the Province of Groningen, two other Dutch authorities are involved in the process: the Ministry of Economic Affairs (*Ministerie van Economische Zaken*, hereafter: Ministry of EZ) as the responsible party of the IMP process in the Netherlands and the Department of Public Works (hereafter: *Rijkswaterstaat*) (RAAD VOOR DE WADDEN, 2010a). Furthermore, relevant stakeholders as municipalities, *Stichting Het Groninger Landschap* and *Groningen Seaports* are involved as well.

In this study, the IMP process serves as a case study to research the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen as an *area director*. First, the presence of governmental tasks as nature, water management and safety and land use planning in the process sets on the one hand a clear task for a governmental authority as the Province of Groningen. On the other hand, the broad involvement of different levels of authorities and other stakeholders in this process provides a situation in which the Province of Groningen can play its 'new role' as a binding factor between sectors and governmental authorities.

1.1 Problem statement

Traditionally, provinces were positioned in a hierarchal structure between national government and municipalities. The structure had a top-down approach. Nowadays, the positioning of provinces is in transition. Provinces are expected to take the role as *area director*, a binding and guarding factor. In practice, this could lead to a dilemma for provinces: on the one hand the 'old role', remaining in the belief that provinces should follow their own vision of 'what is best' for an area and societal responsibilities, while on the other hand performing their 'new role' of *area director*. Especially in

policy sectors such as nature conservation, water management and land use planning, where governmental authorities have a public task, performing the 'new role' instead of following the Province's own vision on the area might be difficult in practice.

For the Province of Groningen, it is relevant to know how the function of *area director* is carried out in the organization. In addition, it is relevant to know how the 'new role' is translated in practice and what the experienced difficulties and opportunities are, in relation of being an *area director*.

1.2 Research objective

The aim of this study is to study how the strategic positioning of Dutch provinces has changed in the last decennia, by analyzing the developments that are at the basis of the organizational identity of provinces nowadays. Moreover, the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen and the way its identity is interpreted and applied in practice is studied.

To achieve the objective that is mentioned above, the following research questions need to be answered.

The main research question is:

To what extent does the development of the strategic positioning of Dutch provinces reflect and influence the way the Province of Groningen positions itself in a multi-actor project?

The sub research questions are:

1. What are the key developments in the Dutch planning and policy-making on the physical environment and how did these developments influence the role of the Dutch government?
2. How did planning and policy-making on the physical environment develop and how did the role of the government in planning develop?
3. How did the organizational identity of provinces in the Netherlands develop?
4. How does the Province of Groningen translate the 'new role' as *area director* nowadays?
5. What is the internal perspective on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in practice in the IMP process?
6. How is the positioning of the Province in the IMP process seen from external perspectives?

1.3 Research approach

In this study, a framing approach (e.g. VAN DEN BRINK, 2010) is used to gain insight in how the organizational identity of the Province of Groningen changed and is applied in practice. The framing perspective is used to articulate the organizational identity as the 'master frame' of the Province of Groningen, based on policy documents and visions for the Province as organization. The case study on the Ems Dollart estuary gives insight in the way the 'master vision' is applied in practice. The translation and interpretation of the 'master frame' in a process like the development of an integral management plan for the estuary, is analyzed from an internal as well as from an external perspective. The translation and interpretation of the 'master frame' by the Province's employees is analyzed by participatory observation and conducting interviews. Moreover, the external perspective is analyzed by interviewing external involved persons, to see how other involved persons interpret the role and identity of the Province of Groningen.

1.4 Research design

The order of the research questions serves as a guideline throughout the thesis.

The study starts in Chapter 2 with a theoretical background on the historical changes in thinking about planning and the physical environment. The change in thinking had a significant influence on policy making and responsibilities of governmental authorities at every scale. The change in the role of the government is discussed in this chapter as well. The chapter answers sub research question 1. The theoretical background contains a comprehensive outline on framing processes as well.

Building upon the theoretical background, Chapter 3 explains the methodology that is used to gain data to be able to answer the main research question.

In Chapter 4, the organizational identity, or master frame, of the Province of Groningen is articulated, by starting from the broad perspective of the organizational identity and roles and responsibilities of Dutch provinces in general. Subsequently, the focus is on the Province of Groningen in particular to articulate its specific master frame. The chapter answers sub research question 2 and 3.

Chapter 5 is the analysis on the interpretation of the master frame, the collective action frame. How does the Province of Groningen interpret and translate their master frame in practice? The IMP process for the Ems Dollart estuary serves as a case study to analyze how the master frame of the Province of Groningen is translated in practice. An internal and external perspective is taken to study on the one hand how employees of the Province of Groningen interpret the master frame, and on

the other hand external involved people interpret and see the positioning of the Province of Groningen. The chapter answers sub research question 4 and 5.

Chapter 6 discusses and concludes the findings of this study and reflects on the main research question. The broad background of planning theory and policy making, followed by the focus on provinces and in particular the Province of Groningen, supports the discussion and understanding of the strategic positioning the Province uses in the case study of the IMP process.



2 Theoretical background

Three policy sectors are of relevance in this study: land use planning, water management and nature conservation. The first part of this chapter starts with an outline of the academic debate on spatial planning as an academic discipline as this gives insight in how thinking about planning and policy-making on the physical environment changed during the last century. Several societal and political trends have influenced the discipline, which can be recognized in planning theory. In addition, the developments in theory can be recognized in practice as well. The Dutch planning practice is analyzed in order to be able to answer the first sub research question: What are the key developments in the Dutch planning and policy making on the physical environment and how did these developments influence the role of the Dutch government?

The Dutch planning practice is analyzed according to two trends that are of relevance in the Dutch case and have had influence on the positioning of Dutch governmental authorities, especially on the positioning of the lower levels as provinces and municipalities. The trends and responsible governmental levels are analyzed in particular for the policy sectors land use planning, water management and nature conservation.

The second part of this chapter gives a theoretical reflection on the framing approach. The framing perspective is used in this study to construct a master frame and a collective action frame for the Province of Groningen. The paragraph about the framing approach provides a background in the theory and describes the terms master frame and collective action frame.

2.1 Empirical reflection on planning theory

Modernist thinking has had a major influence on the discipline of spatial planning. In fact, it is even widely accepted that planning is a product of modernity (e.g. LOW, 1991; HEALEY, 1993; SANDERCOCK, 1998, in ALLMENDINGER, 2009, p.176). Modernism is based on two themes: faith in progress through science and technology (empirical knowledge) and belief in the possibility of objective knowledge about the real world (universal truth). Overemphasis on these themes led to scientism, foundationalism, absolutism and positivism. The last, positivism, is the claim that only empirical knowledge is valid (HARPER & STEIN, 1995).

Until the 1960s, the scientific conception of logical positivism highly dominated the social sciences. "Within the social sciences positivism refers to the approaches that apply scientific methods to human and social affairs; conceived as belonging to a natural order that is open to objective enquiry" (DAVOUDI, 2012, p.430). In its most extreme version, logical positivism denies the existence of anything beyond observation. It was the basis for empirical enquiry: testing hypotheses on the factual reality would lead to objective knowledge, existing of experiences as pure as possible (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007).

Logical positivism and, as said before in more general terms, modernism have had major influence on the discipline of spatial planning (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). According to LOW (1991, in ALLMENDINGER, 2009), planning is thoroughly 'modern': finding a solution and solving a problem. DAVOUDI (2012) approaches the positivist concept from the perspective of spatial planning. She identifies the 'will to order' and the 'desire to control the future' as two main characteristics of positivist planning. Furthermore, she distinguishes five key aspects of positivist planning: the absolute view of space, the aspiration to tame space and create order, a controllable and planned future, rational decision-making by value-free experts solving well-defined planning problems and 'scientific' map-making. One of these aspects, rational decision-making by value-free experts, endorse the idea ANDREAS FALUDI (1973, in ALLMENDINGER, 2009) had about planners and planning: seeing planners as technocrats and planning as 'the application of scientific method to policy making'. GUNTON (1984) describes the origins of this perception in planning as a response to the devastating problems caused by rapid and chaotic growth of cities in the nineteenth century. Planners saw themselves as professional experts and were using objective, scientific knowledge to

solve society's problems. Seeing planners as technocrats, professional experts or scientists has been a general view in modernist planning. The modernist approach was influencing planning theory and practice from the origins of planning until approximately the 1970s and 1980s.

Planning theory was based on generics and not directly linked to practice. Planning was seen separately from political processes and could be described as "a generic activity that could be applied to any situation where rational procedures for decision-making were appropriate" (ALLMENDINGER, 2009, p.50). Though, in the last 30 years "[...] such confidence and arrogance has been replaced by uncertainty and introspection" (p.31). ALLMENDINGER (2009) mentions two reasons for this shift. The first reason is the perceived failure of such technocratic approaches. Due to unforeseeable developments, uncertainty increased and a flexible and adaptive approach became desirable. The second reason relates to broad changes in understanding and theory: the recognition that social theory has moved beyond the search for universal truths. The idea that one should accept that there is no such thing as an absolute truth corresponds with postmodernism. In postmodernism, the absolute truth does not exist because there is no single observable reality out there: knowledge is socially constructed (pp. 195-196).

Different aspects of the broad concept of postmodernism are considered to be relevant for planning theory. Post-positivism is an aspect that is associated with postmodernism. ALLMENDINGER (2009) describes the post-positivist approach as main perspective in the changes in theory in the last decennia. No longer was planning only focused on empirical knowledge and a universal truth, the bases of modernism, but through the shift towards post-positivism social and historical contexts and meanings became relevant as well. From the post-positivist perspective, planners can be described as 'fallible advisors' who operate in a complex world where there are no 'answers', only diverse options. DAVOUDI (2012) focuses on another aspect that is associated with postmodernism in social sciences: the interpretive tradition. The interpretive tradition considers knowledge to be a matter of understanding, rather than explanation which is the way it is considered in the positivist approach. DAVOUDI (2012) distinguishes five key aspects of the interpretive tradition in planning: the subjective definition of place: "space and place are seen as socially and culturally produced" (p.431), the 'will to connect' networks with continuous flows of people and resources, dealing with an indeterminable future, an iterative planning process and powerful maps used strategically or to visualize networks.

Planning theory and planning practice are strongly interlinked. Healey (1998, p.1543) states that "[t]hese shifts [...] are not just happening in the realm of theory. Much of the theory has been built on experience and observations of practice" (HEALEY, 1998, p.1543). The theoretical transition described above is closely intertwined in planning theory and planning practice. All trends have

influenced, or are still influencing, the role of governmental authorities and the implementation of planning.

2.2 Trends in Dutch land use planning

As HEALEY (1998) stated above, the theoretical shift in planning theory can be recognized in planning practice. As this study focuses on the strategic positioning of the Dutch Province of Groningen, in the following sections, the Dutch planning practice is analyzed.

Although interlinked, two trends are identified as most influential in policy-making in the Netherlands. The first trend is the trend from government towards governance: from a top-down form of planning towards planning as a governance activity. The second trend is the trend in the approach of planning issues, from sectoral and generic towards integral and area-specific. Whereas spatial planning is the term for the scientific discipline, for theory and methods in planning, land use planning is the term in the Netherlands for the policy sector that aims to plan and order land uses. The positioning of the government is especially at focus in the following sections, as land use planning has always been a governmental task in the Netherlands.

2.2.1 Governance

The theoretical shift from a technocratic approach towards a postmodern approach, described in paragraph 2.1, can be recognized in planning practice as well. PATSY HEALEY (e.g. 1998;2006) describes this shift comprehensively from a practice-oriented perspective. Despite differences in planning traditions of different countries in Europe, HEALEY (1998) recognizes some broadly shared features in the development of these planning traditions. In the postwar period, European national governments took the responsibility to provide universal access to basic needs as housing, education, health and adequate infrastructure. There was a clear division between public provision and private action. However, HEALEY (1998) states that this postwar, hierarchical, top-down form of organization of planning could not meet the rising demands in the 1970s and 1980s. Government, whether national or local, was not able to deal with environmentalist concerns and the pressure to improve social and environmental qualities and at the same time solve the financial difficulties resulted out of the recession of 1973. In addition to the awareness that government could not meet the rising demands, unforeseeable developments in this period like the recession and unpredictable demographic changes showed that planning issues could not always be approached as generic issues but should be approached as complex issues. Complex issues are issues that do not have a clear causality and have multiple uncertainties, interests and stakeholders (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007).

The consequence of this realization was that national governments had to search for new policy directions and new styles of working. The national government was not able to decide and control

planning issues by itself. HEALEY (2003) states that planning is an interactive process and a governance activity. By governance she means the processes by which societies and social groups manage their collective affairs. The COMMISSION ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE (1995) defines governance as "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs" (in SMOUTS, 1998). As well as HEALEY (2003), the Commission emphasizes the fact that governance is a process of collaboration in which everyone could be involved.

The shift HEALEY (1998) describes can be recognized in Dutch planning practice as well. A hierarchical, top-down form of planning characterized planning practice in the postwar period, the 1950s and the 1960s. Technical rationality was the Dutch approach in this period (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). However, also the Dutch government could not deal with the environmental and social problems and the rising demands from the society. A flexible and adaptive approach became desirable (VAN DER CAMMEN & DE KLERK, 2008). Step by step, the national government started to approach planning as a governance activity, by involving other parties than governmental authorities.

In Figure 1, a decentralization trend towards partners outside governmental authorities is shown. On the one hand, a communicative turn can be recognized, an increasing collaboration between state and society. The 'backbone' of the idea that planning is a communicative process is the work of HABERMAS (e.g. 1973; 1984, in DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). He describes planning as the process of discussing to create 'will-formation': creating the will to achieve ends through discourse. In other words, the essence of the communicative approach in planning is to achieve commitment for one plan, by partnerships and participation of stakeholders. The concept of communicative planning is seen as drawn upon the post-positivist idea: there is not one certain truth but different interpretations of reality (ALLMENDINGER, 2009). In a communicative planning process, the different interpretations, conflicting or not, are brought together. Resolving and presenting these interpretations in one plan is 'at the heart of communicative planning'. Consequently, local knowledge and informal, social infrastructures made the frame where planning happened. A participative and bottom-up approach became the new paradigm in land use planning (e.g. HEALEY, 1998; VAN DER CAMMEN & DE KLERK, 2008).

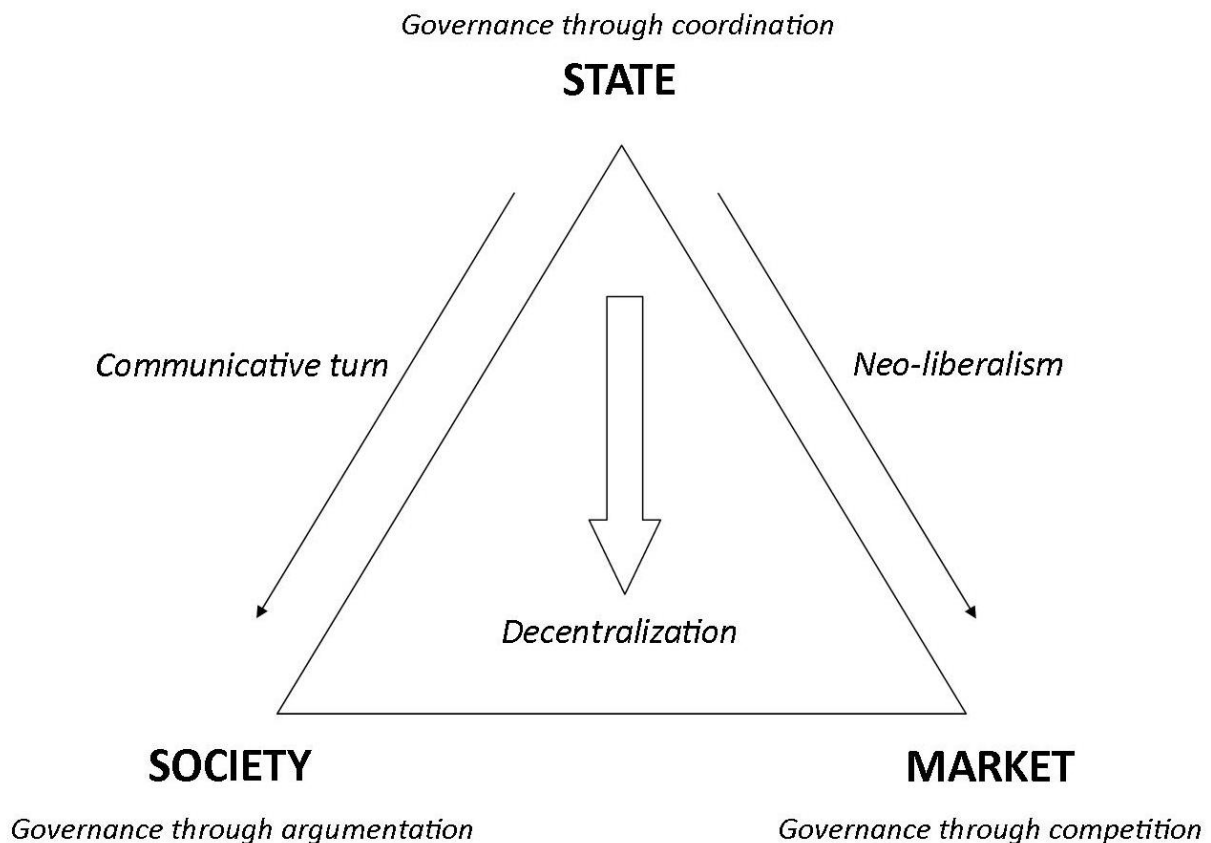


Figure 1 Governance triangle; based on LEMOS & AGRAWAL (2006)

Parallel to the shift in the 1970s and 1980s towards communicative planning, the 'ascendancy of neoliberal politics' arose. Market-oriented planning required flexible, market-friendly states that were entrepreneurial (SANYAL, 2005). DAVID HARVEY (1989) describes the changing role of governmental authorities as from 'managerialism' towards 'entrepreneurialism'. The managerial approach of governments was typical for the postwar period and was, as mentioned above, mainly focused on the provision of services, facilities and benefits. This approach changed during the 1970s and 1980s towards an entrepreneurial approach, focusing on development and employment growth. Governmental authorities shifted their attention to the promotion of projects and strategies to re-position their economies: "what inspired the moment were entrepreneurship and development, not regulations and planning" (SANYAL, 2005, p.9).

