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# TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIO-SPATIAL PLANNING ENABLING RESOURCEFUL COMMUNITIES



Illustrations by Henk van Ruitenbeek

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# TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIO-SPATIAL PLANNING: ENABLING RESOURCEFUL COMMUNITIES

L.G. (Ina) Horlings



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## TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIO-SPATIAL PLANNING: ENABLING RESOURCEFUL COMMUNITIES

Highly esteemed Rector Magnificus, dear colleagues, students, PhD's, friends and family, I welcome you all at my inaugural speech.

The mission of spatial planning is to create a bridge between '*what is*', the current situation of the places we live in and '*what could be*', what places can we imagine, or in normative terms: '*what should be*': how do we want to live in the future? (De Roo et al., 2012, p.1).

To start with 'what is': there is a sense of urgency for transformation as our society faces 'wicked problems', complex issues laden with many uncertainties, like climate change, the depletion of resources, the inequalities within society, increasing mobilities, urbanization and the challenge how to feed six billion people in 2050. These issues play out in spatially varied ways, creating so called 'territories of difference' (Escobar, 2008). They are also spatially complex; for example environmental problems can be caused on a local scale, but may have effects on a larger scale and often have to be dealt with on multiple levels of governance.

I will plead in this speech for a transformative planning which addresses these complex problems and aims to 'make better places together', to cite the motto of our Faculty. Transformation is the fundamental alteration of a system, once the current conditions become untenable or undesirable and hence contested (Gunderson et al., 2005; Folke et al., 2005). Transformation may be spontaneous or planned, and intends to change a situation to a more beneficial or desirable state (Chapin, 2009, Chapin et al., 2009).

Transformation is not just about place-making or place-shaping, but also has a normative and deliberative dimension. The normative dimension leads to ethical questions such as what kind of places do we want in the future, for whom, at what scale and who determines this? (Shackleton, et al., 2013). Currently we see a decentralization of decision power from the state to the regional and local level, an erosion of the welfare state, individualization, but also the rise of active citizenship and new collectives, wanting to take matters in their own hands. Spatial planners work in an arena of varied stakeholders with different interests and have to deal with the subjective

desires, opinions and motives of citizens which have gained an increased power in our democracy (see cartoon: place as an arena); the referendum about Brexit in the UK is probably the most striking example of ‘the power of the people’.

How do *we* want to live in the future? The ‘we’ is becoming more relevant as a result of several trends. In our world of flows (Castells, 2012) life has become more chaotic and ambivalent. Globalization and modernization have speeded up our lives, and turned our world into a village. Thanks to the digitalization and empowerment of society we have become global citizens, experts with access to knowledge at all times. However, this is only true for the privileged who inherit the globe, as some people are ‘still chained to place’ (Bauman, 2012).

The ‘we’ is also differentiated. David Goodhart (2017) describes the difference in the UK between people from Somewhere – rooted in a specific place and socially conservative, having an unease with the modern world and a nostalgic sense that “change is loss”, and those who could come from Anywhere: footloose, often urban, socially liberal, part of the establishment and university educated. However, I would argue that there is a third group, people from Nowhere, immigrants who have become nomads, drifters in search for safe havens and looking for cultural affinity in a globalized world.

Furthermore, not just people from Somewhere but all these groups have a sense of place and are longing for a place they can call home. How can planners handle the socially and spatially differentiated needs for security, identity, prosperity and well-being?

Spatial planning deals with the connection between questions such as: who, what, where and how (see also Dobrucká, 2016; De Roo, 2003). However, I would like to elaborate in this speech on two other questions, first: 1) What for? What is the aim of spatial planning? 2) Secondly the question: Why? Why would citizens and entrepreneurs be willing to engage in socio-spatial change?

The second question is relevant because transformation is not just accelerated by behaviour or politics, but also by an ‘inner’ dimension, which includes awareness, values, passion and perceptions, expressed in stories and narratives (O’Brien and Sygna, 2013; Horlings, 2015a/b; Horlings and Padt, 2013). New stories, such as the need for an energy-transition, can challenge



our values, hard-headed attitudes, and behaviour based on routines. It can contribute to change 'from the inside out' (O'Brien and Wolf, 2010). I will therefore plea for a socio-spatial planning which pays specific attention to this inner dimension of transformation.

## PERSONAL PASSION

But first I would like to say a few words about my own passion for this topic, stemming from my youth experiences. I grew up on an arable farm in the province of Drenthe. The local municipality wanted to buy land in the midst seventies of the last century to reconstruct the area into glass-house production. Our family had to move to the new ‘virgin’ land of the southern part of the *IJsselmeer polders*. When I was 16, standing on a dike and over-looking this new land I saw ... nothing (see the pictures: South Flevoland).

I experienced how the national implementation agency, the *Rijksdienst IJsselmeerpolders*, designed and planned the polder, and experienced their feudal style of working, based on assumptions on the make ability of society, an engineering style of working, in a context of rational planning and functionalism. This clashed with farmers who had their own ideas about infrastructure, land-use and the system of *leasehold*. This experience showed me that there is a difference between the practices of people, the way they perceive and experience their situation, and how it is conceived and planned by authorities. This difference, scientifically discussed by Lefebvre (1991) in his three-fold notion of space, still inspires my work today.

Later, during my PhD work on farmer’s associations (Horlings, 1996), I realized that it is not sufficient that people are willing to work in a more sustainable way, and have the capabilities to do so. Also supporting and enabling institutions are needed to achieve spatial transformation. The rural collectives I investigated have been described extensively by my ex-colleagues at the Rural Sociology Group in Wageningen (see for example Roep, Van der Ploeg and Wiskerke, 2000). The lessons learnt from these collectives are still relevant today, when analyzing the emergence of new *urban* initiatives such as energy cooperatives, community food initiatives and sustainable housing.





*Pictures: South Flevoland in 1979 (Fam. Horlings)*



## RESOURCEFULNESS

To start with the question I raised earlier: what for? In my definition the aim of a *transformative socio-spatial planning* is to *enable resourceful communities in spaces, co-producing 'better' places*. I will first explain what I mean with resourcefulness and an enabling governance, and then how to understand resourceful communities.