The Dutch government searched for a less centrally oriented governmental structure to deal with the changes. In the 'new' structure, the market and non-governmental organizations, representing certain societal interests, got more influence. This shift did not only happen on the initiative of the state but also on the initiative of the society itself, out of protest or dissatisfaction or out of deregulation as a stimulus for more initiative (VAN DER CAMMEN & DE KLERK, 2008). Both the

communicative and neo-liberal turn can be recognized in the Dutch planning practice. In addition to decentralization towards society and market, the lower authorities such as provinces and municipalities got more influence in policy-making (SPIT & ZOETE, 2009). In 1993, the Forth Policy Document on land use planning was published in the Netherlands which emphasized decentralization, private participation and withdrawal of the government. 'Regions on their own power' (*regio's op eigen kracht*), public-private partnerships and building for the market are adages of this Policy Document (SPIT & ZOETE, 2009). In the 1990s, a participative and communicative planning approach was preferably applied in every planning process. Though, at the end of the 1990s, one came to the conclusion that the communicative approach also had disadvantages like high costs, lengthy and short term thinking (WOLTJER, 1997, in DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). Furthermore, the position of the government became on the one hand more equal in relation to other parties but was on the other hand still serving the public interest. This situation made the position of the government, at any level, inconclusive (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). Nowadays, market partners and public participation are still part of the Dutch planning practice to achieve consensus-based solutions. However, the Dutch governmental authorities still have a strong influence on land use planning. The three governmental levels, the state, provinces and municipalities all have strategic, tactical and operational tasks in policy-making (SPIT & ZOETE, 2009).

2.2.2 Area-specific planning

Interlinked with the transition towards governance in the last decennia (paragraph 2.2.1) the approach to planning issues changed. The traditional top-down structure in the postwar period went along with a generic approach of planning issues and coherent, large scale plans. In Europe, the focus of planning in this period was mainly on economic recovery and solving the housing shortage (VAN DER CAMMEN & DE KLERK, 2008). In the 1970s however, as HEALEY (1998) already stated, the societal demand increased towards not only improving economic development and welfare but to improving the social and environmental qualities as well.

In the Netherlands, the rising demand for quality was translated in strong juridical grounded planning based on norms. Sectoral policies were developed for different topics like nature, noise and extraction activities and applied in the entire country. "The outcome was a sharply divided planning system, based on several strong sectors [...]" (DE ROO, 2007, p.102). However, at the end of the 1980s the attention towards spatial, area-oriented policies increased. The complexity of the regulations and the awareness of the importance of market processes resulted in a transition towards a growing interest in profiling of areas and competition between areas, resulting in the desire to maintain or even improve the spatial quality of areas. At the same time, thinking about planning changed towards a postmodernist approach: the belief that there is no absolute truth and

that reality is socially constructed (paragraph 2.1). Striving for improving the spatial quality of areas in a period that there is no objective 'good quality' resulted in a different approach of planning issues. Planning issues could not always be 'solved' with generic norms and rules, but its own local or regional context, unique needs and interests should be taken into consideration. Planning issues should be approached with a unique, area-specific, tailor-made approach to deal with the specific issue (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). Land use planning became adapted to the growing dynamics, complexity and uncertainties of the society (DE ROO, 2007).

Parallel to and interlinked with the shift towards area-specific policies is the shift towards integral policies. This shift is a response to the complexity of many planning issues as well, and a response to the awareness of the linkages between different policy sectors. In the 1980s, the concept 'sustainability', combining social, environmental and economic factors, and the awareness of the human influence on environment and nature made one aware of the linkages between the policy sectors. A land use plan for a new industrial area could not be made without alignment with policy sectors as nature conservation and environmental management, as industry influence nature, and conversely. In the Netherlands, sustainability as a concept was well received in area-specific planning. This expressed the desire to integrate land use planning with environmental policies and possibly other policy sectors (VAN DER CAMMEN & DE KLERK, 2008). This desire can be recognized in the upcoming Act, the *Omgevingswet*, which is expected to be adopted in 2018. It aims to combine all acts and regulations on land use planning, for example on the themes space, infrastructure, nature, water and living environment. The *Omgevingswet* makes integration of the themes easier by simplifying the juridical aspects and processes of spatial developments (RIJKSOVERHEID, 2012).

2.2.3 Trends in positioning of provinces in different policy sectors

In the previous paragraphs a transformation away from a traditional coordinative approach in land use planning is described. In this paragraph, the meaning and impact of these trends towards governance and area-specific planning on the positioning of provinces is analyzed.

The transformation, and especially the first trend towards governance, should be seen as a response to the implicit conclusion that the national government cannot meet all societal needs and does not have the resources to control the physical environment in such a way that it satisfies all parties. It is a response to the growing dynamics, complexity and uncertainties of our society. Planning issues need to be solved in accordance with the local and regional context. "Hence, the desire for decentralized, issue related, area-specific policy, which is conducive to the participation of local actors and to integration of the relevant policy sectors" (DE ROO, 2007, p.103).



Figure 2 Provinces of the Netherlands

Provinces are often seen as the appropriate governmental level to deal with issues on the regional level. There are three governmental levels in the Netherlands: the State, the provinces and the municipalities. This three-layer governmental system originates from the nineteenth century. The State of the Netherlands is divided in twelve provinces (Figure 2), which are again divided in municipalities that deal with local issues (SEINSTRA & SIETSMA, 2012). The twelve provinces are represented in the Interprovincial Consulate (*Interprovinciaal Overleg*, hereafter: IPO). This organization promotes the interests of the provinces as the intermediate governmental level (IPO, n.d. a).

In recent reports, provinces are seen as the appropriate governmental scale that should focus on the responsibilities on land use planning, roads and transport, environment, water and nature, or in short: the spatial-economic policy domain (COMMISSIE REGIONAAL BESTUUR IN NEDERLAND, 2002; IPO, 2010). A reason why provinces are seen as the appropriate governmental scale in this policy domain is the fact that societal dynamics are taking place over larger territories than before. Upscaling and regionalization of governmental tasks in this policy domain is needed. Although the scale of provinces is not always ideal - sometimes the regional issues are crossing the provincial borders - provinces are the governmental authorities that are seen as most able to oversee the regional scale (COMMISSIE REGIONAAL BESTUUR IN NEDERLAND, 2002). In the three policy sectors that are of relevance in this research and are part of the spatial-economic policy domain - land use planning, water management and nature conservation -, the Dutch provinces have a specific positioning: specific tasks and responsibilities.

In terms of the second trend, the trend towards area-specific planning and integration, a transformation in the Dutch planning practice can be recognized as well. The three policy sectors that are discussed in this study were traditionally not strongly linked. However, nowadays, a

connection is emerging between land use planning and the policy sectors water management and nature conservation (e.g. VAN SCHENDELEN, 1997; WOLTJER & AL, 2007; SPIT & ZOETE, 2009).

The aim of this paragraph is to understand how both trends influence the policy-making in the policy sectors. For the trend towards governance, the most relevant question to be answered is: which governmental scales are responsible for the policy sector and in what way? For the trend towards integration, it is relevant to understand how the policy sector is approached: sectoral or integrated with other policy sectors.

Land use planning

The trends described above are already the trends that are most relevant for the policy sector land use planning. But what do these trends mean for the responsibilities of the different Dutch governmental levels, and especially of the provinces?

The profile of the provinces as being responsible for the spatial-economic policy domain is strengthened by decentralization of tasks in land use planning from the national government towards the provinces. In 2004, the *Nota Ruimte* was published. The central idea of the *Nota Ruimte* was: "decentral where possible, central where necessary" (MINISTERIE VAN VOLKSHUISVESTING, RUIMTELIJKE ORDENING EN MILIEUBEHEER, 2004, p.4). In this way, the national policy document on land use planning emphasized the increasing role of provinces and municipalities in land use planning and related policy domains. Municipalities are responsible for the development of juridical land use plans (*bestemmingsplannen*). The land use plans of provinces, and of the national government in areas of national interests, are more indicative and setting the frameworks for municipalities. In July 2008, a revised version of the Land Use Planning Act (*Wet ruimtelijke ordening*) came into force, in which again the increasing responsibilities for lower authorities in land use planning were emphasized (VAN DOORN & PIETERMAAT-KROS, 2010).

Water management

According to WOLTJER & AL (2007), the policy sectors water management and land use planning are nowadays 'inherently connected' in the Netherlands. The linkages between both sectors have increased for several reasons. The first reason is climate change and consequently flooding and water shortages. These new challenges led to a search for new policy strategies that accept water on land, instead of using the traditional approach by blocking the water and only taking technical measures like barriers and dikes into consideration. The second reason is the insight that a river basin needs to be managed from the perspective of the entire river basin. After all, the water flows out of the entire area, via groundwater or surface water, towards the river. Many problems in the river are the consequence of activities somewhere in the river basin (VAN LEUSSEN, 2009). The

connectedness of land use planning and water management issues became even more pronounced by European policies, following the principle of coordination at the scale of the river basin, so an integrated, area-specific approach became desired. The Water Framework Directive (hereafter: WFD), adopted in 2000, is the European instrument that requires member states to make comprehensive management plans for each river basin, taking in consideration the sources of surface water pollution and the impacts of human activities. "The river basin approach required by the WFD, therefore, addresses both land and water together" (WOLTJER & AL, 2007, p.217). The Directive requires member states to link land use planning with water management in their policies. The trend towards integral and area-specific planning can be recognized in water management. However, the Dutch approach is sectoral organized because *Rijkswaterstaat*¹ and regional water boards are mainly responsible for water management. As *Rijkswaterstaat* and the water boards are sectoral governmental authorities, water management is traditionally largely separated from other policy sectors such as land use planning (e.g. WOLSINK, 2006; WOLTJER & AL, 2007).

With regard to the second trend towards governance and decentralization, water management has not been decentralized in the same way as land use planning. Though, the central idea of the National Waterplan 2009-2015 is the same as it is in land use planning: "decentral where possible, central where necessary" (MINISTERIE VAN VOLKSHUISVESTING, RUIMTELIJKE ORDENING EN MILIEUBEHEER, 2004, p.4). Provinces translate the generic national policy in regional policies and are informed by the municipalities and water boards, who are responsible for implementing the regional policies (NATIONAAL WATERPLAN 2009-2015). However, it can be stated that the responsibilities in water management are rather fragmented. On the national level, *Rijkswaterstaat* is responsible for the coastal zone and the major rivers. The water boards are responsible for the regional water system: the quantity and quality of water and flood defense. Provinces are responsible for ground water, while municipalities are responsible for sanitary sewage and the surplus of rainfall (WOLTJER & AL, 2007). The reason why water management has not been decentralized and the national government still has strong influence on the policy sector is given already in 1991, by SAEIJS. He argues that water systems function as an entirety and that an intervention at one place may have far-reaching consequences for quality and utilization elsewhere. SAEIJS' argumentation (1991) fits to the European WFD which requires an integrative approach. All activities in a river basin are so interlinked that the area needs to be managed on a higher level, sometimes even crossing national

¹ *Rijkswaterstaat* is the implementation authority of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment and is responsible for flood defense, a sufficient amount of clean drinking water and national highways (RIJKSWATERSTAAT, n.d.). *Rijkswaterstaat* can be described as a sectoral authority as it has specific tasks in the policy sectors water management and infrastructure (e.g. WOLSINK, 2006; WOLTJER & AL, 2007). In practice, *Rijkswaterstaat* works together with other authorities to contribute to the integration of plans.

borders as in the case of the Ems river, discussed in this research, to make sure that all influencing factors are a part of the integrated management. Instead of the administrative borders, the geographical borders of river basins should determine the level on which water management takes place. Consequently, this could lead to upscaling of tasks in water management. Although the central idea is to decentralize this policy sector (NATIONAAL WATERPLAN 2009-2015), a national approach and national standards seems essential. This means for provinces that, when it comes to the coastal zone or major rivers, the national government is responsible and consequently involved in the developments of regional plans.

VAN DEN BRINK & HIDDING (2009) recognize the tension between the sectoral and central approach and the decentralized area-specific approach which is desired in water management. They conclude that there are possibilities for bridging the gap. However, they state that regional development "is a hard and risky strategy, which requires regional initiative, creativity and persistence" (p.255).

Nature conservation

Nature and land use planning have always been interlinked in the Netherlands. However, the relation of land use planning and nature has changed in the last decennia. From 1850 until the postwar period, people became increasingly interested in nature. As a consequence of the increasing welfare, nature became accessible for more people as a place to relax and spend free time. Another reason why people were interested in nature was the scientific interest. More knowledge would lead to more control on natural processes. Besides enjoying the attractiveness of nature, people tried to dominate nature as well (VAN SCHENDELEN, 1997). In the 1960s and 1970s, when the economy and society were recovered from war, development and progress was at focus. However, one realized that there were limits to growth. The physical space and material resources were limited and the increasing production and consumption led to increasing emissions and waste which had local and global consequences. It was in this period that the awareness of the human influence on landscape, nature and the environmental ecological quality arose worldwide (e.g. VAN SCHENDELEN, 1997; DE ROO, 2001). The Dutch government started to structure environmental policy (DE ROO, 2001). Additionally, the government developed policies for nature conservation. The approach of these policies was reactive. Governmental authorities tried to protect and maintain the last existing pieces of nature, while many nature areas disappeared already, due to the high pressure of land use activities. The focus of nature conservation was to maintain as many as possible examples of different types of nature areas which were still existing (VAN SCHENDELEN, 1997). However, as the welfare increased and the people became more assertive and critical, one realized that the sectoral, reactive policies were not effective and efficient enough. It became clear that policy sectors are interlinked and that consistency was needed. At the end of the 1980s, just as in the

development of land use planning policies, area-specific policies were introduced for nature conservation. Moreover, the National Ecological Network (*Ecologische Hoofdstructuur*) was introduced. The National Ecological Network aimed recovery and consistency of nature areas, by actively restoring and creating nature to enlarge and connect nature areas (VAN DER CAMMEN & DE KLERK, 2008). Thus, instead of a reactive approach, nature conservation became active development-oriented (STAGHOUWER, 2013).

The trend towards integral and area-specific planning can be recognized in nature conservation as policy sector, in the way that nature areas as a type of land use are part of land use plans. In addition, nature areas are combined with other functions as agriculture and recreation (VAN SCHENDELEN, 1997). However, often nature is not equivalent in comparison to other land uses. On local and regional level, stronger economic interests and spatial claims for economic development have a tendency to be more important than nature or other environmental interests. Nature conservation is, as well as water management, a collective interest which is often integrated in land use planning by sectoral and collective instruments and processes (SPIT & ZOETE, 2009).

For a long time, the sectoral and collective instrument has been the National Ecological Network. Nowadays, a decentralization trend can be recognized: in 2012, nature conservation became a core task of provinces instead of a task of the national government. Provinces are responsible for the policy on nature conservation and the implementation of it (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2013a). The national government is responsible for the implementation of the European policy on nature conservation: N2000. The Ministry of EZ is the governmental level to designate an area as a N2000 area. After designation, provinces are again responsible for the development of a management plan for the area, in cooperation with the other parties in the area (RIJKSOVERHEID, n.d. b).

2.3 Intermediate reflection

The previous paragraphs (2.1 and 2.2) aimed to answer the first sub research question: how did planning and policy-making on the physical environment develop and how did the role of the government in planning develop? From a broad perspective on planning, based on international literature, the second part of the paragraph focused on the Dutch planning practice and the role of Dutch governmental authorities and the provinces in particular.

In the previous decennia, spatial planning in the Netherlands has gone through societal and political changes which resulted in a different approach to planning issues: from government to governance and from sectoral and generic towards integral and area-specific planning. As stated earlier, land use planning has traditionally been a governmental task in the Netherlands. Planners have always been a part of the government. However, nowadays, a 'new' approach is seen as suitable for planning issues. The traditional approach and the 'new' approach can be translated in two extremes of governmental behavior in terms of land use planning. These two types of behavior are shown in the spectrum in Figure 3.

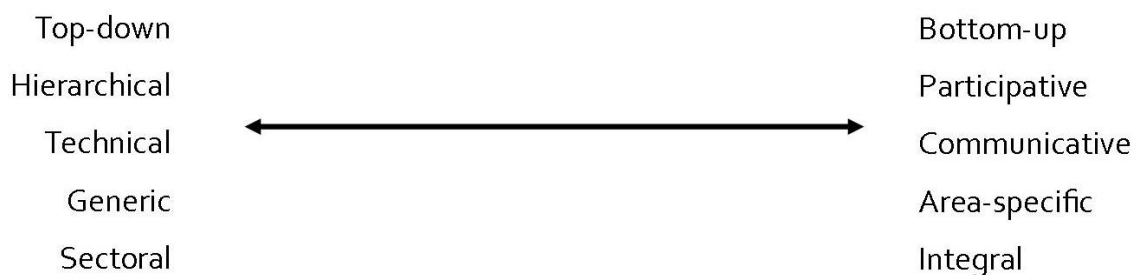


Figure 3 Spectrum of governmental approaches in land use planning

The policy sectors water management and nature conservation have gone through the same societal and political trends as land use planning. These trends resulted in an almost similar change in the policy sectors as the changes in land use planning. However, differences between the policy sectors in terms of governance and integration can also be seen. For instance, the lower authorities have got many responsibilities due to the decentralization trend (paragraph 2.2.1), but not in every policy sector. Consequently, in many cases, these authorities still have to cooperate intensively with the national government when it comes to integral issues. Not all policy sectors are fully decentralized. For instance, water management is still in many aspects state's responsibility.

The trend towards governance led to decentralization, however, it also led to an increase in cooperation with the civil society and regional partners. This resulted, as mentioned earlier in paragraph 2.2.1, in an inconclusive position of the government at all levels. On the one hand, the position became more equal in relation to other parties while on the other hand the government was still serving the public interest (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). The trends mentioned in this paragraph lead to associated dilemmas for the government at every level: integration of sectors leading to cooperation and interdependence between different governmental levels and governance leading to an inconclusive position of governmental authorities.

The Province of Groningen is one of the governmental authorities that have to deal with this 'new' situation. How the Province of Groningen deals with the situation is the focus of this study. By

analyzing this in a case study, the case study of the Ems Dollart estuary and the development of the IMP, the way in which the Province translates its 'new' positioning in a concrete process becomes clear. Different governmental levels have to cooperate in order to make one integral plan for the entire area. Moreover, many regional partners are involved as well, such as municipalities, nature conservation organizations and harbors. How does a governmental authority such as the Province of Groningen position itself strategically between all involved parties? How do the trends towards governance and area-specific planning works in practice? How does the Province deal with the associated dilemmas?