The notion of resourcefulness is inspired by my cooperation with Alex Franklin from the Coventry University (UK) and builds on work from MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson (2012) and Kotilainen (2017). Resourcefulness is not a predefined planning goal, but a source of inspiration,

referring to the capacity of any community – including vulnerable groups – to change the way they use resources (RECOMS, 2017). It is a contributor to community resilience and can foster socio-spatial change through collective action.

Some see resilience merely as the capacity of a community to ‘bounce’ back, retaining a state of equilibrium after a situation of crisis. However, I see this as too limited. Resilience is a dynamic process of transformation towards a more desirable trajectory, which can be captured in the notion of *evolutionary resilience* (Davoudi et al., 2013; Boschma, 2015).

To give an example (see cartoon: protest against gas-extraction), disturbances such as gas extraction here in Groningen, can push systems to thresholds at which adaptations are no longer sufficient, but may require an energy transformation towards a gas-free province (see also Magis, 2010, p.404). This is a critical perspective, including not only sustenance and renewal, but also the adaptive and transformative capacity to regenerate a place beyond its current state (Franklin, 2017). Conditions for evolutionary resilience are preparedness (learning capacity), adaptability (being flexible), persistence (being robust) and transformability (being innovative) (Davoudi et al., 2013, p.312). These are intentional conditions which play out on different scales and governmental levels. An inspiring example of evolutionary resilience is the Room for the River program which resulted in the construction of a side channel along the river Waal near the city of Nijmegen (see the picture: Space for the river Waal).



Picture: Project space for the river Waal, Lent (Ina Horlings, 2016)

I would like to give here the following characteristics of resourcefulness:

- 1) First, it *challenges a merely social-constructivist point of view* as it brings the importance of the natural characteristics of a place (again) to the fore (Horlings et al., 2016). The aim is to add quality to space which includes natural and ecological attributes, as well as social, cultural and psychological characteristics present at the local level (Baker and Mehmood, 2015, p.322).
- 2) Resourcefulness is a *novel practice based approach*. Active citizens perform innovative place-shaping practices to improve the spatial quality of their environment. Examples are energy cooperatives, community gardens, new landscape arrangements and forms of co-housing (Boonstra, 2016) (see the picture: project IEWAN), new forms of integrated community health care, arts initiatives and various forms of 'green' service provisioning.



Picture: project IEWAN: co-housing in a straw building in Lent (Ina Horlings, 2017)

- 3) I see resourceful communities as *place-based* (Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2012), which means that people are social beings in working together, but also spatially connected in dealing with the characteristics, potentialities, and resources of a specific place. Initiatives on the neighbourhood or regional level can bring change by upscaling for example through institutional leverage (Baker and Mehmood, 2015, p.323).

- 4) Resourcefulness can contribute to *social innovation*. Social innovation means finding novel solutions to social needs and problems (Phills et al., 2008). The European Commission (2011) defines social innovation as new ideas (products, services, models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. Social innovation changes the boundaries between public, private and civil society actors (Phills et al., 2008, p.36); it brings an exchange of ideas and values between these actors, resulting in shifts in their roles and relationships as *co-mingled* agents of social change (Baker and Mehmood, 2015, p.330). Social innovation has been considered as a process as well as outcome. As an outcome it is significant when it exhibits three characteristics (Nilsson, 2003, p.3): 1) scale, such as the amount of people affected; 2) scope, requiring societal improvement in a deep and multidimensional way; 3) and resonance; that is capturing societal imagination in a powerful manner. These characteristics move societal responses to innovative ones. A key question then is how and under what circumstances can resourceful communities support social innovation and be promoted on the place-based level?

## ENABLING GOVERNANCE

The terms *enabling governance* in my definition of socio-spatial planning refers to an enabling environment in which resourcefulness can thrive. Enablers include networks, organisations, institutions but also change agents. The term co-production suggests that new forms of co-steering between social, economic and governmental actors are needed in the management of social change (Baker and Mehmood, 2015, p.322). As Whitaker (1980) already said in 1980, an immanent characteristic of societal change is the co-production of citizens and grassroots organizations, needed for the necessary individual changes in behaviour, to manage initiatives and projects more effectively, but also to create the dynamic that encourages transformative practices. Co-production implies that citizens play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them. It creates synergy between what a government does and what citizens do (Ostrom, 1996, p. 1079). It shifts the balance of power, responsibility and resources from professionals to individuals and collectives, engaged in shaping their



own places (Albrechts, 2012). I agree with Albrechts here that – I quote – *“through this process visions or frames of reference, the justification of coherent actions and the means for implementation are produced that shape, frame and reframe what a place is and what it might become”*. (Albrechts, 2010: 1117; cited in Albrechts, 2012, p.52)

### ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN THE DO-IT-YOURSELF DEMOCRACY

Engaging citizens in socio-spatial transformation is part of a trend which has been termed by scholars and policy-makers in various ways, e.g. the ‘do-democracy’ (Van de Wijdeven en De Graaf, 2014), ‘sharing economy’, ‘energetic society’ (Hajer, 2011), or the ‘participative society’ (Tonkens, 2008), thus describing empowered and knowledgeable citizens, with reaction speed, learning ability and creativity, willing to be actively involved in creating and contributing to their own environment (Hajer, 211). An example is Toentje, an urban gardening project in the city of Groningen (see the picture: Toentje). However, we have to realize that not everyone is willing or able to participate.



Picture: Toentje: urban gardening in Groningen (Toentje)

The increasing interest in active citizenship can partly be explained by a renewed interest in community, place and 'local identity', the re-emergence of the social economy, the privatization of public services, and tensions between empowered 'bottom-up' initiatives and the changing role of the state (see also Moulaert et al., 2005).