2.4 A framing approach

A framing approach is used to analyze the way in which the Province of Groningen tries to deal with the dilemmas and its strategic positioning in the context of a continuously changing political and societal reality. Although framing is originally approached from a psychological perspective, nowadays, framing is seen as a political and strategic activity (e.g. VAN DEN BRINK, 2010, ENTMAN, 1993). From this perspective, framing is applied in this study to give insight into how the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen changes and is applied in practice. This paragraph will start with an introduction of the framing approach. This part is followed by the theoretical background of two types of framing processes drawn from VAN DEN BRINK (2010): the articulation of a master frame and constructing a collective action frame.

2.4.1 Framing

The origin of the framing concept lies in the cognitive psychology. In the cognitive view, frames help individuals to deal with complexity by filtering and simplifying information. In 1932, BARTLETT (in VAN DEN BRINK, 2010) described frames from this perspective as mental structures or 'schemata' in our memory that help us to organize and interpret new experiences. Frames help to make sense of the situation, identifying and interpreting aspects that seem important for understanding and relegating information to the background as less important. "This selective simplification filters people's perceptions and defines [...] their fields of vision, leading at times to sharply divergent interpretations of an observed event" (SHMUELI, 2008, p.2049).

Although the concept of framing was recognized early, for example in the publication of BARTLETT in 1932, the social movement scholars became interested in the framing approach in the 1980s, in the same period as the postmodernist period. Framing theories are based on a social constructionist perspective which fits in the postmodern theory. A social constructionist perspective "does not recognize any absolute truth-claims - it implies that there is no single observable reality out there -

[...]" (ALEXANDER, 2008, in ALLMENDINGER, 2009, p.195). The framing perspective emphasizes the fact that people make sense of reality and add meaning to situations in different ways.

In the last decennia, the perspective on the framing theory changed. In 1986, SNOW defines the function of a frame as organizing experience and guiding action, whether individual or collective. Nowadays, collective framing is recognized as well. There are more perspectives on frames and on how frames are generated (e.g. REIN & SCHÖN, 1996; SHMUELI, 2008). Besides the cognitive view, framing can be approached from a communicative perspective. Rather than an individual sense-making process described by BARTLETT (1932), framing is seen as a collective 'activity', a communicative approach involving interactions among actors in a situation. From this perspective, framing processes are seen as a political and strategic activity. To frame is to select particular aspects of a perceived reality and to make these pieces of information more meaningful and noticeable while occluding other aspects (e.g. ENTMAN, 1993; VAN DEN BRINK, 2010). By doing so, framing can be used "to persuade others to one's own viewpoint, to gain advantage in negotiations, or to rally like-minded people to the cause" (PUTNAM AND HOLMER (1992, in SHMUELI, 2008, p.2049). In conflicts, individuals choose terms that favor their side.

For this study, the work of VAN DEN BRINK (2010) serves as a major inspiration. VAN DEN BRINK (2010) uses a similar approach in using the framing theory in the context of an organization such as the Province of Groningen. The work of VAN DEN BRINK (2010) focuses on the transition of the identity of *Rijkswaterstaat* and uses the framing perspective to be able to make sense of reality in the context of an organization such as *Rijkswaterstaat*. The research focused on the external developments influencing the organizational identity of *Rijkswaterstaat* and the application and interpretation of the new identity within the organization and concrete projects.

VAN DEN BRINK (2010) mentions in her study that frames generally function as guides for doing and acting. The framing theory does not stay in strategic terms - future vision and shared perspectives - it consists of the element of action programs as well. Moreover, "[...]frames are constructed and operate at the individual, collective and more generic levels" (VAN DEN BRINK, 2010, p.39). Therefore, this study does not only focus on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in general on a generic level. Rather, it focusses on concrete action programs as results of strategic positioning in the organization and in the case study of the Ems Dollart estuary as well. This study tries to not only articulate a collective organizational identity, the new *master frame*, but takes the *collective action frames* on the level of departments and employees into account as well. By doing so, it becomes clear what the influence of the *master frame* is on the working floor and how the master frame is interpreted and applied in practice.

2.4.2 Collective action frame

A clear definition of the term collective action frame cannot be given easily. In the definitions that can be found in literature, one aspect is notable: the link to social movements or social movement organizations. According to STEINBERG (1998, in VAN DEN BRINK, 2010, p.37), a collective action frame tries to "provide a window on how social movements construct an interpretive schema that underlies mobilization and sustains action". BENFORD AND SNOW (2000, p.614) describe collective action frames as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization". Social movements construct collective action frames by negotiating about a shared understanding of a problematic situation and the way to act (GAMSON, 1992, in VAN DEN BRINK, 2010). From this perspective framing is largely an intentional and strategic activity, with the aim to gather support and mobilize potential adherents (SNOW & BENFORD, 1988, in BENFORD & SNOW, 2000). Collective action frames are more than aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions. Collective action frames are consciously constructed and negotiated shared understandings. In this study, the collective action frame of the Province is the position the Province takes in the specific context of the processes around the Ems Dollart estuary.

2.4.3 Master frame

Whereas collective action frames are constructed at the collective level, some frames are not. These frames are broad and "function as a kind of master algorithm that colors and constrains the orientations and activities of movements" (VAN DEN BRINK, 2010, p.38). This type of frame is referred to as master frame. Master frames are generic frames and are not limited to the interests of a particular group or to a specific problem (SNOW & BENFORD, 1992, in VAN DEN BRINK, 2010). Master frames perform the same function as collective action frames but on a larger scale (VAN DEN BRINK, 2010). In this study, the master frame of the Province of Groningen is the generic identity of the organization: the position the Province is taken, regardless the context of a specific type of problem or policy sector in which the Province positions itself.

2.5 Framing the Province of Groningen

This study aims to analyze the development of the strategic positioning in the Netherlands and the reflection and influence of this development in positioning of the Province of Groningen in a multi-actor project. VAN DEN BRINK (2010, p.42) states in her study that, "[w]ith a little imagination, *Rijkswaterstaat* can be seen as a social movement organization that is trying to reposition itself politically and strategically in a wider environment". In this study, the Province of Groningen is likewise seen as a social movement organization trying to reposition itself. By approaching the Province in this way, the framing approach can be applied. The framing approach distinguished two

types of frames, the master frame and the collective action frame, which helps to give an answer on the main research question of this study.

The master frame gives an organization an organization-wide guideline on its identity and positioning. A master frame should help employees to position themselves in their daily work and policy-making processes. If the positioning of the employees is expressed in a consistent way, the external involved people should be able to notice the master frame. In this study, the master frame helps to understand what the organizational identity of provinces, and the Province of Groningen in particular, is. The master frame of the Province of Groningen refers to the organizational identity and the political and strategic positioning of the Province in general.

The concept of collective action frame is used to refer to the way in which employees of the Province of Groningen position themselves in the concrete case study of the Ems Dollart estuary, based on the master frame. Moreover, the way the external parties see the master frame, the external interpretation of the master frame of the Province, is analyzed. The collective action frame helps the researcher to give an answer to the second part of the main research question, to the question how the organizational identity reflects and influences the way in which the Province of Groningen gives meaning to its positioning in the IMP Ems Dollart process.

The two types of framing processes, distinguished by VAN DEN BRINK, are elaborated in two steps in this study. These two steps are presented in the context of this study in the conceptual model (Figure 4). Following the framing theory, the study starts with the articulation of a master frame to construct the organizational identity of the Province of Groningen. The second step of the study is the articulation of the collective action frame, the translation and interpretation of the master frame in practice. The construction of the collective action frame is done in the concrete case study of the IMP process.

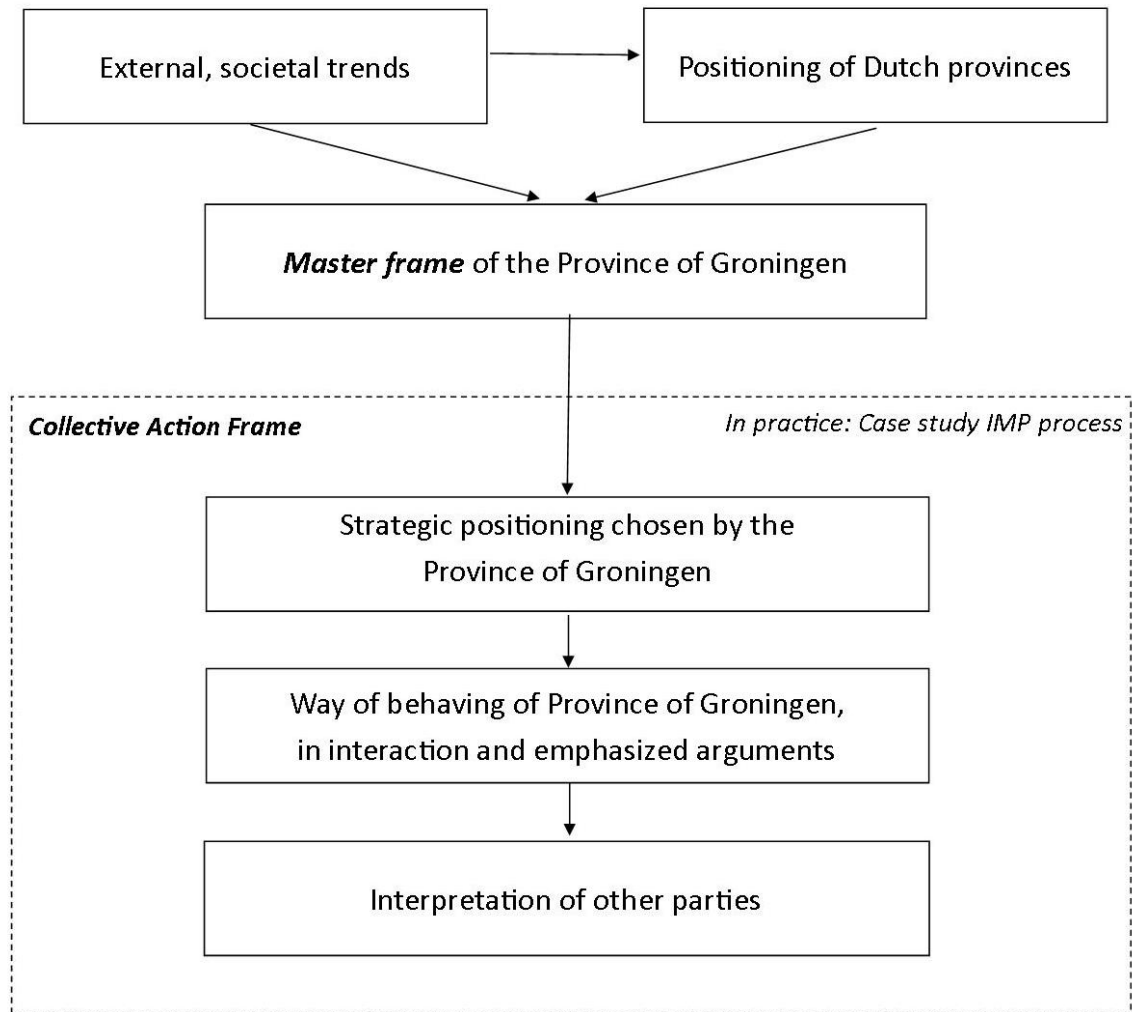


Figure 4 Conceptual model of the research

In the next chapter, the operationalization of the central concepts of this study is presented. Moreover, the choices on which the demarcation of this study is based on are explained, as well as the applied methods and the reliability of the study.



3 Methodology

Building upon the theoretical framework that is discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter deals with the methodology that is used to get an answer to the sub research questions. By answering the sub research questions, the researcher is able to answer the main research question in the end: How has the strategic positioning of provinces in the Netherlands developed and how does that development reflect and influence the way the Province of Groningen positions itself in a multi-actor project?

The following sections cover the choice for using a qualitative research approach, the positionality of the researcher in the situation of an internship, and the methods that were used to obtain both primary and secondary data.

3.1 Interpretive approach

The framing approach emphasizes the fact that people can have different interpretations and add meaning to situations in different ways (VAN DEN BRINK, 2010). Consequently, this study is positioned in the interpretive approach. The interpretive approach believes that there is no single reality, but rather multiple interpretations of realities (VAN DER STOEP, 2014). The ontological and epistemological assumption that realities and knowledge are constructed in and out of interactions

between people is the basis of the interpretive research tradition (GEERTZ, 1973; YANOW, 2000; CROTTY, 2003, in VAN DER STOEP, 2014). In this study, framing is used to focus on what happens in interaction by analyzing text, talk and non-verbal behavior as mediums in which interpretations are manifested. In addition, framing is used to analyze the processes and outcomes of social interactions. In this study, interactions during formal and informal meetings and interactions on formal and informal documents are analyzed.

As this study is positioned in the interpretive approach, qualitative data is collected. Qualitative data accepts multiple perspectives and realities (O'LEARY, 2010). According to O'LEARY (2010, pp. 113-114), the qualitative tradition can be used "to truly explore and understand the interactions, processes, lived experiences, and belief systems that are a part of individuals, institutions, cultural groups, and even the everyday". The subject of this study, the strategic positioning of provinces in the Netherlands, can best be analyzed by collecting qualitative data as it is a subject that is dependent and developed by interpretations, interactions and strategic and political processes. By focusing on one case and by collecting qualitative data, the researcher is able to collect in-depth information, to understand the reasons and arguments behind decisions. In this study, political agendas and power relations play a role as well. O'LEARY (2010, p.113) claims that the qualitative tradition "does not necessarily shy away from political agendas". Qualitative research is done in this study in order to collect the right information to answer the main research question.

3.2 Methods

The study on the master frame and the articulation of the collective action frame of the Province of Groningen is performed by using triangulation of methods and information sources. Triangulation of methods – using more sources of data – confirms the authenticity of each source and is a strategy in qualitative studies for achieving credibility (O'LEARY, 2010). In this study, the research design entails a case study. The case study serves as a concrete project to study how the Province of Groningen translates its 'new role' in practice. In addition, documents are analyzed and interviews are conducted to gain data. Furthermore, data is collected by participatory observation. In the following sections, the methods used for this study are clarified.

3.2.1 A case study

One of the methods applied in this study is the case study method. A case study is often chosen to allow the building of a holistic understanding within a clearly defined and highly relevant context. O'LEARY (2010, p.174) defines a case study as "a method of studying elements of the social through comprehensive description and analysis of a single situation or case, e.g. a detailed study of an individual, setting, group, episode, or event".

Often, an interpretive analysis entails a research design with case studies, "because meaning construction can only be understood within its specific and unique contexts" (VAN DER STOEP, 2014, p. 57). Interpretations are dependent on the context and cannot be grasped with general laws and rules. Therefore, this study on the strategic positioning of Dutch provinces focuses in particular on the Province of Groningen and more in depth on the IMP process. The IMP process serves as a case study to analyze how the Province of Groningen is positioning itself.

Since the 1960s, the Ems Dollart estuary is in a poor ecological status. Many processes and developments are focused on this problem and the tension between ecology and economy. The Province of Groningen is closely involved in several processes around the Ems Dollart estuary, including the IMP process. The process is bilateral: a cooperation of the Netherlands and Germany. Furthermore, the process is integral: many sectors that have interests in the estuary are involved. Besides the Province of Groningen, the Ministry of EZ and *Rijkswaterstaat* are two other Dutch authorities that are involved in the process. Currently, formal meetings are held between the different stakeholders to find synergies and conflicts. Aim of the IMP is to come to a widely supported list of measurements that can be implemented to improve the ecological quality of the estuary.

There are several reasons why the case study of the IMP process is selected for this study. First of all, as already mentioned in chapter 1 and above, the involvement of different policy sectors and different levels of authorities and other stakeholders is a characteristic of the IMP process. Through this, the process provides a situation in which the Province of Groningen is expected to be able to express its strategic positioning and its 'new role' as *area director* clearly. Second, this study followed the strategy carried out by DENZIN & LINCOLN (2005, in VAN DER STOEP, 2014). They argue that the researcher should select a case study which offers the most opportunity to learn, for example because it is accessible and the researcher has the possibility to spend time with it. The IMP process is strongly linked with the internship that has been part of this study. In paragraph 3.3, the internship is discussed more comprehensively. However, here it can already be stated that the internship provides the researcher access to many formal and informal meetings and many documents and involved persons. Moreover, the status in which the process is currently in, the meetings between the stakeholders, provides a situation in which the Province can express its 'new role'.

3.2.2 Document analysis

The second method that is used in this study is document analysis. O'LEARY (2010, p.223) defines this method as the "collection, review, interrogation, and analysis of various forms of written text as a primary source of research data". Document analysis is a method that collects indirect data or

secondary data: data that exists regardless of the researcher's questioning. The advantage of existing data is that it is not influenced by the researcher. Primary interaction between the researcher and the researched does not take place so the researcher has no impact on the reality (O'LEARY, 2010). In this study, the forms of written texts that are analyzed vary from literature to policy documents to internal publications of the Province of Groningen.

To be able to find out how the organizational identity of Dutch provinces developed (research question 2), literature and policy documents have been selected and read. The titles of the policy documents that are used can be found in Appendix A. Besides literature on the general positioning of provinces in the Netherlands, policy documents, either formal publications as well as internal documents of the Province of Groningen, were analyzed to be able to identify the relevant and topical issues the Province is dealing with nowadays to develop its strategic positioning.

The way in which the Province of Groningen is translating the 'new role' as *area director* nowadays (research question 3) is partly studied by analyzing publications and internal documents of the Province of Groningen. The titles of these documents can be found in Appendix A as well.

3.2.3 Participatory observation

Besides document analysis, another research method that is used in this study is participatory observation. As its name suggests, the researcher is able to move between participating in an organization, in this case the Province of Groningen, by deliberately immersing themselves into its everyday rhythms and routines, and observation, "by sitting back and watching activities which unfold in front of their eyes, recording their impressions of these activities in material evidence" (COOK, 2005, p.168). As with document analysis, the advantage of participatory observation is that it gives the possibility to collect indirect data as well (O'LEARY, 2010).

In the IMP process, many meetings, internal and informal as well as formal, and substantive as well as process-oriented meetings, take place. In this study, the main focus is on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen. Therefore, the most relevant meetings from the perspective taken in this study are the process-oriented meetings, focused on the process management and division of tasks and responsibilities in the organization on the IMP process. Moreover, some 'content-oriented' meetings between stakeholders have been visited. Additionally, some formal meetings of another process are included in the study as well. This process is called Multi-year Program on Infrastructure, Land Use Planning and Transport (*Meerjarenprogramma Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport*, hereafter: MIRT). It consists of a research on the governmental responsibilities and cooperation with Germany in the Ems Dollart estuary to prepare the implementation phase of measurements which might start in 2015, when the IMP process is over. As MIRT is so interlinked with the IMP process,

and is expected to be the 'follow-up' of the IMP process, the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in this process is relevant as well. The list of the meetings that were visited by the researcher can be found in Appendix B.

Data collected by participatory observation was saved in a research diary. The visited meetings and conversations were documented. The documentation mainly focused on the context in which a meeting took place, who were present, who was the chairman and of course what were the most relevant questions and comments and who brought these in? By focusing on these aspects, the main interests and the organization in charge can be derived.

Participative observation gives the possibility to find out during the process who the key persons in the IMP process are. This is important information for conducting the interviews. Moreover, the roles and stakes of the different organizations can be partly read of the statements and arguments used by the different persons. This is relevant as well, to understand the stakes of the different organizations and how this conflicts or related to the stakes of the Province of Groningen. The information serves as a basis for the interviews, to refer to a specific situation or comment if necessary. Moreover, the participatory observation served as a basis to answer the third and fourth research question of this study: how does the Province translate its 'new role' as *area director* and what is the internal perspective on this in practice in the IMP process? It also gives a small insight in how other people, from an external perspective, react on how the Province of Groningen performs its role (research question 5).

3.2.4 Interviews

Additional data was collected by conducting interview with the key persons identified during the participatory observation. Interviewing is "a method of data collection that involves researchers seeking open-ended answers related to a number of questions, topic areas, or themes" (O'LEARY, 2010, p.194). Or, defined by EYLES (1988, in VALENTINE, 2005), an interview is a conversation with a purpose. The material that is generated from an interview is rich and detailed and is 'deep'. Interviews are analyzed "using a textual approach, relying on words and meanings" (VALENTINE, 2005, p.111). As this study is focused on understanding the personal interpretations of different involved individuals, a 'people-oriented' method as interviewing is appropriate.

In addition to the participatory observation method, primary data was collected by conducting interviews with the key persons identified during the observations. The following interviewees participated in this part of collecting data. The list of interviewees is ordered randomly.

- Program manager (1), Province of Groningen
- Program manager (2), Province of Groningen
- Senior policy officer, Province of Groningen
- Representative, Province of Groningen
- Senior policy officer, Ministry of EZ
- Senior advisor, *Rijkswaterstaat*
- Senior policy officer, *Rijkswaterstaat*
- Policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*

The aim of this study is to collect and analyze different individual interpretations of the positioning of the Province of Groningen of different involved persons and employees of the Province. An interview can give an insight into the different interpretations, as the aim of an interview is to understand the different experiences of individual people (VALENTINE, 2005). Besides asking direct questions, the interviews were used to ask clarifications of some comments made during the meetings which were not directly clear. The research diary served as a basis to prepare the interviews.

As this study aims to give an insight into the internal as well as the external perspective of the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen, the interviews are not limited to the employees of the Province but additionally externally involved people are interviewed as well. The reasons to interview people who were not directly involved in the recent IMP process were for instance former involvement in the IMP process of the interviewee or involvement in the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen.

The type of interviews conducted in this study is semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews make use of a flexible structure. All interviews are prepared and start with a defined questioning plan that functions as a framework, but the interviews might deviate from this "in order to follow the natural flow of conversation" (O'LEARY, 2010, p.195). The advantage of conducting a semi-structured interview is that the interview provides all data that was intended to be relevant for the study and probably more interesting and unexpected data. The action plan for conducting the interviews can be found in Appendix C.

3.3 Ethical issues

For all three methods described above, some ethical issues need to be thought of before using the methods. In document analysis, pre-existing documents are treated as a primary source of data. But because the documents are pre-existing texts, they need to be thoughtfully considered on the issue

of subjectivity. Both for participatory observation and for conducting interviews, subjectivity is a risk as well. The researcher is a "fallible, biased, or subjective human entity, faced with the challenge of producing 'unbiased', trustworthy results" (O'Leary, p.29). Additionally, the observed and interviewed people, the 'researched', are unpredictable and can have hidden agendas, fallible memories and a need to present themselves in certain ways. In this study, the researcher needs to be aware of the trap of judging and needs to take subjectivities into account and work actively towards the criteria of neutrality.

The interview reports are attached to this thesis in a separate, confidential document. The reports and their names are confidential at the request of several interviewees. The interviewees were open about their thoughts and opinions and the interviews had sometimes a speculating character. Moreover, the IMP process and other developments around the Ems Dollart estuary are still in process so the cooperation between the different parties is still going on. Political and personal sensitiveness is prevented by attaching the interview reports and names in a separate document which is not published.

This study is conducted during an internship at the Province of Groningen for 7 months, starting in December 2013 until June 2014. Although the researcher did visit many formal and informal meetings, she only has the role of a researcher. Consequently, she did not participate actively in meetings and did not give her opinion or advice. The advantage of this is that the researcher could stay 'objective' in the eyes of all involved people. Staying 'objective' is mainly considered to be important as the researcher conducts the study from the perspective of the Province of Groningen, but she should not be seen as employee of the Province.



4 The master frame of the Province of Groningen

The master frame of the Province of Groningen refers to the organizational identity and the political and strategic positioning in general. In this chapter, the organizational identity of the Province of Groningen is articulated. First, the organizational identity of Dutch provinces is analyzed. Second, the particular situation and positioning of the Province of Groningen is analyzed to be able to articulate its master frame. Both analyses are done by studying recent policy documents. However, master frames are never static. Rather, master frames should be seen as dynamic frames that are always changing and developing due to external developments. To understand the current master frame of provinces, and the master frame of the Province of Groningen in particular, and to understand how transitions of master frames happen, the analyses have a historical aspect.

4.1 The organizational identity of Dutch provinces

This paragraph aims to answer research question 2: how did the organizational identity of provinces in the Netherlands develop? The provinces have gone through societal and political developments. The developments have had an influence on the organizational identity, or in other words: master frame, of Dutch provinces.

4.1.1 Historical developments

Until 1850, the Dutch local and regional authorities were uncertain about their authority. Local and regional developments were strongly dependent on the vision of the national government. The lower authorities were mainly executing rather than designing (VAN DER WOUDE, 2010). In 1848, the new national Constitution was adopted which changed the domestic government fundamentally. The Constitution was designed by Thorbecke who emphasized the importance of municipalities and provinces (SEINSTRAS & SIETSMA, 2012). Two years later, in 1850, the provincial act was adopted. Most relevant for the provinces was the fact that from that day on the Provincial Council had to be elected by inhabitants, the meetings of the Council had to be accessible for public and the provinces became more independent. After 1850, a long period of increasing responsibilities and increasing visibility started for the provinces. However, it was hard to develop their own profile. In 1962, the *Provinciewet* was adopted. The *Provinciewet* made the provinces more independent. In the same period, the postwar period, the responsibilities and tasks of provinces grew and especially their influence on land use planning increased. Land use planning became a provincial core task (SEINSTRAS & SIETSMA, 2012). However, provinces got more responsibilities in other policy sectors as well. In the 1970s, the term 'do-province' (*doe-provincie*) was conveyed to express the active role of provinces (COMMISSIE REGIONAAL BESTUUR IN NEDERLAND, 2002).

However, in the 1980s, doubts about the governmental tasks and influence in general arose out of the society (paragraph 2.2) and the provinces lost their identity. In the following years, the provinces as a governmental level was often passed over and the national government and municipalities became more important for conducting governmental tasks than the provincial level (COMMISSIE REGIONAAL BESTUUR IN NEDERLAND, 2002). Moreover, by deregulation and decentralization to the municipalities, provinces lost their tasks (SEINSTRAS & SIETSMA, 2012). In this period, the legitimacy of provinces versus cooperation between municipalities was discussed, especially in the context of regional planning issues that fell in the 'regional gap'. Which governmental level was most effective to work on these issues? There was support for extending provincial tasks as well as for elimination of the provinces. At the end of the twentieth century, the regional scale became more important but the provinces still did not have a clear identity (SEINSTRAS & SIETSMA, 2012, p.44). "Spatial development and administrative borders hardly coincide anymore. This is due to the fact that societal developments with spatial consequences have become increasingly dynamic, whereas the administrative structure remains stationary" (SMALLENBROEK & SPIT, 1992, p.234). To solve this 'problem', new forms of government and cooperation were introduced on the regional scale (e.g. SMALLENBROEK & SPIT, 1992; SPIT & ZOETE, 2009; SEINSTRAS & SIETSMA, 2012). In fact, SMALLENBROEK & SPIT (1992) argued that the central government established the sub-regions so that they could serve

as executive agents of central governmental policy, "thus bypassing the provinces at an intermediate level" (p.239). The role of the intermediate governmental level, as a level between the local and national government, has been discussed often in history. In fact, SEINSTRA AND SIETSMA (2012) argue that when the provinces started to position themselves as *area directors* in the 1990s, the national government and municipalities saw them as competitors for taking over their tasks. The role of provinces was not clear and more regional structures and divisions arose. The administrative pressure became inevitable on the regional scale (COMMISSIE REGIONAAL BESTUUR IN NEDERLAND, 2002).

From 1987 on, parallel to these developments, the national government and the provinces (and municipalities) tried to overcome the indistinctness by establishing administrative agreements (*bestuursakkoorden*). The agreements aimed to make the division of tasks between governmental levels more predictable and clear (SEINSTRA & SIETSMA, 2012). After an uncertain period, in which the existence of provinces was heavily discussed, for example in the previously mentioned reports, the most recent administrative agreement of 2011 emphasizes the specific tasks of provinces. The core tasks of provinces are mainly in the spatial-economic policy domain. The provinces are mainly responsible for the development of integral visions for the area by involving and weighting of different interests. To make the tasks of provinces more clear, provinces are supposed to focus on these core tasks, whereas municipalities focus on their core task in the social policy domain (e.g. REGEERAKKOORD, 2010; 2012; MINISTERIE VAN INFRASTRUCTUUR EN MILIEU, 2012; MINISTERIE VAN BINNENLANDSE ZAKEN EN KONINKRIJKRELATIES, 2013).

Despite the given effort to overcome the indistinctness, even today the discussion about the intermediate governmental level is still going on. For example, there are many documents to be found in which the scale of provinces is discussed (e.g. COMMISSIE REGIONAAL BESTUUR IN NEDERLAND, 2002; REGEERAKKOORD, 2012). Upscaling of the twelve provinces to approximately five regions is a commonly heard idea. There are different arguments to rethink the scale of provinces. First of all, the average geographical size of a municipality is nowadays 14 times bigger than it was when the current provincial borders were set. "To keep the directing role, it is important that provinces have a clear position in relation to the municipalities and a sufficient size to avoid the two levels to overlap" (MINISTERIE VAN BINNENLANDSE ZAKEN EN KONINKRIJKRELATIES, 2013, p.33). Secondly, municipalities are searching for their tasks and responsibilities as well. As a result, municipalities are often searching to deal with a problem of their responsibility on the regional scale. Additionally, under the pressure of the EU, the national government is interfering in decentralized tasks. A consequence is that the provinces are under pressure between on the one side the upscaling municipalities and on the other side the downscaling national government (RAAD VOOR HET OPENBAAR BESTUUR, 2010).

4.1.2 Towards *area director*

Although the provinces do have implementation and maintenance tasks in several policy sectors, the emphasis in policy documents on the role of provinces is on the development of new policies and visions. A 'new role' for provinces is introduced in the development of new policies, caught in the term *area director*. The 'new role' of provinces means provinces have a multi-sectoral approach and perform a binding role between the different interests in an area. Tasks of an *area director* are: developing integral visions, exchanging interests and watching over the complementarity of cities and regions (e.g. BESTUURSAKKOORD 2011-2015; MINISTERIE VAN INFRASTRUCTUUR EN MILIEU, 2012). IPO describes the role of an *area director* in a similar way, as bringing parties such as municipalities and other organizations together and facilitating the process to find a consensus. However, IPO strongly emphasizes the importance for provinces of having a clear vision for regional development as well and having guiding principles and preconditions about the process and its result. The clear vision and preconditions need to be communicated before the process starts and need to be flexible enough so that the process is still inviting for other parties to participate. According to IPO, this is a part of being an *area director* as well (INTERPROVINCIAAL OVERLEG, 2013).

According to SEINSTRA AND SIETSMA (2012), provinces are the ideal governmental level for being a binding government: they bring parties together and they develop and maintain regional networks. By analyzing the role of provinces in practice by IPO, one came to the conclusion that provinces are able to realize a consensus between different parties and interests (FRANSSEN, 2007, in SIETSMA & SEINSTRA, 2012). However, FRANSSEN (2007, in SIETSMA & SEINSTRA, 2012) mentions that provinces are weak in terms of making decisions. When provinces are weak in making decisions, provinces try to avoid risks when there are strong opposing interests. Although provinces have a regional steering task, provinces are sensitive for their regional partners' interests.

Provinces are profiled as the appropriate governmental level for binding different parties and interests, in policy documents and literature mentioned above. However, the arguments why provinces are the ideal governmental level to be a binding factor are missing. What can be stated is that many issues are nowadays taking place on a higher, regional level instead of a local level, which makes the provinces in general more important as they can oversee developments that cross local administrative borders (see paragraph 2.2.3). The fact that governance in terms of participation of stakeholders becomes important as well, provinces identify themselves as being an *area director*, bringing the stakeholders together on a regional scale.

4.2 Identity transformation process of the Province of Groningen

This paragraph aims to answer research question 3: how does the Province of Groningen translate the 'new role' as *area director* nowadays? Besides the organizational identity of provinces in general, the Province of Groningen as an organization has its particular circumstances, culture and context which influence its identity. In this paragraph, the master frame of the Province of Groningen is articulated.

4.2.1 The general transformation process in the Province of Groningen

Provinces are, just like the society, changing all the time. Thus, the transformation process of the Province of Groningen cannot be described from a certain starting point towards an end goal. However, to be able to describe the gradually changed identity of the Province, certain highlights and publications from the previous decennia are used to describe the transformation process, starting from 1999.

In this year, the Province of Groningen officially started with a process to develop the organization (VAN DE WEERD, 2006). The Province recognized a changing society: societal problems and developments became more complex and integral. More, the position of the Province changed as well as it became increasingly "an actor in different networks with varying partners" (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2001, p.53-1). A change in the organization was needed. The reports of IPO in the previous decennium about the identity of provinces in general was for the Province of Groningen a motive to become more innovative and to adapt their role and position to the societal needs (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2001; 2010).

The results of the development process were a re-organization of the Province and the development of a "change agenda" (*Veranderagenda*) in 2001 (VAN DE WEERD, 2006). The *Veranderagenda* was developed to coordinate the transformation of the Province from a supervisory role towards a regulatory and directing role. The *Veranderagenda* aimed an integral, interactive and area-oriented working approach. In 2005, a recalibration of the *Veranderagenda* resulted in a new vision for the future, a document called "Perspective 2010" (*Perspectief 2010*) (e.g. VAN DE WEERD, 2006; PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2010). This vision was especially focused on internal policies on management, human resources and departments. Additionally, the vision included improving information for inhabitants of the Province, creating new cooperation and developing an "external orientation of managers" (VAN DE WEERD, 2006, p.5). In 2009, the limited financial capacity of the government and consequently the efficiency and effectiveness of governmental authorities became important. In 2009, the Province described its challenges and ambitions as follows:

- government is on the move: role provinces, upscaling and cooperation;
- we become more and more a director instead of a policy producer;
- we have 34 million euro less to spend until 2015;
- we focus on core tasks: therefore, we need to make choices;
- we want to stay an attractive employer in a changing job market; and
- we want to work on our functioning and behavior (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2009).

The Province responded to the challenges by setting up a new project "*Kleiner en Beter*" to change the organization internally towards a 'smaller and better' organization (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2010). Moreover, the Province established a new "vision on the organization 2015". This vision had the aim for the Province of Groningen to be open, active, authentic and reliable (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2009).

However, despite the visions and projects the Province of Groningen introduced and implemented, an internal analyzing research in 2010 showed that the desired changes, especially an increasing focus on results and integration, did not happen sufficiently (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2010). According to the research of 2010, the urgency to change was not high enough because there was not enough external pressure to change and the Province could still allow an inefficient service as the Province is a monopolist and does not have to deal with competition. Moreover, the Province was not able to change because of insufficient leadership and the lack of clear choices in its role interpretation. Additionally, maintaining the existing culture of an informal and free working style had advantages for the working environment of the employees as well. This situation resulted in lack of clarity about roles and positions, for internal functions and relations as well as towards external parties. Parties appreciate the substantive expertise of the Province, but recognize a lack of clarity in the performance of its role (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2010). The research of 2010 emphasized that the Province of Groningen has the ambition to perform the role of *area director*. As the research concluded that parties recognize a lack of clarity in the role of the Province, this should be at focus in the coming years (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2010).

Nowadays, the Province of Groningen is still working on translating their vision in practice. In 2014, the management of the Province organized meetings with the different departments, focused on the key aspects: prioritization, external orientation, giving feedback and working in a more integral, flexible, entrepreneurial and creative way (GRONET, 2014). Since the gradual start of development in 1999, the Province developed visions and projects to adapt its organization to the political changes and the complex society. In many policy documents, the desire to cooperate with partners and inhabitants and to be an open and reliable partner in a multi-actor environment is repeated.

4.2.2 Regional challenges

Besides the global and national challenges as the economic crisis, climate change, decentralization and ageing, the Province of Groningen deals with particular regional challenges as well.

First of all, the Province has to deal with one growing city and a demographic decline in the rural areas. The demographic decline results in a lower demand on housing and a lower demand on facilities such as schools. Vacant houses and less facilities lead to a decreasing quality of life in this area (e.g. PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2011). Moreover, the quality of life and attractiveness of the rural areas, especially in the northeastern part of the Province, is endangered by the earth quakes that take place due to gas extraction. Inhabitants of the area are scared, houses are damaged and are losing value (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, n.d.). For the rural areas, the Province of Groningen is in a negative spiral in terms of quality of life.

Another challenge is the redrawing of municipal boundaries. Municipalities get more responsibilities due to decentralization and deal with issues that cross the municipal boundaries. As a consequence, it is hard for this low governmental level to be able to meet the societal needs and to find a solution for issues that are larger than the municipal area. Therefore, the Province and municipalities work on a plan for upscaling municipalities. Consequently, the re-organization will lead to a re-organization of tasks and responsibilities between the Province and the municipalities. Probably, the Province will withdraw itself from core tasks (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2014).