Active citizenship can be evoked via crises or stem from people's own needs and necessities (Baker and Mehmood, 2015, p.324) and be rooted in various motivations, responding against unwanted developments (such as wind parks) or driven by idealistic motivations to improve the quality of their place. The project Buurtmakers carried out in 2016-2017 by my colleagues Ward Rauws and Ruben Bouwman in cooperation with students in socio-spatial planning, showed that informal initiatives on the neighbourhood level have varied goals but also have something in common; they want to connect people. 81 neighbourhood initiatives in 5 Frisian towns were investigated, of which two-third said to be engaged in connecting people, often linked to one or more themes like food, elderly care, sports or art (Rauws et al., 2017).

Active citizenship has become popular among scientists who have used different concepts to understand these phenomena, such as transformative agency (Westley et al., 2013), grassroots innovation (Seyfang and Smith, 2007), social innovation (Bock, 2012; Moulaert et al., 2010) or niche innovation (Kemp et al., 2001; Geels, 2004), the democratic power of associations (Warren, 2001), active citizenship (Van Dam et al., 2014), bottom-up development (Miazzo and Kee, 2014), self-organization (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011), or the silent revolution of collective action (De Moor, 2008). Others have tried to capture these initiatives empirically in models such as the CLEAR model (Bakker et al., 2012) describing citizens attributes like willingness and capabilities, or the ALMOLIN model (Moulaert et al., 2005) which includes how local initiatives mobilize resources which can contribute to social innovation and institutional arrangements.

We shouldn't consider the trend of active citizenship as merely positive. Evelien Tonkens for example has pointed at the moral plea of governments to be 'a good citizen', without explaining what this might mean, and she warned us for the risk of overriding citizens, placing a too heavy workload on them, for example in the care sector (Tonkens, 2008; 2014). The expect-

tations about the self-efficacy of citizens and their capabilities takes place in a neo-liberal context which can lead to manipulation of citizens to achieve policy goals, the exclusion of vulnerable groups, and an increasing division between the 'resourceful' and those who are just trying to survive. Another risk is that the participative society leaves less room for more critical or protesting citizens, transferring the responsibility to change their situation back to themselves (Verhoeven and Oude Vrielink, 2012).

Spatial planners struggle in dealing with active citizenship. On the one hand planning is based on deliberative *intentions* of governments to act upon spatial trends and the wicked problems I mentioned.





On the other hand we see the *emergence* of citizens who want to take matters in their own hand, who want to take responsibility for their environment, having their own perceptions and desires. I often witnessed that local and provincial governments expect from initiatives to adapt to *their* logic, timing and agenda, or they tend to retreat all together, just waiting for the ‘energetic’ society to take action. Enabling initiatives is however a difficult task to perform. To use a metaphor: it is *a dance between collective intentions and emergence* (see cartoon: socio-spatial planning as a dance), a dance which requires specific skills from planners such as being committed, but on the right distance and without taking over (see also Horlings et al., 2009).

### THE ROLES OF SOCIO-SPATIAL PLANNERS

I would like to mention here four key roles of socio-spatial planning which I have addressed in my previous work and also inspire my agenda for the future (see the figure: roles of socio-spatial planners). These roles are positioned on two axes: from dialogue to design and from subjectivity to inter-subjectivity.

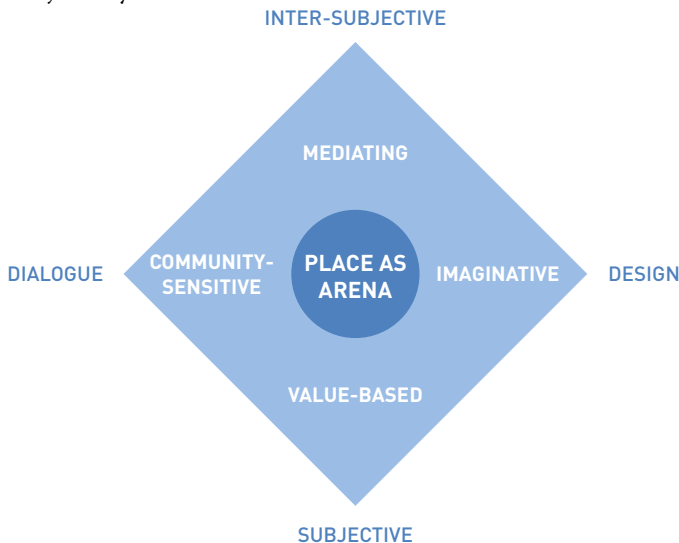


Figure: Roles of socio-spatial planners (Ina Horlings)

To summarize these shortly: socio-spatial planners analyze the potentialities of places as arenas, from a value-based and community-sensitive perspective, mediating between actors and designing new institutional arrangements.

I would like to explain four key roles here:

1. Value-based.

There are not just different pulls, constraints and freedom that move us forward (Massumi cited in Zournazi, 2003, p.1) but also values which motivate us to take action. We tend to start planning processes, by looking at systems, structures and institutions. An alternative starting point is to acknowledge how people make sense of their place, and how they attribute values to their environment. This means we have to explore the hidden part of the iceberg (see the figure: The hidden part of the iceberg). Insight in the values of people can be a valuable source of knowledge and inspiration in deliberative 'spaces of opportunity'. A value-based approach focuses on appreciation instead of problems (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999) which helps to mobilize citizens. If people become more aware ('make sense') of

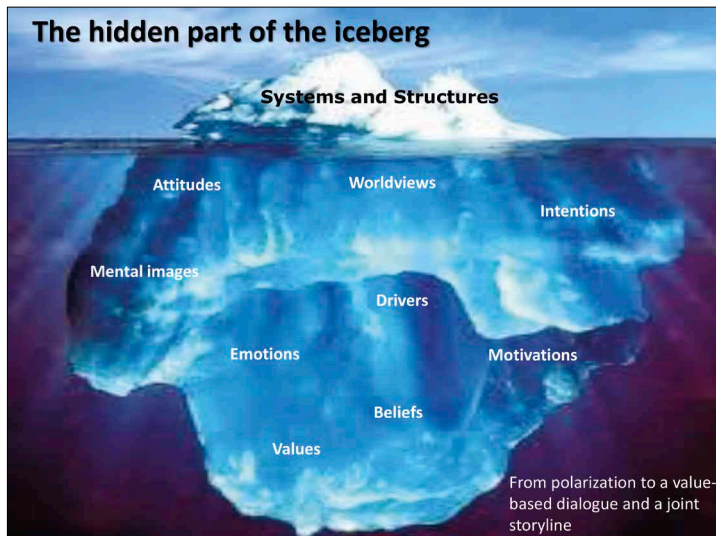


Figure: the hidden part of the iceberg (Ina Horlings)

their intentions and values themselves, they can discover shared values and find common ground for cooperation. Potentially a situation of polarization can then shift to a value-based dialogue and a joint storyline (Horlings, 2015a/b).

## 2. Community-sensitive.

This means most of all being sensitive to and explore the ‘tipping points’ when and where socio-spatial transformation could happen. Hillier (2007, p.225) mentions that spatial planning is about the investigation of ‘virtualities’ unseen in the present; the speculation of what might happen. Planners should ideally sense what has been described by the philosopher Bransen as ‘prolepsis’: those practices, activities and events which point to the future and already include the potential to make it happen (Bransen, 2015). Think as a metaphor of the black crow, announcing the danger in the (Hitchcock) film *The Birds*.

## 3. Imaginative.

To shape better places and enable resourceful communities we need of course analysis and synthesis as scientific tools, but also association and creativity. Creativity brings us understanding of possible futures *building a bridge between the ‘real’ and the possible*, between what is, could be and should be, combining various independent attributes (objects, events, meanings, interactions, stories) into something meaningful (De Roo et al., 2012, p.13). Imaginative planning can enlarge possibility space, a well-known term in complexity sciences (van Wezemael, 2016). This includes not just the role of spatial design, creativity and visualization techniques, but also an increasing role of artists (Horlings, 2017a). Spatial designers and artists are highly capable of visualizing new futures to discover unknown territories. They can contribute to a ‘re-reading’ of existing information and research data, thus revealing hidden practices and economies, which challenge the dominant framing of issues (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Even more important, creativity can contribute to a change of mindsets and construct new narratives and stories. An inspiring example is the PeerGroup in the north of the Netherlands who engages with inhabitants, reflects on this artistically via theatre plays, and strengthens people’s pride of place (see: [www.peergroup.nl](http://www.peergroup.nl)).

#### 4. Mediating

between varied opinions and perceptions of people in arenas of stakeholders and situations of conflict. This includes not just the need to perform leadership and build new 'vital coalitions' between academics, entrepreneurs, citizens and governments in cities and regions, but also the creation of new institutional agreements (Horlings, 2010). An example are the 30-year contracts which Via Natura – a landscape fund near Nijmegen – has agreed upon with farmers to realize nature and landscape goals in this area (Runhaar et al., 2017). (see the picture: Ecological corridor)



*Picture: Ecological corridor in the Ooijpolder near Nijmegen (Via Natura)*

#### **THE HISTORY OF SPATIAL PLANNING AND VALUE-SYSTEMS: FROM BLUE-PRINT TO COMPLEXITY PLANNING**

How did I arrive at these notions? I would now like to take a reflective step back and present here some inspirational building blocks, rooted in the history of planning and the work of inspiring scholars.

The history of planning has been well described. However, I would like to add my own touch to this. To characterize some key changes in spatial

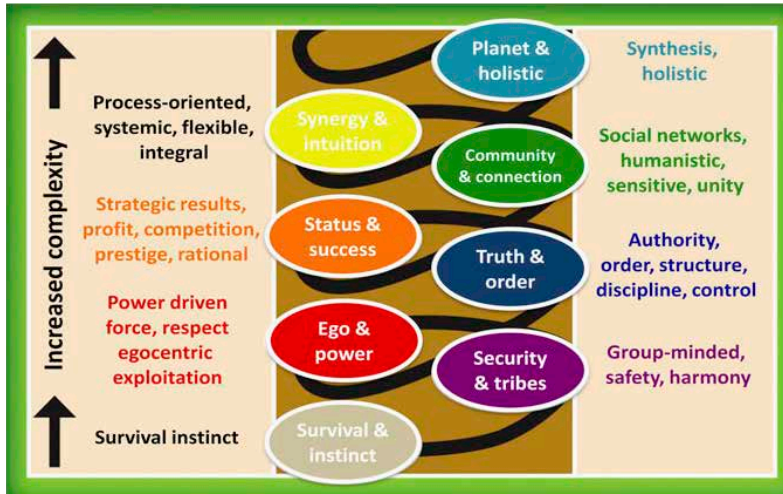
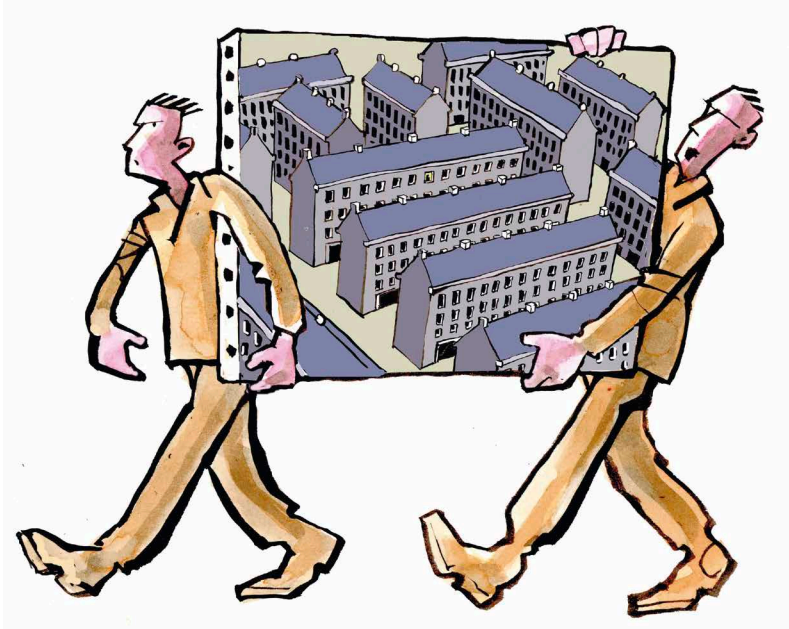


Figure: Value-systems (Horlings, 2015a; derived from Beck and Cowan, 1996; Drawing copyright Auke van Nimwegen).

planning over time, I use the concept of value-systems, which can be distinguished from the values mentioned earlier, and refers to more overarching worldviews and shared cultural values (Beck and Cowan, 1996). Value-systems show the different ways people collectively respond to changing life-circumstances. As our society has become more complex, people deal with this complexity via specific value-systems or memes, which are visualized in different colours in a spiral figure as shown here (see the figure: value-systems).