Besides the societal and political challenges, the Province of Groningen has particular ambitions for its area. In the coalition agreement of 2011, the new management of the Province enounced the ambitions for the period 2011-2015. Examples are: "We want the Province of Groningen to be frontrunner in sustainable agriculture. [...] We focus on attracting more visitors to the Province. [...] We want to position the Province as energy region of the Netherlands and Europe" (PROVINCIE GRONINGEN, 2011, pp. 6-8).

The Province has societal challenges, especially in the rural areas for which the Province is responsible for. Moreover, the Province has its own vision and ambition as well to strength its competitive position. The responsibilities and ambitions of the Province need a strong and decisive management.

4.2.3 Department of Rural Areas and Water

The Province of Groningen has an ambition for performing their role, being an *area director*, and the Province has responsibilities and ambitions for the provincial area. But how do the individual departments translates both ambitions and tasks in their daily work? The Department of Rural Areas and Water (*Afdeling Landelijk Gebied en Water*, hereafter: LGW) is one of the departments in the

organization of the Province. The department is responsible for a large part of the substantive core tasks of the Province: nature, water and land scape. In addition, the department deals, as all departments of the Province, with the general ambition of the Province of being an *area director* as well. In this study, LGW is chosen as an example of how departments deal with the ambitions and tasks, as this department has clear tasks which need steering and vision and as LGW is related to the case study of the IMP process. The information on how LGW applies the 'new role' of provinces in their policy documents could serve as background information in a later stadium in this study.

Besides the substantive plans and visions developed by LGW², the department develops work plans about the 'how' of their work and responsibilities. The behavior and attitude of the department and its employees is at focus in the work plans. The two most current work plans of LGW are the work plan for 2012-2013 and the work plan for 2014-2015.

The work plan 2012-2013 is called: decisiveness, courage and persistence (AFDELING LANDELIJK GEBIED EN WATER, 2012). Due to budget cuts, a smaller organization and a possibly growing responsibility for an expected new core task 'vital rural area', prioritizing tasks became more important than before. To deal with the new situation, the department repeated the ambition of being an *area director* and the description of the tasks of an *area director*. By developing integral visions, exchanging interests and facilitating processes, LGW wanted to fulfill its mission. To make it concrete, the department developed six goals for improvement: prepare for new core task, external orientation, efficiency and prioritizing, improve integration in work and exchange information, operate strategically, optimize intern steering (AFDELING LANDELIJK GEBIED EN WATER, 2012).

² The substantive responsibilities of LGW can be found in the *Nota Natuur*, the *Programma Landelijk Gebied Groningen 2*, the *Nota Water*, the policy document *Landschap* and the *Provinciaal Omgevingsplan* (AFDELING LANDELIJK GEBIED EN WATER, 2014).

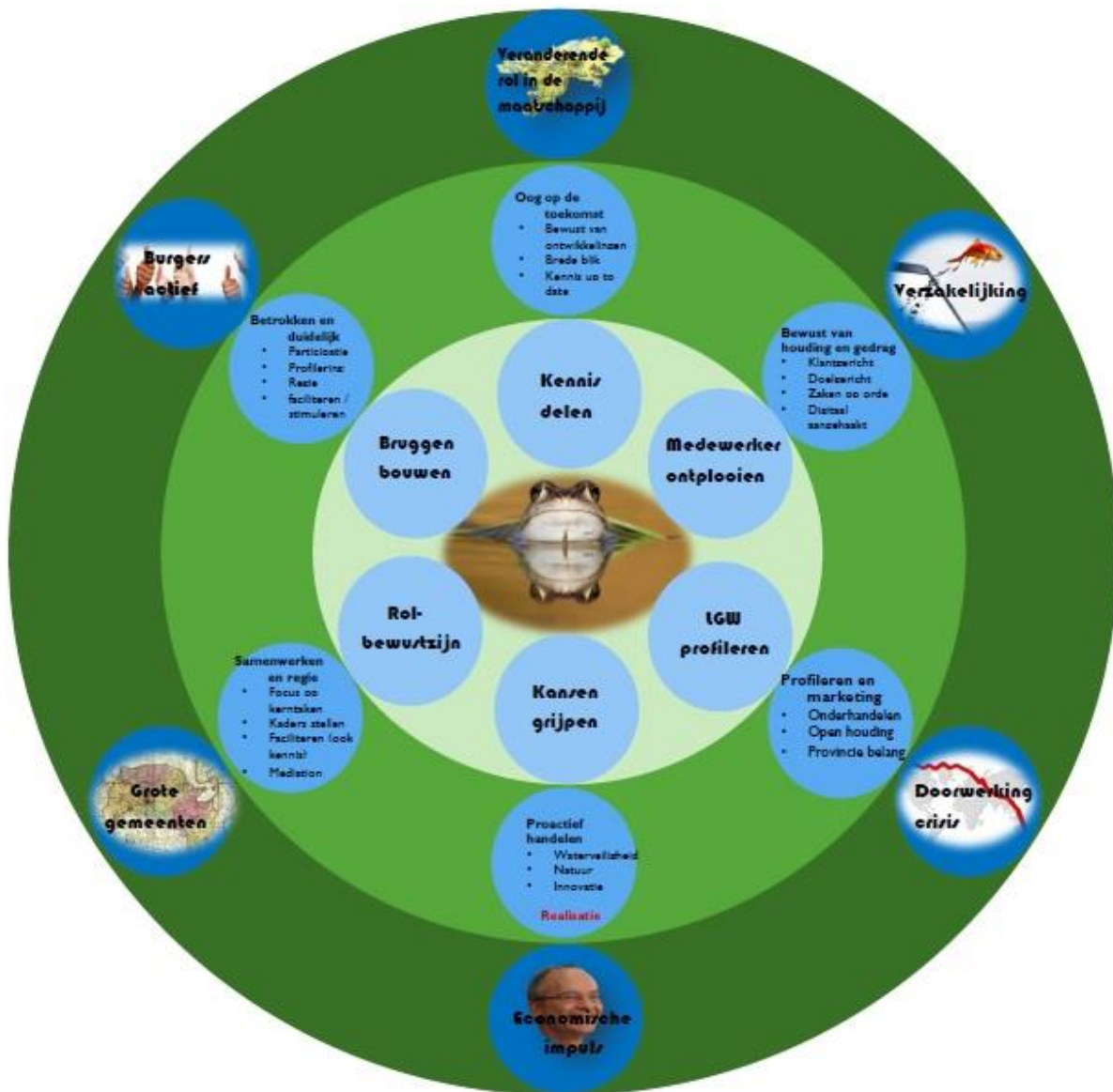


Figure 5 Work plan of LGW 2014-2015, in the form of a mind map

The work plan 2014-2015 is called: role awareness, task-oriented and visible. The expected core task 'vital rural area' has become one of the core tasks of the Province. In addition, a growing awareness of the important of direction (*regie*) has resulted in a project on direction. The work plan is a mind map (Figure 5) which is clarified in a textual plan. In the middle, a moor frog is shown "as a symbol of the specialized, substantive and ideological employee of LGW" (AFDELING LANDELIJK GEBIED EN WATER, 2014, p.3). Around the moor frog, from the outer circle towards the inner circle, the external developments and challenges, the department goals and the personal development goals are shown. Again, LGW mentions its ambition of being an *area director*. As well as in the work plan for 2012-2013, the department developed six goals, linked to the department goals as well as to the personal development goals (AFDELING LANDELIJK GEBIED EN WATER, 2014).

Although the department repeats in its two recent work plans the Province’s mission of being an *area director*, a clear link to their concrete goals for improvement is not mentioned directly in the work plans. Of course, some indirect links can be recognized, as LGW mentions in its goals an external orientation, on the regional partners and on the other departments and representatives of the Province.

4.3 Reflection

In this chapter, the master frame of the Province of Groningen has been analyzed. First of all, the transformation process of the positioning of Dutch provinces in general has been described. The second sub research question, how did the organizational identity of Dutch provinces develop, is answered by this description.

In Figure 6, the development of the Dutch provinces is shown. The thickness of the arrow is an indicator of the influence the provinces had on policy-making in general. The development is placed in the context of the spectrum drawn in paragraph 2.3, the spectrum of the two extreme governmental approaches. The Dutch provinces were originally governmental authorities that were

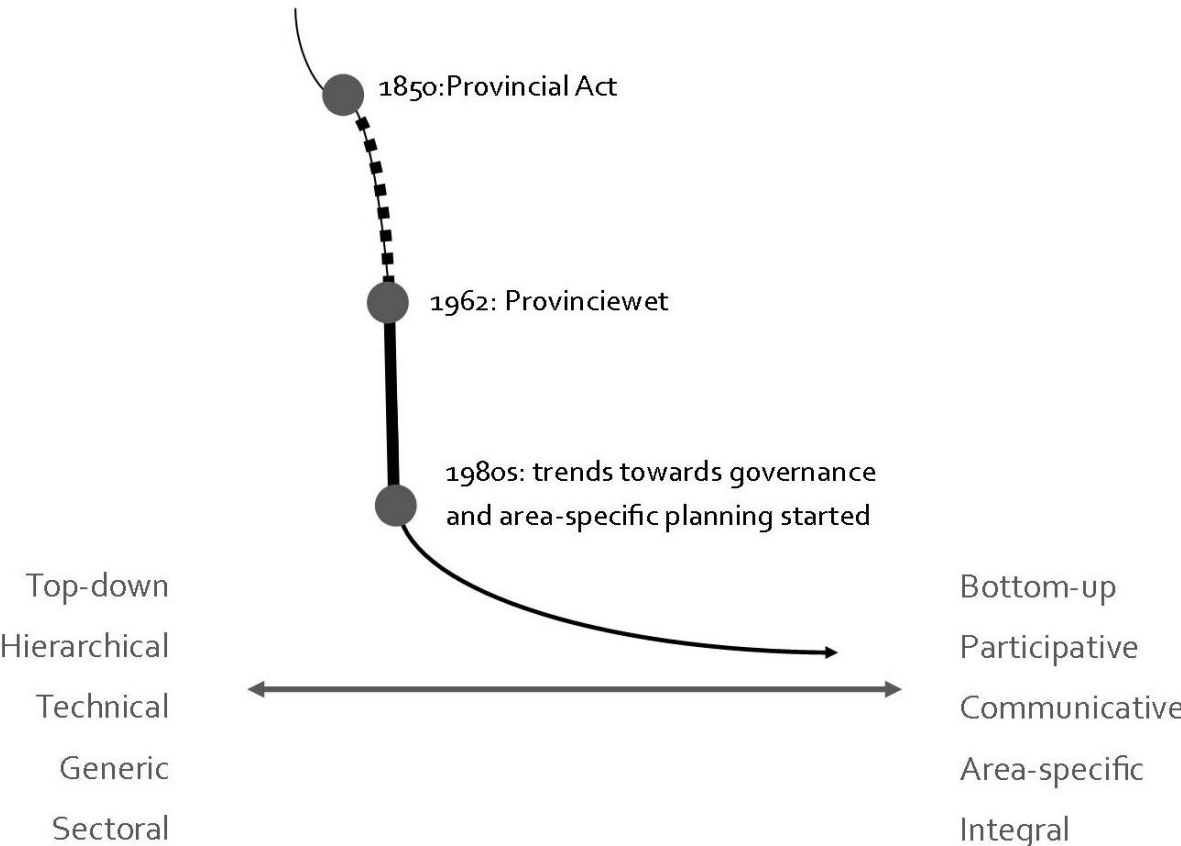


Figure 6 Historical development of the organizational identity of Dutch provinces

only executing State's orders. Until 1850, their influence was small. In 1850, the Provincial Act entered into force which made the Provincial Council an elected and accessible institute. However, until 1962, provinces had difficulties with developing their own profile. In 1962, the *Provinciewet* entered into force and provinces got more and more responsibilities. Around the 1980s, there was a general doubt about governmental influence and provinces lost their identity. Nowadays, provinces adapt their approach more and more to the needs of the society by aiming to be an *area director*, multi-sectoral and binding different interests. However, the intermediate governmental level of provinces is continuously discussed in history. Moreover, a regional issue is not by default a responsibility for the provincial government as municipalities and the national government are acting on the regional level as well.

The third sub research question asked how the Province of Groningen translates the 'new role' of being an *area director*. The Province of Groningen has gone through the same trends as the Dutch provinces and is nowadays identifying itself as an *area director* as well. However, the Province of Groningen is still working on its identity and role in practice. Some characteristics of an *area director* resound in the policy documents of the Province, as external-orientation and being a reliable partner. However, concrete goals to be an *area director* and having a clear role cannot be recognized, even not on the level of a department as LGW.

Thus, provinces developed a strong 'master frame' of being an *area director*, which is strategically chosen by the management of the Province of Groningen as a 'master algorithm' – the generic identity of the organization –, coloring and constraining the orientations and activities of the organization. The 'master frame' of the Province of Groningen contains mainly the identity of an *area director*: being an external-oriented and binding organization and a reliable partner. The Province of Groningen is aware of the societal needs and changes that ask for a changing approach of the governmental authorities. Moreover, the responsibilities of the Province of Groningen have changed and the Province deals with strong interests and challenges in its territory.

How the 'master frame' should be translated and work in practice does not become clear in the current policy documents. Furthermore, the challenges and high ambitions of the Province lead to a need for a strong and decisive management. Here, a possible dilemma and the difficulty that FRANSEN (2007, in SIETSMA & SEINSTRA, 2012) identified can be recognized: provinces want to be a binding factor and are sensitive for the interests of their regional partners, which can lead to provinces being weak in terms of making decisions that are needed but not preferred by their regional partners. How the Province of Groningen deals with this dilemma in practice can be seen in the next chapter.



5 Collective action frame of the Province of Groningen: in practice

Now that we know what the master frame of the Province of Groningen contains, namely its vision of having a strong organizational identity as *area director*, this chapter analyses the application and interpretation of the master frame in the concrete case study of the development of an IMP for the Ems Dollart estuary.

First of all, the chapter starts with an introduction in the case study and a reconstruction of the IMP process, based on interviews and participatory observation. Then, the positioning of the Province of Groningen in relation to the differences in interests of the Ministry of EZ and *Rijkswaterstaat* is described. The third and fourth part answers the fourth and fifth sub research question by analyzing the internal and external perspective on the master frame of the Province of Groningen, forming the collective action frame and showing how the employees of the Province deal with the 'master algorithm' of their organization in the specific context of the IMP process.

5.1 Case study: IMP Ems Dollart estuary

The Ems Dollart estuary is situated on the border between Germany and the Netherlands. It is a water body which is connected to the Wadden Sea and the North Sea and to the river Ems. FAIRBRIDGE (1980, in BOS, ET AL, 2012, p.10) defines an estuary as "an inflow of the sea in a river

mouth until where the tides have an influence". Estuaries are crucial in terms of nature as they have specific characteristics, as a mixture of salt water and freshwater and tidal influence. The estuaries of the Wadden Sea, including the Ems Dollart estuary, are important for the import of nutrients and the sediment balance. Moreover, the estuaries function as nursery area for fishes and as resting and foraging areas for birds and seals (RAAD VOOR DE WADDEN, 2010a). However, the Ems Dollart estuary is in a poor ecological condition. This situation originates from the 1960s and worsened since then (RAAD VOOR DE WADDEN, 2010b). Main problem is the turbidity of the estuary, which lead to a shortage of oxygen for fishes and a decrease of primary production which is the basis of the food chain in the ecosystem.

The turbidity of the water is mainly a result of anthropogenic interferences in the system: dredging and widening of shipping lanes and dumping activities (RAAD VOOR DE WADDEN, 2010a). The anthropogenic interferences are necessary to keep the estuary accessible for shipping. The industries around the estuary and the Eemshaven, the harbors of Delfzijl, Emden and Leer and the shipyard of Papenburg are dependent on the shipping lanes of the estuary (ECOLOGIE EN ECONOMIE IN BALANS, 2014).

Thus, the Ems Dollart estuary is important in terms of nature as well as in terms of economic development. However, at the moment, both interests endanger each other. On the one side, the economic development brings harm to the ecological quality and a negative trend in the ecological quality can be seen. On the other side, nature conservation organizations and the low ecological quality of the estuary make it difficult for economic development to get a permit for further development. To combine both interests, to find a right balance and to meet the European standards of the WFD and EU Natura 2000 policy (hereafter: N2000), a plan needs to be developed.

5.1.1 Preliminary period of the IMP process

Part of the Ems Dollart estuary is disputed territory. For the Netherlands, this part is a Dutch area but for Germany, it is German ground (Figure 7). For many centuries, the German and the Dutch government cooperate in this area. In 1960, both countries signed a 'border treaty' for the estuary which focused on cooperation in topics as shipping and transport in the disputed territory. Since 1960, Germany and the Netherlands meet at least once a year in the Ems Commission (*Eemscommisssie*) in order to cooperate on these issues (RAAD VOOR DE WADDEN, 2010a).



Figure 7 The disputed territory in the Ems Dollart estuary (www.eems-dollard.eu)

In the 1990s, the policy-makers became aware of the poor ecological quality of the Ems Dollart estuary. In 1996, the Ems Dollart Environment Protocol (*Eems Dollard Milieuprotocol*) was signed by both countries for a cooperation in topics as nature and water quality. In the Sub Commission G³, both countries meet annually to discuss about these topics.

In short, cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands for the estuary is arranged in the Ems Commission for shipping and transport and in the Sub Commission G for nature and water quality. In both commissions, *Rijkswaterstaat* is the chair of the Dutch delegation. *Rijkswaterstaat* is responsible for the maintenance of the shipping lanes and the accessibility of the harbors. In addition, *Rijkswaterstaat* is responsible for the water quality management. However, other Ministries and lower governmental authorities as the Province of Groningen are part of both commissions as well. The Ministry of EZ is involved as it is the licensing authority for the Nature Protection Act in the disputed territory. In addition, only the Ministry can make formal

³ The Ems Dollart Environmental Protocol did not become part of the 'border treaty' for the estuary of 1960, but it became part of the general border treaty of Germany and the Netherlands. The general border treaty has a specific commission on boundary waters. This commission has for every individual boundary water body a sub commission. Starting in the southern part of the Netherlands with Sub Commission A, towards the North: the Sub Commission G for the Ems Dollart estuary (interview senior policy officer, Ministry of EZ).

arrangements with Germany. The Province of Groningen is the licensing authority in the undisputed Dutch territory (RAAD VOOR DE WADDEN, 2010a). The task of municipalities is limited in the area.