These value-systems don't show an hierarchical or linear system. Value-systems going up the spiral show more complexity and include and transcend the previous ones. The first value-systems have to do with survival (the beige colour), living in tribes and clans (purple) and individual expression (red). In times of crisis there can be a transgression towards a lower value-system. For example: when we face the risk of flooding as we did in the Netherlands in the midst of the nineties of the last century, we tend to focus on survival as a reflex, by building higher dikes.

In the fifties and sixties of the last century a technical-rational plan-



ning approach was (still) dominant as illustrated by my example of the Flevopolder. Prof. Voogd (1995) Professor in spatial planning in Groningen till 2007, has described this as a combination of optimism, a strong belief in own capabilities, a technical orientation and blue-print planning to solve problems (see cartoon: blue-print planning).

Planning has for a long time been driven by the idea of ideal patterns in a society, organized and ruled in a directive, top-down way, seeking to find order in the world. This can be considered as a combination of a blue value-system – characterized by order, structure, control and authority – and an orange value-system: – focusing on rationality, strategic results, and scientific knowledge. An example are the geometric patterns we see in the land-use patterns of Flevoland. In spatial planning the traditional concept of plans and blue-prints and vertical forms of decision-making gradually gave way for processes of negotiation and horizontal governance.

Planners like Healey (1998) and Innes (2016) were among the first scholars to plead for a more communicative and collaborative planning. Healey's famous book "Collaborative planning: Shaping Places in a fragmented society" in 1997 was inspired by the perception of planning as an interactive process, taking place in a complex and dynamic social and institutional environment, shaped by wider forces that structure, but not determine specific interactions, and the ways social groups manage their collective affairs (Healey, 2003, p.104). Her work shows an actor-oriented approach, she emphasizes place quality as a policy focus, and recognizes the power of agency and the importance of practices on the ground. Healey herself reflected later (in 2003) on her earlier work, arguing that the way institutions and systems operate, is not just embodied in individuals who have power over rules and resources, but also in our assumptions and daily discourses, routines and practices which may become institutionalized.

Collaborative and communicative planning emerged during the 1980s, inspired by the idea of Habermas about communicative rationality, and shifted the focus to argumentation, promoting the ideal of collaboration. This can be considered as a 'green' value-system. Equally empowered actors bring their different interests and perspectives together in an authentic dialogue, skilfully managed by neutral facilitators (De Jong, 2016, p.264). Planners need the wisdom and facilitation skills to bridge varied and sometimes opposite opinions (see cartoon: bridging opposite opinions).

Planning is then the optimization of interaction and participation based on transparency, cooperation and trust. The goal is to identify shared values resulting in agreements about how to see and how to deal with the world that surrounds us. As such we can speak of an 'agreed reality' (De Roo et al., 2012, p.8). The Reconstruction process in the 1990s, in the sandy areas of the Netherlands, can be considered as an example where through years of negotiation a consensus was reached between a variety of stakeholders. However, these processes didn't deal with values but with stakeholder interests, leading to weak compromises, endless collaboration processes, a lack of innovation, problems with implementation, and the exclusion of non-organized citizens and entrepreneurs. Theoretically, many critics have pointed out since then that the use of communicative planning does not guarantee good results, arguing that it reduces the value of expertise and is





often misused by powerful groups that are seeking a formal justification for their decisions (see for example De Roo and Silva, 2010, cited in Dobrucká, 2016, p.151).

Thus we have to take the next step in spatial planning. A 'yellow' value system takes multiple stories into account, varied ways of doing and adapts to what is emerging in a dynamic society. Planners thus have to be flexible in performing different roles, adaptive to dynamic situations and able to show leadership in developing integral solutions. I would say complexity planning as explored by my direct colleagues here in Groningen matches quite well this description and is a promising road ahead. Complexity



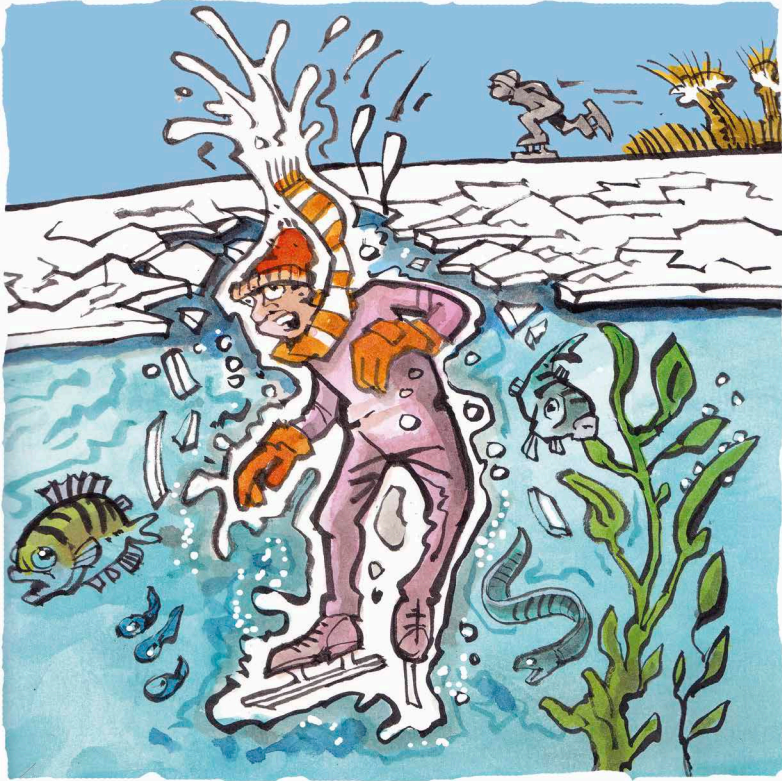
planning doesn't mean that we are living in a complicated society, but that we apply a system perspective where each of its parts influences the rest, resulting in forms of self-organization and non-linear change (Boelens and De Roo, 2016). As Boelens and De Roo argue: *"There is a growing awareness that planning needs a wider portfolio of tools 'beyond the plan' towards an agreed future or ideal – a course towards a planning of 'undefined becoming'"* (p.44). This steps away from predefined planning goals and focuses on the dynamic interaction of diverse intentions and needs.

This perspective is very relevant to understand the society we live in. However it doesn't automatically incorporate political aspirations. When a pro-active attitude is missing, it might facilitate increased understanding which can also serve as an alibi for passivity (Dobrucká, 2016, p.153). In other words: complexity planning doesn't provide a direct answer to the question I raised in the beginning, what kind of places do we want in the future?

## THE 'LIQUID' SOCIETY

In order to get a deeper understanding we have to learn from the past. But we also need to take a closer look at the society we live in *today*, which is rapidly changing. Paul Scheffers (2016) describes in his most recent book *'De vrijheid van de grens'* that the worldwide integration of economy, culture and politics has turned the world into a marketplace where everything (nature, culture and people) can be commodified, creating winners and losers. This is a discourse of competitiveness (Bristow, 2005, 2010) characterized by short-term policies, where cities and regions are seen as businesses, competing for space, resources and capital, driven by market forces and uncontrollable by national planning.

At the same time the significance of traditional institutions such as the state has decreased. Mark Warren analyzes in his book "Democracy as associations" how in late-modern societies processes of globalization and differentiation have resulted in an erosion of state-centred intervention and an increased complexity of collective action. We see, I quote: *"patterns of individuation cultivate capacities for self-rule while at the same time they dislocate the institutions through which these capacities might be realized"* (Warren, 2001, p.7). But this erosion of institutions also raises feelings of unsafety,



uncertainty, and insecurity while we face a rapid pace of change. Citizens are looking for anchors in a drifting world. To use a metaphor: we are skating on thin ice, and try to cope by speeding up (see cartoon: skating on thin ice).

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2012) described this as the 'liquid society': power is exercised on a global scale, institutions have become fluid, subject to change, and we see an erosion of the spatial patterns of the past. In such a society the identity of people and places becomes fluid as well, while on the other hand we face the challenge to build our own narratives and biographies. The question what our identity is, has indeed become a 'hot topic.' To illustrate this: governments aim to market identities of cities

and regions via place branding strategies, we see an increasing debate on what 'our' identity is in the Netherlands, a polarization between different multi-cultural groups and multiple identities, and attempts of protest groups to conserve place identities. However, these identities are in fact mouldable, co-constructed, contested and continuously changing.

The desire to anchor our lives in the fluid society, also results in pleas for new spatial demarcations. The creation of walls is a metaphor and material expression of a wider phenomenon of creating boundaries between us and them, between nature and society, between the poor and the privileged and I would say even within ourselves, between our hearts and minds.

### HOW PLACES ARE STILL RELEVANT; THE RELATIONAL APPROACH

Several scholars have questioned if places, such as neighbourhoods, cities and regions are still relevant in a liquid society. The famous Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has argued that we can witness a 'generic city' as a result of capitalism, built as a *tabula rasa*. The city, in Koolhaas's view, has become irrevocably *unmakeable*: 'planning makes no difference'. The satellite towns around the generic city arise and decline unpredictably. He refers to the metaphor of an airport, where there is not authentic culture or history and argues that places look the same everywhere (see cartoon: The generic city). According to Koolhaas the generic city is without characteristics, without identity and without a past, soulless (De Caeter, 2004).

Geographers have also argued that when places lose their distinctiveness, they lose their reality and significance, which can result in a loss of sense of place, the 'erasure of place' (Escobar, 2001), 'placelessness' (Relph, 1976) or even 'non-places' (Augé, 1995, Friedman, 2010). However, I would argue that place is neither generic nor passive, but dynamic and more relevant than ever. People and places are not victims of hegemonic processes affecting their place, but able to change a place to their needs, ideas and values, by performing place-shaping practices.

A *relational approach* to understand this reality is useful here, seeing the world as one in which objects, situations, values, ideas and behaviour only acquire meaning in their relationship to other objects, situations, values, ideas and behaviour (De Roo et al., 2012, p.9). I would like to honor Doreen Massey, who provided us with insights how places are not merely



geographical locations, but the outcome of practices, social relations and interactions stretching beyond geographical or administrative boundaries (Massey, 2004; 2005). She referred to relations between the land and the economy, nature and society, rural and urban which are mapped over multiple localities and result in the distinctiveness of places (Woods, 2011). A relational perspective helps us to understand place connectivity, how practices are geographically unbounded, and embedded in the complexities

of wider spatial connections (MacCallum et al., 2009). This offers a framework to analyze agency, in the form of social entrepreneurship, collective citizenship and social movements, not as a defensive response, but as a pro-active power, changing the network of social relations of which people are part of.

Such a perspective transcends local-global divisions. To illustrate this: eco-villages (see the picture: Kurjen Tila) use place-based resources in the development of practices such as sustainable housing and permaculture, trying to embrace values such as compassion, creativity and a close connection to nature (Pisters, 2016). These 'local' practices are also the result of international flows of people, ideas and knowledge, via their participation in a global eco-village network. A key question then is to understand how connectivity's shape places, how to alter these relations, and how people give highly varied meanings to places (Horlings, 2017b).