Part of the Ems Dollart Environmental Protocol of 1996 was the task of developing a management plan for the area. Around 2006, the pressure to develop a plan for the area increased. The *Waddenvereniging*, a nature conservation organization, started a campaign to attract attention to the 'sick' Ems Dollart estuary. Furthermore, the German and Dutch governments had obligations to the European Commission in terms of N2000 to register the area, and in terms of the WFD and the EU Floods Directive (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen; interview senior policy officer, Ministry of EZ; interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*).

In 2006, developing an integral management plan became an important theme in the meetings of the Sub Commission G. Aim of the integral management plan was to cover the aims of N2000 and the WFD, and to take the interests of shipping, coastal defense and other usages in consideration as well. The Commission tried to get support for the process and to speed up the process (SUBCOMMISSIE G, 2006a; 2006b). The preparation phase of the IMP started, but was already stopped in 2007, when the city of Papenburg revolted against the registering of the area for N2000. The city did not want to be limited in its economic development, especially in the developments around the shipyard that it situated in the city of Papenburg.

5.1.2 Reconstruction of the IMP process

After the city of Papenburg lost its court cases, the German government had enough trust in starting again with the development of an integral management plan. In December 2010, the first formal meeting took place in the provincial government house in Groningen. This meeting was headed by an officer of the Ministry and by an officer of the Province of Groningen. In this meeting, the idea that this process would be a joint project of the Dutch State and the Province of Groningen was created (interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*). The Germans already developed an integral management plan for the Elbe and Weser estuary and suggested to use the same process structure, called the "*Integrierter Bewirtschaftungsplan*" (Integral Management Plan, hereafter: IMP). The Dutch government agreed.

The Ministry of EZ was in charge of the process on the Dutch side, as the Ministry was responsible for registering the area for N2000. The plan was that, after registering, *Rijkswaterstaat* would be in charge for the rest of the process as it is responsible for the management plan and the implementation of the plan. However, registering of the area did not happen until today because of unplanned developments as the two falls of the Cabinet, so the Ministry of EZ is still in charge of the process (interview senior policy officer, Ministry of EZ). Thus, the three intensively involved Dutch

governmental authorities are the Ministry of EZ, *Rijkswaterstaat* and the Province of Groningen, all three having different responsibilities for the estuary.

In the meantime, the IMP process continued. The structure of the process was developed. On the Dutch side three groups were established. The first group is the Steering group, in which the representatives of the three governmental authorities take place and cooperate on a strategic and political level. The second group is the Kernteam. The Kernteam is responsible for the administrative organization and planning of the process. In this team, the three governmental authorities are represented by officers. The third group is the Project group. The Project group is open for all stakeholders to participate to discuss about the IMP process. In addition, a bilateral group about the organization and a bilateral substantive group were formed.

In the Netherlands as well as in Germany, a stakeholder group was formed for N2000. The N2000 group worked on the development of possible measurements that could be taken in order to improve the ecological quality of the area. The measurements are ordered by the level of impact, measurements that have an impact on the entire system, on certain habitats and on certain species. Examples of the measurements suggested by the N2000 group are: construction of secondary water bodies, construction of shallow water zones and a sustainable organization of fishery (VAKGROEP NATURA 2000, 2014).

In Germany, the other stakeholders were categorized in nine stakeholder groups:

- spatial developments;
- WFD;
- flood and coastal defense;
- shipping and harbors;
- agriculture;
- fishery;
- hunting;
- industry; and
- leisure and tourism.

The Dutch government tried to form nine stakeholder groups as well, but there was not enough interest in participation. Afterwards, people that were involved in this phase of the process presume that reasons for the limited interest were that the aim of the process was unclear, that the process was too abstract and that it had a high amount of meetings. Most of the organizations were not able to participate in all the meetings that were arranged, especially because there were more processes

going on around the estuary, for example the 'Ecology and Economy in Balance project' in which many regional organizations were participating already (paragraph 535.1.4) (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen; interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*).

The Dutch stakeholders that were interested in participating could join the German stakeholder groups. However, these groups remain unbalanced in terms of the amount of German stakeholders versus the amount of the Dutch stakeholders (interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*). The result of every stakeholder group was a *Fachbeiträge*: a contribution of the sector represented in the stakeholder group, in which the group listed their interests and future wishes and intentions for their activities in the Ems Dollart estuary. Examples of the wishes of the Dutch participants are: greenhouses in the Ems harbor, construction of dams and an additional ferry route (VAKGROEP RUIMTELIJKE ONTWIKKELINGEN, 2013; VAKGROEP LANDBOUW, 2013; VAKGROEP INDUSTRIE, 2013).

The *Fachbeiträge* served as a basis for the conflict analysis which has been done in December 2013 and January 2014. The conflict analysis was shaped in the form of a matrix with on the one axis the wishes of the stakeholder groups and on the other axis the measurements the stakeholder group N2000 proposed to improve the ecological quality. By coloring the cells in the matrix with green for synergy, yellow for neutral and red for conflict, all wishes of the stakeholder groups were analyzed on the background of the N2000 interests.

In the period of April until June 2014, the 'match meetings' took place to discuss the conflict analysis. The meetings took place separately in both countries. In July 2014, some bilateral meetings took place where necessary. The stakeholder groups were invited separately to meet with the N2000 stakeholder group to discuss the synergies, conflicts and ambiguities. As there were no Dutch stakeholder groups formed earlier in the process, one coordinator for was designated from the authority who was mainly responsible for the sector. For example, the Province of Groningen provided the coordinators for the stakeholder groups: spatial developments, agriculture, hunting, industry and leisure and tourism. The coordinator was responsible for getting the important stakeholders around the table. The aim of the 'match meetings' was to find out how the invited stakeholder group could contribute to the aims of N2000, by analyzing how to solve the conflicts, create synergies and potentially create more adjustments in their activities to contribute to the N2000 interests. *Rijkswaterstaat*, the Ministry of EZ and the Province of Groningen were represented in the stakeholder group N2000. Most meetings were chaired by an external person who was not involved in earlier phases of the IMP process.

5.1.3 The IMP document

The status of the IMP will be a 'covenant' and the plan will not be juridical binding. When the IMP process is completed and the plan is adopted, both governments will implement it separately in their juridical plans and instruments.

Currently, all 'match meetings' have taken place. Before the year 2015 starts, the IMP document needs to be written. The current discussion is about who is going to write the document and analyze the reports of the 'match meetings'.

The document will be based on the outcomes of the 'match meetings'. It will be a plan that represents the interests and wishes for the area from many different perspectives and show if the wishes and interests conflict or complement each other. Although the plan comes closer to a solution that is agreed in by the German government as well as by the Dutch government, the plan is not a solution for the problem yet. As mentioned above, the document is not juridical binding. Moreover, nothing will be said about who is responsible for which measurement and about the effectiveness of the measurements that will be proposed in the IMP document. In addition, the plan might not be supported by all stakeholders in the Dutch side of the area, as they were not involved enough. Some other processes run parallel to the IMP process and might provide in these doubts.

5.1.4 Parallel processes

On the Dutch side, many processes take place around the Ems Dollart estuary. This paragraph focuses on two processes that run parallel on the IMP process. These two processes are strongly interlinked and influencing the positioning of the Province of Groningen in the IMP process.

Ecology & Economy in Balance

In 2009, the Province of Groningen took the initiative to start the project 'Ecology and Economy in Balance' (hereafter: E&E project). Aim was to get the parties around the harbors and industry areas of the Ems Dollart estuary together and introduce a new way of working to reach a healthy balance between the ecological quality and economic developments in the region (ECOLOGIE EN ECONOMIE IN BALANS, n.d.). Direct cause to start this project was the fact that the Province of Groningen met the nature conservation organizations more often in court to fight about licensing than at a discussing table. To avoid juridical fights and believing that the parties could achieve more together than they would do on their own, the E&E project was started to start the dialogue between the parties (e.g. interview program manager 1, Province of Groningen; interview program manager 2, Province of Groningen). The parties that participate in the project are the Province of Groningen, the Ministry of EZ, the Ministry of I&M, Groningen Seaports, Nature and Environment Federation Groningen, Cooperating Companies Ems Delta and the cooperation of several foundations representing the

landscape and nature qualities of the area (*Coalitie Wadden Natuurlijk*) (ECOLOGIE EN ECONOMIE IN BALANS, 2014). The project serves as a platform on which parties can discuss problems, develop smart interventions for the conflicts of interests to avoid juridical procedures. A program manager of the Province of Groningen stated: “*We can achieve much more than if we would follow the traditional way of proceedings*” (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). Another program management of the Province of Groningen stated: “*The project is mainly focused on the development of a future vision together and commitment and implementation of the ambitions*” (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen).

The Province of Groningen was the initiator, but the aim of the project has been unclear for a long time. In October 2012, the parties sign an “intention declaration” in which they declared that they would strive for a resistant cooperation on the themes of ecology and economy in the Ems Dollart region. A few months after they signed the declaration, the Province of Groningen appointed an independent process manager who would be responsible for the project (e.g. interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*).

In January 2014, the parties of the E&E project signed an agreement which made the aim of the project more clear and concrete. The parties declared in the agreement that they would join forces to achieve an improvement in nature and accessibility of the region and to strive for less silt in the system. Furthermore, the parties intended to achieve smooth processes in order to improve the investment climate of the region, for example in the planning process of deepening the shipping lane (ECOLOGIE EN ECONOMIE IN BALANS, 2014) (paragraph 5.3.1).

MIRT Research

In 2014, the MIRT process started for the Ems Dollart estuary. As mentioned earlier, MIRT is the abbreviation of Multi-year Program on Infrastructure, Land Use Planning and Transport. It is an instrument that focuses on the financial investments in large spatial developments (RIJKSOVERHEID, n.d.). A MIRT process often starts with a MIRT Research. In the case of the Ems Dollart estuary, the MIRT Research phase started in November 2013 (MINISTERIE VAN INFRASTRUCTUUR EN MILIEU, 2014). A MIRT Research aims to concretize the potential development towards a concrete implementation task. The outcome of the research could lead to the next phase: a MIRT Exploration, a step closer to a state’s investment (RIJKSOVERHEID, n.d. a).

A MIRT process is always initiated by the national government but it always implies cooperation between the state and the regional level. In the case of the Ems Dollart estuary, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment (*Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu*, hereafter: Ministry of I&M) and the Province of Groningen cooperate.

The MIRT Research is focused on preparing a Dutch strategy for bilateral cooperation with Germany, in order to find a balance between the ecological quality and the developments in economy, flood defense and spatial quality. Secondly, the MIRT Research is focused on the measurements discussed in the IMP process and on making agreements about responsibilities and financing, in order to restore the estuary (MINISTERIE VAN INFRASTRUCTUUR EN MILIEU, 2014).

Link between processes

What is missing in the IMP process, commitment of Dutch partners and commitment of parties and effectiveness of measurements, is partly covered by the two parallel processes mentioned above. The E&E project, initiated by the Province of Groningen, focusses on cooperation of regional partners in the Ems Dollart region on the Dutch side. The MIRT Research focuses on the cooperation with the German government, and the responsibilities and commitment of the involved parties for possible measurements.

The link between the MIRT process and the IMP process is the fact that the MIRT process is a follow-up of the IMP process. The MIRT process is now running parallel to the IMP process and already building on the IMP process, which will be finished in the end of this year. The MIRT process aims to prepare the implementation of measurements by analyzing the effectiveness and feasibility of the measurements. However, whereas the IMP document will be developed by an intensive cooperation between Germany and the Netherlands, the MIRT process is a Dutch process without cooperation with the German colleagues.

The link between the E&E project and the two other processes is less clear. The E&E project is a platform for discussing and cooperating of regional partners and is not formally linked to the other processes. However, a link can be seen in the agreement of January 2014. One of the agreements in this signed contract is that the partners agreed on elaborating further steps in the restoration of the system in the MIRT Research and in the IMP process. The nature conservation organizations and the parties interested in the accessibility of the estuary made a deal: the nature conservation organization would be restrained starting juridical procedures against the shipping lane deepening, as long as they would have enough prospect in the restoration of the system and the improvement of the ecological quality by the MIRT process (ECOLOGIE EN ECONOMIE IN BALANS, 2014).

5.2 The positioning of the Province of Groningen

5.2.1 Interests and responsibilities of the Province of Groningen

The Province of Groningen is intensively involved in the developments around the Ems Dollart estuary. As mentioned before, the Province has several responsibilities in terms of land use planning, water management and nature conservation. Logically, this is a reason why the Province is involved. Especially its responsibility for nature and for the implementation of N2000 is emphasized in the interviews with different employees as a reason why the Province is involved in the process (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen; interview senior policy officer, Province of Groningen). *"We are getting more and more responsibilities with regard to implementing management plans and achieving goals for N2000"* (interview senior policy officer, Province of Groningen).

Besides its responsibilities, the Province of Groningen has interests for the area and the processes as well. According to a program manager of the Province of Groningen, the core of the problem is that *"if we do not invest enough in maintaining the quality of the Wadden Sea and the Ems estuary, as two nature areas, it will get harder and harder to permit economic developments at the edges of the harbors"* (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). Consequently, the interest of the Province of Groningen is to invest in nature protection to be able to develop the economy in this area. Combining a sustainable economic development with the conservation of the nature areas is the interest of the Province. The interviewees of the Province emphasize this interest in the context of the E&E project. By a successful cooperation between the regional partners in the E&E project, the 'old' working style of going to court for every license can be avoided. A representative of the Province of Groningen complement this statement by stating that besides the development of nature and economy, the water safety is an important issue in the area as well (interview representative, Province of Groningen). So three substantive interests can be named: water safety, economic development and nature conservation which is connected to the economic development again.

In addition to the substantive interests and responsibilities, the Province has a formal task in the IMP process of being responsible for the communication with the stakeholders. The Province already had contacts with its regional parties before the IMP process started, for example in the E&E project. The Ministry of EZ and *Rijkswaterstaat* are, on the national level, on a bigger distance from the regional parties (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen; interview senior policy officer, Province of Groningen). On all levels, the governmental authorities have an advantage in a good cooperation with Germany. As well as the national government as the neighboring regional and local governments deal with issues that cross the national border, for example in the tourism

industry or in nature conservation as in the case of the Ems Dollart estuary. Thus, good cooperation and strong relationships between the governments are useful. Therefore, cooperation with Germany is seen as an overall interest of the Dutch authorities in the IMP process (interview senior policy officer, Province of Groningen).

According to a program manager of the Province of Groningen, real implementation of measurements to achieve improvement of the estuary is still far away. This makes it hard for political directors to stay involved in the complex, long term, processes. Therefore, according to the program manager, *"it is important to regularly achieve a success in the form of a concrete project"*. By implementing a concrete project, the Province of Groningen wants to show its partners that something is really happening in the area (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). The advantage of a concrete project seems to be based on the short term result. A project should have good intentions and should lead to a better image on what happens in the area. The implementation of a concrete project should lead to motivation by political directors and regional partners to stay involved the long term processes such as the IMP process. In this way, a concrete project is seen as a success.

5.2.2 Differences in interests between the leading parties

The overall interest of the Dutch governmental authorities is the conservation or recovery of the Ems Dollart estuary. Though, *"the way of dealing with issues, the speed to handle and the priority that it is given, differs"* (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen).

First of all, it seems to all interviewed employees of the Province of Groningen that the Province has a higher ambition level than the national government. An example that illustrates this difference in interests can be found in the discussion of having a maintenance target or an improvement target for the estuary (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen). This is a juridical discussion about the ambition for a specific area in N2000. A maintenance target means that the contribution of an area on the quality of the type of area is sufficient to the national aim. An improvement target means that the contribution of an area needs to be higher in the future to reach the national aim for the type of area. In the case of the Ems Dollart estuary (REGIEGROEP NATURA 2000, 2012). The Ministry of EZ states that a maintenance target is, from a juridical perspective, enough for the estuary. However, the Province of Groningen has an improvement target. Probably, the urgency of the bad situation is more recognized by the Province, especially in terms of the limitations a bad ecological situation means for the economic development, which leads to a higher ambition – reflected by wish of the Province for an improvement target – of the Province (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). Probably, another reason why the Ministry of EZ strives for a

maintenance target is that they are afraid of the financial consequences of striving for an improvement target. An improvement target implies more measurements to be implemented and this would mean higher costs (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen, interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). Every party has limited funding and is afraid that they have to pay for the measurements in order to improve the estuary. And whereas the Province waits until the Ministry of EZ starts to give financial commitment, the Ministry of EZ waits until Germany starts to show that they are willing to invest. *"We want to have certainty that our investments and efforts of tomorrow fit in the bigger plan of the national government and that we can get money from the government. Because we are certainly not paying for everything"* (interview senior policy officer, Province of Groningen).

Whereas the Province of Groningen emphasizes on the substantive interests it has, a senior policy advisor of the Ministry of EZ emphasizes the interests of the Ministry in the process. *"The dialogue with Germany is for us one of the most important parts of the process. [...] We hope that parties will get to know each other better during the process, which makes it easier to talk about economic interests later as well"* (interview senior policy officer, Ministry of EZ).

Besides the difference in the levels of ambition of the involved authorities, another difference in the approaches of the national government versus the Province is mentioned in the interviews. It is the difference in the speed and urgency the parties want to give to the processes. The urgency of the Province of Groningen seems to be higher than the urgency of the national government (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). As mentioned above, the urgency of the problem in the estuary is more recognized by the Province. Moreover, the regional partners of the E&E project put pressure on the Province of Groningen to work on the problem of the estuary, for example by negotiations and impose conditions or compensation measurements before a certain date. As a consequence, the Province of Groningen puts pressure on the national government to speed up the processes. However, the processes are not fast enough yet: *"I have to deal with the rules and procedures. I am constantly doing my best to speed up the process"* (interview representative, Province of Groningen). A result of the pressure of the E&E project is the start of the MIRT process.

5.3 Internal perspective on positioning in the process

The fourth research question is answered in this paragraph: what is the internal perspective on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in practice in the IMP process? The answer on this question is based on the interpretations of individuals employed by the Province of Groningen and partly on the experiences of the researcher based on the data collection via participatory observation.