*Picture: Kurjen Tila, biodynamic farm and eco-village in Finland (Sylvestre Marcato, 2016).*

## SOCIAL NAVIGATION IN A FLUID WORLD

Traditional forms of spatial planning are increasingly out of sync with the rapid pace of change, complexities and uncertainties of the world that they attempt to plan. There is a need for development of a new more flexible form of planning. As Hillier has argued: “*spatial planning attempts to embrace a future that is not solely determined by the continuity of the present, nor by the path dependent repetition of the past*” (Hillier, 2011, p.504).

How can then specifically a socio-spatial planning understand our fluid world, where people search to find anchors in situations of vulnerability, insecurity and opacity? Planning theories so far don't capture why people move in uncertain situations and act in difficult situations. To understand this, cooperation between spatial planning and other disciplines such as Psychology and Sociology is helpful. The way we cope with difficult situations takes place in a situation that is wavering and unsettled, that is changing itself. How to grasp that both people and institutions are changing and 'on the move'? We thus need a concept which captures '*motion within motion*'.

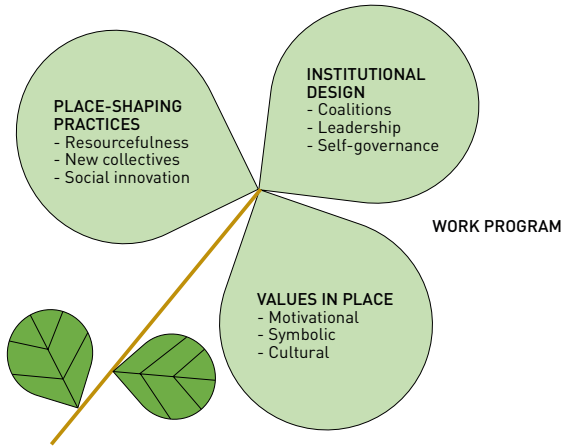
The term navigation is relevant here (see cartoon: navigation). This term is related to the Latin word *navigare*, meaning 'to sail, sail over and go by sea.' Foucault already engaged the metaphor of ships and navigation on several occasions in his exploration of ideas of spatial planning, town planning and governance. Deleuze and Guattari also refer to a 'maritime model' in which 'to think is to voyage' (cited in Hillier, 2011). I don't mean here navigation as an adaptive mode of strategic spatial planning (Wilkinson, 2011), but more in an anthropological sense to explain how people deal with social environments which are in rapid and uncontrollable motion.

I introduce here the more specific term '*Social Navigation*', focusing on how people manage with situations of social flux and change. Social navigation describes the ways we deal with changing institutions in dynamic places which are 'becoming', without fixed identities. Place-shaping of citizens then is social navigation in a context where geographical differences, fluidities and becoming interconnect. It refers to how people navigate spatially in a rapidly changing world, taking matters in their own hand. How they adjust and attune their strategies and tactics in relation to the way they experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and the influence of





social forces (Vigh, 2009). A socio-spatial planning incorporates these strategies and tactics and is rooted in a combination of social, environmental, economic and political values about society. Uncertainty about the future can be in this way empowering as it offers a sense of potential (see also Hillier, 2011, p.504 and 507). It is a dance between intentions and emergence, directed towards resourcefulness.



*Figure: Work program (Ina Horlings)*

## RESEARCH AGENDA

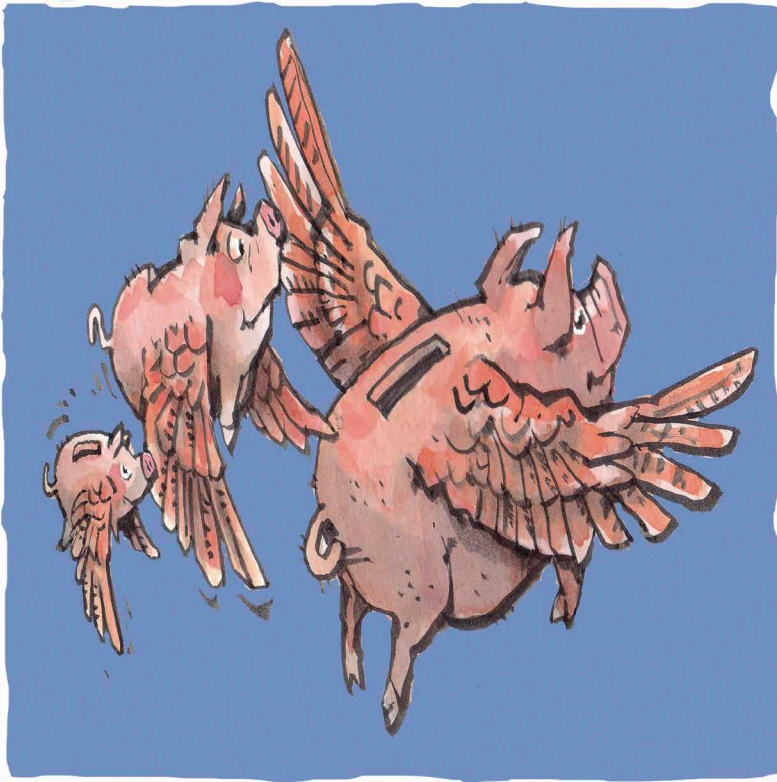
I know arrive at my work program for the coming years. I would like to present here a research agenda for a transformative planning which enables resourceful communities. This starts with the inner dimension of transformation – the individual willingness and motivations as well as collective cultural values of people – influencing the outer dimension, the place-shaping practices of new collectives, which can be enabled via institutional design (see the figure: work program).

### 1. Values in place

My aim here is to transcend the discourse on economic competition between places and regions. This means we have to look beyond economic values (see cartoon: beyond economic values) and include the values with influence the willingness of people, their perceptions and emotions and guide people's spatial behaviour.

We can make a distinction between individual and collective values and between motivational, symbolic and cultural values. Motivational values are rooted in awareness and describe what drives people to change a situation. Symbolic values refer to how people make sense of their place and are





attached to it, expressed in stories and narratives. The plurality and often hidden meanings and values of people in places include (Gustafson, 2001, p. 1): personal meanings, associated with feelings and self-identification 2) meanings related to a sense of community and 3) meanings attached towards the environment (a physical natural or built environment, or a symbolic, historical, or even institutional environment) (see also Horlings et al., 2016).