5.3.1 The Province of Groningen as *area director*

The role of an *area director* is interpreted in different ways by the interviewed employees of the Province of Groningen. In the eyes of one of the program managers of the Province of Groningen, the role of an *area director* is ambiguous (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). The program manager states that an *area director* brings parties together and works on cooperation and facilitation to find a solution for societal issues. Moreover, sometimes an *area director* needs to make choices and set boundaries. "*It depends on the issue if the role of the Province is directing, facilitating or controlling*" (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). In general, the role of an *area director* is interpreted as bringing parties together and achieving a common approach.

A representative of the Province of Groningen emphasizes on the binding role of the Province as an *area director*, binding the different interests by bringing the partners together. The approach of the Province, especially in the E&E project, is to search for the mutual gains: "*what is in it for me?*" (interview representative, Province of Groningen). He states that by trying to cooperate instead of fighting in court, and discuss about the issues, the financial aspects and restoring the problems, the regional partners are now able to connect issues and make it a win-win situation. An example is the agreement between nature conservation organizations and the organizations that have interests in deepening the shipping lanes. Deepening the shipping lanes has a negative influence on the ecological quality of the estuary so the nature conservation organizations would go to court if the parties would not cooperate. Now the parties cooperate, the organizations try to find a win-win situation in which the deepening of the shipping lanes can continue and in which governmental and non-governmental parties formally agree on investing in nature. In this case, investments in nature can be realized 'thanks to' the economic developments (interview representative, Province of Groningen). The role of the Province of Groningen in these negotiations is mainly facilitating and encouraging. The Province of Groningen is the initiator of the E&E project. The Province facilitates and supercharge the process and encourages the cooperation between partners. By hiring an independent process manager, the Province facilitates the management of the process as well.

Because there is no clear solution for restoring the ecological quality of the estuary, the process of negotiating and cooperating is needed. However, according to the interviewed representative of the Province of Groningen, it is important to already start implementing although there is no clear solution. Taking small steps that go in the right direction is important as it is an approach of 'learning by doing'. Examples of measurements that will be implemented in the coming years are the

Marconi-project in Delfzijl⁴ and the green Dollart dike⁵. “*These steps are simple but show that we are working on the system (the ecosystem of the Ems Dollart estuary, ed.) to make it healthier*” (interview representative, Province of Groningen). According to the interviewed representative of the Province of Groningen, it is crucial to show partners the small steps in order to motivate them and to convince them that the end goal, improving the ecological quality of the estuary, will be achieved in the end of all the processes (interview representative, Province of Groningen).

Especially in the E&E project, the Province of Groningen plays its role as *area director*. In the former situation, the Province met its regional partners either in the permitting process or in court. Nowadays, by stimulating the E&E project, the Province tries to get away from the juridical and formal meeting by trying to get its partners together. The Province facilitates and encourages collaboration in the E&E project. In this way, the Province is the binding factor between the different interests in ecology and economy in the Ems Dollart region.

By different employees of the Province of Groningen, the Province is seen as the pre-eminently governmental level to be an *area director*, more than other authorities (interview representative, Province of Groningen; interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). The first reason why the Province is seen as the pre-eminent level for this role is the substantive responsibility of the Province. The Province is responsible for infrastructure and giving industries possibilities for development, and for conservation and development of nature. The Province of Groningen deals with parties that are owners of nature and with parties that have big interests in economic developments such as harbors. Decentralization of tasks that were previously tasks of the national government, should increase the space and possibility the Province gets to perform its role. The second reason why the Province is seen as the ideal *area director* is the fact that the provincial level is on a higher level than municipalities and companies. “*Parties that are on the same level but are having different interests, such as nature conservation organizations, companies, municipalities or water boards, would never accept each other in the role of area director. You just need a province for this. The Province is on the right level and has a juridical task to play its role, so this is generally accepted*” (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen).

5.3.2 Difficulties and dilemmas of new role

Whereas the Province is able to play its role as *area director* in the E&E project and although the Province is seen as the pre-eminently governmental level to play this role, being an *area director* in

⁴ The Marconi-project is a local project in the city of Delfzijl. It is a project that combines the improvement of multiple qualities: a renewed coastal defense, a stronger link between the city and the water, recreation and nature (GEMEENTE DELFZIJL, n.d.).

⁵ A green dike is a ‘new’ design for a dike with a complete grass covering and a gentle slope. A green dike is the preferred alternative for a part of the dike along the Dutch Dollart (WATERSCHAP HUNZE EN AA’S, 2013).

the IMP process seems to be difficult for the Province. It can be stated that the role of the Province is difficult in general in this process. As this process is a cooperation of the Ministry of EZ, *Rijkswaterstaat* and the Province of Groningen, the Province of Groningen is not in charge of the process as in the E&E project. The Ministry of EZ is responsible for the project and will mainly be judged on the result of the IMP process. Therefore, the Province is not the only party who has influence on the process, and consequently, the Province does not have enough room to fully play its role of *area director* by involving the regional partners. Moreover, the Province cannot take full responsibility for the involvement of the regional partners as the success of the involvement is partly dependent on the Ministry of EZ and how the Ministry designs the process. "*The design of the process determines whether or not the regional partners are involved*" (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen). So, the Province of Groningen gives meaning to its role by representing the interests of the regional partners and by emphasizing the importance of the involvement of the regional partners in meetings, in meetings with the Ministry and *Rijkswaterstaat* and with German authorities and representatives (interview representative, Province of Groningen). After all, in the IMP process, the involvement of parties was not successful on the Dutch side. On the German side it was, probably because the type of process was known as the same type of process was already elaborated before (paragraph 5.1.2). Just a few Dutch stakeholders were interested in participating. Reasons that stakeholders were not interested to participate might have been that the process was too abstract and that the amount of meetings for processes around the Ems Dollart were already too high (interview program manager (1), Province of Groningen). However, another reason why the involvement was not successful might be the situation explained above: the division of roles and responsibilities in the IMP process for the leading parties *Rijkswaterstaat*, the Ministry of EZ and the Province of Groningen. Although the Ministry of EZ is the initiator, none of the parties is fully responsible. In fact, the Province does not even want to take full responsibility for a part of the process, its original task in the process to manage the involvement of the regional partners.

According to the interviewed representative of the Province of Groningen, there is no dilemma in having a vision and being a binding factor (interview representative, Province of Groningen). He states that having your own vision is a basis for cooperation and discussion with other parties. And as the Province has juridical responsibilities for certain policy sectors, the Province is responsible for developing visions for these sectors as well. So on the one hand, the Province positions itself as being a binding factor, while on the other hand the Province sets frames and preconditions. The representative states that the Province is able to combine both roles: "*Parties, especially the Waddenvereniging or other nature conservation organizations, always want to go one step further than the other parties. As a political organization, as the Province, you can play a binding role in*

weighting the different interests and try to make choices, or prepare a choice” (interview representative, Province of Groningen).

Though, a program manager of the Province of Groningen states that an ambiguous role as *area director* can be unclear for external parties. He recognizes the difficulty of combining cooperation with parties as equal partners on the one hand, while on the other hand the Province making decisions, for example to prohibit something. It needs to be communicated which role the Province plays in a particular process or phase. In fact, besides the processes discussed in this study – the E&E project, the IMP process and the MIRT Research – there are more processes, either local, regional or national. Due to this high amount of processes and structures and the differences in cooperation and responsible parties, the Province is forced to play different roles in different processes, as described already for the E&E project and the IMP process. The many processes and structures around the Ems Dollart estuary makes it hard for parties to understand which role the Province plays (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). For the Province of Groningen, this means that the positioning of the Province might be ambiguous and unclear, as well as for its employees as for the external parties, which makes it difficult to develop a strong identity as governmental authority.

The Province of Groningen is aware of the importance of communicating about its role. In the E&E project, the Province has learned to divide roles to make its role more clear for external parties (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen). In the beginning of the project, the program manager at that time was an employee of the Province and had a substantive role and had a role in the process management. The Province recognized that it was unclear for the external parties what the opinion and role of the Province was. Therefore, an independent process manager has been appointed. The process manager is mainly responsible for the cooperation between parties. The involved program manager of the Province of Groningen is responsible for formulating the substantive position of the Province. In this way, the Province tries to make its role clear (interview program manager (2), Province of Groningen).

5.4 External perspective on the positioning of the Province of Groningen

The fifth research question is answered in this paragraph: how is the positioning of the Province in the IMP process seen from external perspectives? The answer on this question is based on the interpretations of involved people who are not employed by the Province of Groningen and partly on the experiences of the researcher based on the data collection via participatory observation.

5.4.1 Vision of the Province of Groningen

In the eyes of different involved people, the vision of the Province of Groningen for the Ems Dollart estuary and the IMP process is not clear, especially not in the administrative process. Examples of

meetings in which the role of the Province might be unclear for the involved people are the 'match meetings'. In these meetings, most of the stakeholder groups were coordinated by a policy officer of the Province of Groningen. This made the meetings informative because of the combination of juridical knowledge from the policy officers and the practical knowledge of the regional stakeholders. However, the aim of the 'match meetings' was not only to be informative but also to discuss about the demands of a certain stakeholder group. A coordinator of a stakeholder group could be seen as a representative of the sector, whereas another policy officer took part in another stakeholder group in the same meeting. The internal division, which is also recognizable in internal meetings between departments of the Province for example (internal preliminary meeting for internal meeting of representative for Economy and representative for Nature and Agriculture), was literally expressed in the way the 'match meetings' were organized. The Province was representing different roles, from process management to participation in multiple stakeholder groups.

Moreover, in the substantive discussion on a maintenance target or an improvement target in terms of N2000, the official point of view of the Province of Groningen is not clear for an interviewed senior advisor of *Rijkswaterstaat*. He states that it is not always clear if an individual is preaching its own opinion or the opinion of the employee as representative of an organization. On the other hand, the points of view of other organizations such as *Rijkswaterstaat* and the Ministry of EZ are clear to him (interview senior advisor, *Rijkswaterstaat*). Also for the interviewed policy officer of the *Waddenvereniging*, it is hard to identify the Province's vision: "*It is hard to isolate the Province of Groningen from the rest of the process*". He interprets the effort of the policy officers of the Province as administrative engagement to the quality of the end product, not as steering on the result of the process (interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*). Because of the small number of involved employees of the Province in the IMP process, it is hard for the external parties to recognize the difference between a personal opinion of an employee or an overall point of view of the Province of Groningen. Moreover, the expression of the Province's role is dependent on a small number of employees. This does not make a difference in the role of the Province, but it makes the strong identity of the Province in general in practice not so strong and vulnerable for individual interpretations by its employees, of which the Province should be aware of.

However, in the political, steering context of the IMP process, the vision of the Province is carried out more clearly. According to the policy officer of the *Waddenvereniging*, the general aim of the Province is a good economy with an ecology that is not suffering under the economic developments but is rather improving in quality (interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*). In this vision, the Province combines its role of being an *area director* to its substantive vision in the area: a balance between economy and ecology, which can be interpreted as a balance between the interests of the

stakeholders. Following the argument of a senior policy officer of *Rijkswaterstaat* who is mainly involved in the political context of the IMP process, the interests and visions of the involved governmental authorities are not varying that much, however, the emphasis is different (interview senior policy officer, *Rijkswaterstaat*). In steering meetings, the Province is mainly emphasizing on the importance of the involvement of the regional parties, is representing the interests of its regional partners and is referring to its agreements it made with the regional partners. The Province expresses the role of being an *area director* in its vision for the Ems Dollart estuary and in the steering meetings.

5.4.2 The Province of Groningen as *area director*

The role of an *area director* is in general interpreted by external parties in the same way: coordinating and weighting of the different interests in an area. The 'external' interviewees agree as well on the statement that the Province of Groningen fulfills its role as *area director*. The Province tries to take the municipalities and stakeholders through processes, not only in processes around the Ems Dollart estuary but in other areas as well (interview senior advisor, *Rijkswaterstaat*; interview policy officer, *Waddenvereniging*). The Province has direct contact with users and stakeholders and is responsible for the E&E project which is a typical process for an *area director*. A senior policy officer of *Rijkswaterstaat* states: "*I think that the Province is an appropriate governmental level to play this role, more than the national government. The national government is further away for the parties*" (interview senior policy officer, *Rijkswaterstaat*).

However, there are some difficulties identified in the role of an *area director* and the way the Province of Groningen gives meaning to its 'new' role in the processes around the Ems Dollart estuary. Although the Province has become more thorough in its 'new' role, it is stated that the Province of Groningen still has difficulties in playing its role as *area director* in terms of combining cooperation with parties and having its own interests, opinions and responsibilities. For a province, which is close to its regional partners, it might be harder to receive criticism than that it would be for the national government which is more anonymous and 'further away' for the region. "*In some situations, it would be easier for the Province to not be the decision-maker*" (interview senior policy officer, Ministry of EZ).

The second difficult aspect of the Province of Groningen as *area director* is about probably going too far in keeping its regional partners satisfied. According to the interviewed senior policy officer of *Rijkswaterstaat*, he noticed in the cooperation with the Province that the Province tries to satisfy the nature conservation organizations, to avoid that these organizations would go to court. In his opinion, the process is important and a shared vision without juridical procedures would be a good

result, however, everyone has to have the right to go to court and proceed and the Province should not have the aim to avoid parties going to court (interview senior policy officer, *Rijkswaterstaat*).

5.5 Reflection

This chapter analyzes how the master frame of the Province of Groningen is applied and translated in practice, in the context of the case study of the IMP process for the Ems Dollart estuary. The IMP process is a complex process, in which many governmental authorities and other stakeholders are involved. For the Province of Groningen, this makes it hard but important as well to position itself strategically. Aim of this chapter was to analyze how the Province positions itself as *area director*. The chapter aims to answer the fourth and fifth research question.

The fourth research question is: what is the internal perspective on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in practice in the IMP process? The employees of the Province recognize its position and responsibilities as *area director*, so they emphasize on the importance of involvement of stakeholders in the IMP process. Especially the E&E project gives the Province the possibility to act as an *area director* and to bring parties together. It is more difficult to act as an *area director* in the IMP process. However, as well as on administrative as on political level, the Province tries to do so and is representing its regional partners actively. The Province does not want to be fully responsible for the involvement of stakeholders, as the Province has not full control on the design of the process, which has an influence on the success of the involvement of stakeholders. The design of the process lies in the hands of the Ministry of EZ. In short, it can be stated that the internal interpretation of the master frame in practice is awareness and recognizing the Province as the pre-eminently governmental level to perform this role of being an *area director*. However, it is difficult to perform when the Province is dependent on the national government, as in the IMP process.

The fifth research question is answered in this paragraph: how is the positioning of the Province in the IMP process seen from external perspectives? Main similarity in the interviews with external involved persons is the unclear, or missing, vision of the Province of Groningen. Although the political, strategic management is able to carry out the interests of the Province, not all external involved persons are able to recognize the vision of the Province for the area. All interviewees agree on recognizing the Province of Groningen as *area director*. The Province does bring parties together, but the interviewees see that it is difficult for the Province to be decisive on its interests and responsibilities and rather try to satisfy its partners.

As concluded in paragraph 4.3, the Province of Groningen developed a strong 'master frame' of being an *area director*. According to the analysis in the concrete case of the IMP process in this

chapter, it can be stated that from an internal as well as from an external perspective the Province is recognized as an *area director*. The Province is seen as the external-oriented and binding organization as it aims to. Though, it can be stated that the Province is not successful in expressing its own vision for the area. The Province does have a point of view, expressed in visions and policy documents, but is not capable to convey it, according to the external interviewees. Apparently, based on the fact that this is mentioned in different ways in the interviews, the external parties miss some clarity on the Province's vision throughout the process. None of the interviewed employees of the Province of Groningen mentioned this 'missing' vision in the interviews. It can be stated that although the Province is performing its role as *area director* as good as possible in the different processes, the Province could be more clear in its communication about their substantive responsibilities and visions, especially in the administrative process.



6 Discussion & conclusion

This concluding chapter deals in the first place with the research questions. The research questions are answered based on the empirical findings of this study. The sub research questions are already answered in the previous chapters, but are shortly mentioned in this chapter, where after the main research question is answered. The second part of the chapter is about the discussion. Although the empirical findings are already analyzed by using the theory as background, the discussion gives insight in how the theory and research results are interlinked, by using the conceptual model. The third part gives recommendations to the Province of Groningen, based on the results of this study. The empirical findings are analyzed in the context of the theory. In the reflection part, the researcher reflects on the study and the used methods in order to evaluate the study in general. As well, this part gives insights in how the study could be extended by further research. The chapter ends with a conclusion, in which this study is shortly reviewed.

6.1 Answering the research questions

This part connects the answers on the sub research questions, based on the empirical findings. By doing so, the answers can be linked and the main research question can be discussed. In advance of discussing the main research question, the sub research questions and the answers are mentioned shortly once more.

1. How did planning and policy-making on the physical environmental develop and how did the role of the government in planning develop?

Spatial planning has gone through societal and political changes which resulted in a different approach to planning issues. For the Dutch planning practice, two trends are considered to be most relevant: the trend from government to governance and from sectoral and generic towards integral and area-specific. Land use planning has traditionally been a governmental task in the Netherlands, especially implemented by the national government. Nowadays, the national government decentralized many tasks and responsibilities to the lower level of governmental authorities: the provinces and municipalities. Moreover, the trend towards governance led to an increase in cooperation with the civil society and regional partners. This resulted in an inconclusive position of the government at all levels. The government became more equal in relation to other parties but was still serving the public interest as well. The trend towards an integral and area-specific approach leads to an increase of interdependence between governmental levels, as the responsibilities of different policy sectors are not always fully decentralized. Different governmental levels have to cooperate in order to make one integral plan for an entire area.

2. How did the organizational identity of provinces in the Netherlands develop?

Although there are several highlights in the history of the provinces, there has always been discussion on the provinces as the intermediate governmental level. Around the 1980s, there was a general doubt about governmental influence, which meant a loss of identity for the provinces as well. Nowadays, the provinces adapt their approach more and more to the needs of the society by aiming to be an *area director*: multi-sectoral and binding different interests. However, a regional issue is still not by default a responsibility for the provincial government as municipalities and the national government are acting on the regional level as well.

3. How does the Province of Groningen translate the 'new role' as *area director* nowadays?

The Province of Groningen has gone through the same trends as the Dutch provinces and is nowadays identifying itself as an *area director* as well. However, the Province of Groningen is still working on its identity and role in practice. Some characteristics of an *area director* resound in the policy documents of the Province, as external-orientation and being a reliable partner. However, the 'new role' as *area director* can mainly be recognized in the general policy documents and aims. Concrete goals cannot be recognized, even not on the level of a department as LGW.

4. What is the internal perspective on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in practice in the IMP process?

The employees of the Province recognize its position and responsibilities as *area director*, so being a binding factor and emphasizing on the importance of involvement of stakeholders in the IMP process. However, it is difficult to act as an *area director* in the IMP process. As well as on administrative as on political level, the Province tries to do so and is representing its regional partners actively. In short, it can be stated that the internal perspective on the strategic positioning is awareness and recognizing the Province as the pre-eminently governmental level to perform this role. However, it is difficult to perform when the Province is dependent on the national government, as in the IMP process. The E&E project gives the Province the possibility to act as an *area director* and to bring parties together.

5. How is the positioning of the Province in the IMP process seen from external perspectives?

In the interviews with external involved persons, the main similarity is the agreement on recognizing the Province of Groningen as *area director*. The Province brings parties together. However, the interviewees see that it is difficult for the Province to be decisive on its interests and responsibilities and rather try to satisfy its partners, especially in the E&E project. Although the political, strategic management is able to carry out the interests, in the administrative level of cooperation, the vision and interests of the Province are vague and not all external involved persons are able to recognize the vision and interests of the Province for the Ems Dollart region.

With all the sub research questions answered, the main research question can be answered as well. The main research question is formulated as follows: To what extent does the development of the strategic positioning of Dutch provinces reflect and influence the way the Province of Groningen position itself in a multi-actor project?

Based on the empirical findings, the Province of Groningen indeed positions itself according to the general strategic positioning of Dutch provinces. The identity of the Dutch provinces has developed according to the changing role of the government in general. Today's society needs an open, communicative government. By using the societal trends and the continuous discussion on the legitimacy of provinces as the intermediate governmental level as a background, the provinces strategically positioned themselves as *area directors*. Although the provinces have more roles according to their responsibilities, the emphasis in the previous decennia, from the 1980s until today, is on the role of *area director*, as their strategic positioning in the province's multi-actor environment. The Province of Groningen uses the role of *area director* in the processes around the Ems Dollart estuary. The Province took the initiative to develop the E&E project, as a platform on which regional partners can cooperate and discuss. At that time, the reasons to develop the project was to avoid juridical procedures and the belief that the partners could reach more together than

they would do on their own. Although the Province is not in charge of the IMP process and dependent on the effort and process design of the Ministry of EZ, the involved employees feel responsible for their regional partners of the E&E project and are actively representing them in the meetings about the IMP process. Especially in the meetings of the Steering group, the political and strategic meetings, the Province emphasis is on the involvement of the stakeholders and agreements made with the regional partners in the context of the E&E project. In the political and strategic meetings, the positioning and vision of the Province of Groningen became clear for the participating parties. However, on the administrative level, in the cooperation of policy officers, the vision and positioning of the Province did not became clear. In fact, the external involved persons that cooperate with the Province's employees on this level were able to recognize the Province as *area director*, but were not able to recognize the interests of the Province.

It can be stated that the emphasis on being an *area director* in policy documents is influencing practice so strong that the main interests of the Province seems to be a successful *area director* rather than serving the public interest by being a decisive and visionary governmental authority. Although some employees of the Province of Groningen are aware of the importance of having their own vision as well, and although the Province works on development plan and visions, the external parties do not recognize a provincial future vision and ambition for the area.

6.2 Discussion

The conceptual model was created based on the framing theory and assumed the master frame of the Province of Groningen to be influenced by external, societal trends and the positioning of Dutch provinces in general. Both influences were assumed to have an impact on the 'official' strategic identity of the Province of Groningen, or in other words, its 'master frame'. It can be stated that the master frame of the Province of Groningen is indeed influenced by external, societal trends. Trends in the academic debate on planning theory, linked to the Dutch societal trends, can be recognized in the transformation process. The Province actively frames its position as being an *area director*, being an external-oriented organization. This 'new' identity fits in the postmodern planning of the last decennia. Planning is not anymore based on technocratic approaches and rational procedures, planning and knowledge should be socially constructed (ALLMENDINGER, 2009), in practice by involving other parties rather than just making policy internally in the Province's organization. A communicative planning approach, achieving commitment for one plan by partnerships and participation of stakeholders (ALLMENDINGER, 2009), can be recognized in the Province's approach of emphasizing on the involvement of stakeholders.

Since 1850, the year the Dutch governmental structure of three governmental levels was established, the legitimacy of provinces has always been discussed. It was hard for the provinces to develop their own profile. Moreover, the postmodern approach of planning makes the role of governmental authorities at any level inconclusive. On the one hand, the government is more equal in relation to other parties, while on the other hand the government is still serving the public interest (DE ROO & VOOGD, 2007). The Dutch provinces developed a strong identity as being an *area director* in spatial developments. The Province of Groningen positions itself as *area director* as well by developing and publishing internal documents about its identity. However, by analyzing the positioning of the Province in the concrete processes around the Ems Dollart estuary, it becomes clear that the dilemma identified by DE ROO & VOOGD (2007), does have an influence on the internal and external perspective on the identity of the Province. Being a binding factor and equal in the relationships with partners, on with the Province is mainly focused, is only one side of the medal. Communication about its own vision and its responsibilities for the public interest is the other side.

The question can be asked if it is desirable for a governmental authority such as a province to be equal in relation to other parties. In this way, governmental authorities position themselves on the same level as other organizations, which positions the public interest on the same level as other interests. Especially in the policy sectors of nature conservation, water management and land use planning, an overall interest need to be represented and a governmental authority is the obvious party to do so. In processes such as the IMP process, in which stakeholders are involved, governmental authorities should be clear about the preconditions and minimum requirements of the outcome. In this way, governmental authorities position themselves not as equal to their partners but rather on a 'higher' level as the decision-making party. However, in this position, governmental authorities can still serve the public interest and be an *area director*.

As a summary of the above, it is concluded that the theories from the scientific literature correspond with the development of the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen, as well as with the IMP process. The articulated master frame of the Province fits in the context of the academic debate and the societal trends. In practice, the employees do emphasize the main characteristics of the 'new' identity of the Province. In this way, the Province does not stay in its 'old' role of being a top-down organization but it is pushing the boundaries of being a communicative partner in area developments.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the research results and the discussion, there are some recommendations that can be given to the Province of Groningen to help improve the Province's strategic positioning.

The term *area director* is translated in the general documents on positioning of the Province of Groningen by general goals, for example the goal to be an open and reliable partner. This is a positive development, as the Province creates an organizational identity that aims to meet the society's needs. However, concrete goals to come closer to the ideal role of the Province are missing. According to IPO (2013), an *area director* is not an inclusive role. Therefore, it would be advisable for the Province to keep improving its organizational identity, adjusted to the society's needs, and to go one step further in elaborating the role of *area director* more concrete, probably by prioritizing some characteristics of an *area director*.

The second recommendation is linked to the first. Recognized by some interviewees, being an *area director* does not only contains the responsibility of binding parties, it also contains the responsibility of setting frames and having a clear vision. In practice, in the processes around the Ems Dollart estuary, the 'binding responsibility' is mainly implemented and emphasized as a responsibility of the Province. Indeed, binding the parties and interests in the region seems even to be the main interest of the Province. Though, the Province does develop future visions and does have responsibilities, especially in terms of nature. To be able to allow economic developments in the future, improving the ecological quality is needed. Although the Province is aware of its responsibilities and the consequences, the Province is not able to carry out its interests on all levels. In the IMP process, not all involved people are able to recognize the Province's point of view. It would be advisable for the Province to be open and communicate clearly its formal interests, especially in multi-actor processes in which this is also expected from other involved parties.

6.4 Reflection

When reflecting on this study and on the used theory and methods, it can be concluded that the framing approach helped to structure the study and to understand how the organizational identity can be formulated in an official strategy and translated in practice. All used methods contributed to finding the answers on the research questions. The articulation of the master frame could be based solely on policy documents and publications. However, to understand how the master frame was interpreted, conducting interviews was needed as interpretations cannot be found in official documents. Used as a background, participatory observation helped the researcher to get a better understanding of the interpretations and how these interpretations influenced the IMP process.

The study started by converging. The study started broad by analyzing the changing governmental role. Then, the study focused on the positioning of the Dutch provinces and zoomed in on the position of the Province of Groningen. At last, one process was picked as a case study to analyze the practice. Although the converging approach helped to link general, theoretical concepts to practice, the converging process made the research sometimes too much focused, as other processes as the E&E project and the MIRT Research were too strongly linked to the IMP process that it was impossible to analyze the IMP process by occluding the other two processes.

Concerning the reliability of the results it has to be stated that the participatory observation did influence the results. Indirect data and observations formed partly the conclusion, whether the observations were confirmed by the interviews or not. Although it does not harm the reliability of the results as the researcher took its objectivity in consideration carefully, for some statements in this research it is not possible to add a clear reference as these statements are based on general observations and not on 'official' data or a particular meeting.

What would be done differently the next time has to do with the data collection via interviews. Eight in-depth interviews have been conducted. The data collected by the interviews was valuable, though, more interviews would probably give a better insight in the differences in interpretations. Taking into consideration the short time frame in which the study was done, less participatory observation and more interviewing might have been more informative for this study.

The empirical findings of this research provide, in addition to an answer to the research questions, input for further research as well. First, it would be interesting to compare the role of the Province of Groningen in the processes around the Ems Dollart estuary by other processes in the Province. Because the master frame is developed for the whole organization, it would be interesting to see how other employees in different situations and issues, probably on a different department, interpret and deal with the master frame. Second, it might be interesting to compare the translation of the general provincial identity by the Province of Groningen, by the translation of the identity by other provinces. As the term *area director* can be interpreted in different ways, provinces might interpret the term in different ways and translate it differently in their organizations. Building upon the comparison between different provinces, a similar case as the Ems Dollart estuary could be compared, in a different context and in a different province.

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Appendix A. List of used policy documents

Below, an overview of the policy document used for this study is shown, divided in policy documents about provinces in general and policy documents about the Province of Groningen.

Provinces

- Bestuursakkoord 2011-2015
- Op schaal gewogen. Regionaal bestuur in Nederland in de 21^e eeuw. Commissie Regionaal Bestuur in Nederland, 2002
- Profiel provincies. IPO, 2010
- Een nieuwe werkelijkheid, een nieuwe provincie?! IPO, 2013
- Bestuur in samenhang. Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2013
- Structuurvisie Infrastructuur en Ruimte. Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Milieu, 2012
- Nota Ruimte. Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer, 2004
- Nationaal Waterplan 2009-2015. Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer en Ministerie van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit
- Het einde van het blauwdruk-denken. Naar een nieuwe inrichting van het openbaar bestuur. Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur, 2010
- Regeerakkoord 2010
- Regeerakkoord 2012

Province of Groningen

- Voordracht van Gedeputeerde Staten aan Provinciale Staten van Groningen tot wijziging van de organisatorische hoofdstructuur van het provinciale ambtelijke apparaat. Provincie Groningen, 2001
- Richting, ruimte en resultaat. Visie op de organisatie 2015. Provincie Groningen, 2009
- Provinciaal ontwikkelperspectief. Provincie Groningen, 2010
- Coalitieakkoord. Provincie Groningen 2011-2015. Provincie Groningen, 2011
- Ontwikkelingsvisie Eemsdelta 2030. Provincie Groningen, 2013
- Voorjaarsnota 2014. Provincie Groningen, 2014

Appendix B. List of meetings participated by the researcher

Below, an overview of the meetings in which the researcher participated is shown, ordered chronologically by the date of the meeting.

- Meeting: Kernteam IMP
Organization and planning of the IMP process
- Launch conversations: Stakeholder groups
First meetings with stakeholder groups to introduce them to the IMP process and the upcoming 'match meetings'
- Meeting: Project group NL IMP
Organization and planning of the IMP process, open for stakeholders, informing and discussing the status of the process
- Meeting: Kernteam IMP
Organization and planning of the IMP process
- Internal preliminary meeting for meeting with Project group MIRT
Discussion the action plan of the MIRT process and preparing the opinion of Province of Groningen for the meeting with Project group MIRT
- Meeting: Project group MIRT
Organization and planning of the MIRT process
- Meeting: Contact group IMP Germany and the Netherlands
Organization and planning of the IMP process, bilateral meeting with Germany
- Meeting: Kernteam IMP
Organization and planning of the IMP process
- Meeting: Kernteam IMP
Organization and planning of the IMP process
- Meeting: IMP deliberation
Status of the IMP process, strategic and juridical
- Project Start-Up MIRT
Team building, defining the results of the process, defining the bottlenecks in cooperation, developing the steps to take in the process
- Match meeting: Stakeholder group Hunting
Discussion synergies, conflicts and ambiguities in the interests of the stakeholder group compared to the interests of the stakeholder group Natura 2000
- Match meeting: Stakeholder group Leisure and Tourism

- Discussion synergies, conflicts and ambiguities in the interests of the stakeholder group compared to the interests of the stakeholder group Natura 2000
- Internal preliminary meeting for meeting with Steering group IMP
 - Preparing the opinion of the Province of Groningen with the representative for the meeting with Steering group IMP
 - Meeting: Steering group IMP
 - Status IMP process, in relation to other processes as well, meeting with representatives of the Ministry of EZ, *Rijkswaterstaat* and the Province of Groningen
 - Match meeting: Stakeholder group Agriculture
 - Discussion synergies, conflicts and ambiguities in the interests of the stakeholder group compared to the interests of the stakeholder group Natura 2000
 - Match meeting: Stakeholder group Spatial developments
 - Discussion synergies, conflicts and ambiguities in the interests of the stakeholder group compared to the interests of the stakeholder group Natura 2000
 - Match meeting: Stakeholder group Shipping and harbors & Industry
 - Discussion synergies, conflicts and ambiguities in the interests of the stakeholder group compared to the interests of the stakeholder group Natura 2000
 - Match meeting: Stakeholder group Water Framework Directive & Flood/Coastal defense
 - Discussion synergies, conflicts and ambiguities in the interests of the stakeholder group compared to the interests of the stakeholder group Natura 2000
 - Evaluation match meetings: Stakeholder group Natura 2000
 - Evaluation of results of match meetings and the following steps in the process
 - Meeting: Project group IMP
 - Organization and planning of the IMP process, open for stakeholders, informing and discussing the status of the process
 - Meeting: Project group MIRT
 - Organization and planning of the MIRT process
 - Meeting: Steering group MIRT
 - Status MIRT process, in relation to other processes as well, meeting with representatives of the Ministry of EZ, the Ministry of I&M, *Rijkswaterstaat* and the Province of Groningen
 - Internal preliminary meeting for internal meeting of representative for Economy and representative for Nature and Agriculture
 - Alignment of cooperation with Germany in the Ems Dollart region, between the processes focused on nature conservation (mainly the IMP and MIRT process) and

the processes in the region with a focus on the economy, performed by the Department of Economy, Culture and Project financing, preparing a full picture for the representatives

- Internal meeting: representative Yvonne van Mastrigt and representative Henk Staghouver
Alignment of cooperation with Germany in the Ems Dollart region and positioning of the Province of Groningen

Appendix C. Action plan for interviews

The interviews start with asking for a description of the interviewee's current position in the organization in which the interviewee is employed and how long the interviewee is employed in this organization. Additionally, the interviewee's position in the IMP process and other processes around the Ems Dollart estuary is asked.

As mentioned in the master thesis (paragraph 3.2.4), the interviews have a semi-structured character. Therefore, the questions mentioned in below just served as guidelines. During the interviews, the researcher used her background information about the IMP process and policy documents to ask more specifically on topics mentioned by the interviewees.

Reconstruction IMP

Because there are only a few documents that can be found from the first years of the IMP process, a historical reconstruction is made for this study. Aim is to be able to analyze why different governmental authorities are involved and how their role and position is articulated and performed during the process. Only interviewees who have been involved in the IMP process from the beginning are interviewed on this subject. The following questions are asked for the reconstruction:

- What was the occasion/motivation to start with the IMP process?
- The Ministry of EZ was the initiator. Why?
- Why is *Rijkswaterstaat* involved?
- Why is the Province of Groningen involved?
- What are the different responsibilities of the governmental authorities in the process?

Answering the sub research questions

The conducted interviews have the aim to contribute to answering of the main research question of the study: How has the strategic positioning of provinces in the Netherlands developed and how does that development reflect and influence the way the Province of Groningen position itself in a multi-actor project?

The conducted interviews have the aim to answer the sub research questions of the study, which contribute in answering the main research question. The first three sub research questions can be answered with using literature and policy documents. The last two sub research questions can only be answered by interviewing, as these two questions aim to articulate a collective action frame, the interpretation of the master frame by individuals.

Sub research question 4: What is the internal perspective on the strategic positioning of the Province of Groningen in practice in the IMP process?

The answer of this research question is based on interviews held with employees of the Province of Groningen. The following questions are asked:

- What are the different interests of the governmental authorities for this process?
- What is the specific interest of the Province of Groningen?
- How would you interpret the term *area director*?
- Do you think provinces are at an appropriate governmental level to perform this role?
- Do you think the Province of Groningen performs this role in the IMP process? Why (not)?
- If yes, how is the Province of Groningen practicing its 'new role' in the IMP process?
- How do you contribute to practice the 'new role'?
- Are you aware of the 'new role' in your daily work?

Sub research question 5: How is the positioning of the Province in the IMP process seen from external perspectives?

The answer of this research question is based on interviews held with persons that are intensively involved in the IMP process, and are not employed by the Province of Groningen. The following questions are asked:

- What are the different interests of the governmental authorities for this process?
- What is the specific interest of the Province of Groningen?
- How would you interpret the term *area director*?
- Do you think provinces are at an appropriate governmental level to perform this role?
- Do you think the Province of Groningen performs this role in the IMP process? Why (not)?
- If yes, how is the Province of Groningen practicing its 'new role' in the IMP process?
- How does this fulfill your expectations of a governmental authority as the Province?

Interview process

All interviews were recorded so that the researcher was able to transcript the interviews. All interviewees gave permission to record. After the interview, the researcher made a transcript of the interview, structured the interview and send the interview report to the interviewee. The interviewee got the possibility to read through the reports and change, remove or add words if he or she wanted to. Then, the interviewee send the interview report to the researcher and confirmed that the interview report could be used for this study.

As some interviewees asked for not publishing their names, the researcher decided to publish none of the names of the interviewees. Moreover, some interviewees asked for not publishing the interview reports as appendices to this thesis. Therefore, all interview reports are published in a separate and confidential document.