There are valid arguments why a value-based approach is relevant for spatial planning (O'Brien and Wolf, 2010). First, we see the world in different ways and may prioritize different values. Legitimate and successful adaptation to crises depends on what people consider as worth preser-

ving and achieving in their place. Second, spatial interventions often lead to trade-offs, certain goals are achieved on the expense of other goals or people. A value-oriented approach shows these trade-offs, how the values of one group can conflict with the values of other groups and cause situations of injustice, exclusion or inequality. It uncovers the hidden part of the iceberg. Third, values are context dependent, dynamic and change over time. This is of course very relevant for planning which has to adapt to changing contexts; this has been termed the 'elasticity' of planning (Jones, 2017). An example of elastic planning are houses which are flexible and adjustable to different stages and values in people's lives. A fourth argument for a value-based approach is that transformation can lead to new values. When we stick to the example of housing, the tiny house movement (see the picture: tiny house) is an example of new values of the younger generation who consider the flexibility and low-cost of housing more important than size, ownership or status.



*Picture: Tiny House (Ina Horlings)*

I have already started to investigate values by setting up a survey in collaboration with Energysense in Groningen and my colleagues Chris Zuidema and Ward Rauws. 370 households have received a questionnaire and 250 had responded in May 2017. We have asked them about their involvement in



energy initiatives, their underlying motives and values, and how they see the role of citizens, business and governments within the context of the much needed energy transition.

## 2. Place-shaping practices of new collectives in resourceful communities

I will analyze how place-shaping practices of new collectives contribute to resourcefulness and social innovation. These collectives include new forms of ‘commoning’ (the shared management of public spaces), collective and place-based initiatives in energy, care and food, experiments with co-housing and community gardens (see cartoon: collective gardening activi-

ties), the co-production of creative spaces by citizens, artists and creative entrepreneurs in collaboration with governments such as the Honig complex in Nijmegen (see [www.honigcomplex.nl](http://www.honigcomplex.nl)) and transformative practices in places like eco-villages and transition towns. These practices do not just take place in Western-European countries but also in other continents, co-shaped by varied institutional contexts.

In the context of the Marie ITN Program SUSPLACE these practices are studied by 15 early stage researchers in six different European countries. They show that these place-shaping practices use the material and immaterial assets of people and places, contributing to a re-appreciation of places, a re-grounding of practices in resources, and a re-positioning towards new markets and products (see [www.sustainableplaceshaping.net](http://www.sustainableplaceshaping.net)).

A key question is how these practices contribute to resourcefulness and evolutionary resilience. This will be studied in the context of a new Marie Curie ITN program Resourceful Communities (once the Grant Agreement has been signed by the EU), developed by Alex Franklin of the Coventry University (lead partner) and myself. The consortium consists of 11 academic and non-academic partners in six European countries, including *Rijkswaterstaat* and the PeerGroup in the Netherlands.

### 3. Institutional design: coalitions, leadership and self-governance

A third research area is to investigate how planners can enable resourceful communities in places on the local and regional scale, via institutional design. An enabling role can mean that governments 1) follow societal dynamics 2) take part in these dynamics 3) or sometimes create societal dynamics, supporting transformational change. Spatial planning has become a field of exploratory practice and experimentation (Balducci et al., 2011). This raises all sorts of research questions about coalition building, leadership and self-governance:

- Coalition planning (de Jonge, 2016) aligns citizens in new networks, which can also be virtual. Think for example of crowdfunding and online networks. Planners on the local and regional governmental level play a key role in building bridges between entrepreneurs in different sectors, between citizens initiatives and supporting institutions, and between new collectives in order to learn from each other.

- Leadership, more specific place leadership, plays a key-role in guiding and facilitating transformation by stimulating the imagination, (re-)framing issues and developing new agendas, in order to 'try to think the unthinkable' (Sotarauta et al., 2012). Leadership, formal and informal, carries an ambition, an urge to move a community in the direction of a cherished story. Stories shape daily interactions and negotiations, which in turn form rules of interaction, or simple institutions which can become more complex and formal. At the same time, the resulting institutions and rules impact how citizens engage with one another (Van Assche et al., p.3). Research carried out in the Groninger Westerkwartier showed that place leadership, in combination with new modes of governance and the building of collective capacities via joint learning, can enhance a 'spiral development' in areas, leading to more resilience (Roep et al., 2015).
- Self-governance is not the same as self-organization as my colleagues here in Groningen have argued. Self-organization is unplanned spontaneous change without an intended collective action while self-governance refers to a network of citizens, interests groups or entrepreneurs taking action more or less independently from governments (Rauws, 2016; Rauws et al., 2016). Self-governance shifts the power and responsibilities to citizens initiatives. This can be a disruptive power, challenging current institutions. Does this mean we are heading towards a post-policy area where to cite Boonstra: *"planning becomes an act of navigating, equally performed by professional planners working for planning authorities as well as other civic initiators and stakeholders involved"*? (Boonstra, 2016, p.292). And will this lead to an increase of direct democracy? These are still open questions. An example of an interesting innovation is the so called blockchain technology, open-source online collaboration networks. Such technology enables methods of peer-to-peer governance to wholly circumvent institutions such as central banks and legal structures. These initiatives potentially unlock methods of self-governance while simultaneously disrupting the policy regime (Husain, 2016). We have not yet begun to discover the spatial consequences of these developments.

## **TO CONCLUDE**

I now come to my conclusion. A transformative socio-spatial planning means that we study not just practices and institutions, but also include people's perceptions, values and emotions in enabling socio-spatial transformation. This requires different roles of planning as I showed. A value-based socio-spatial planning helps us to understand how we navigate our way in a rapidly changing, fluid world. The investigating of collective citizenship and their social navigation tactics can offer insights in how communities on varied scales develop their own pathways towards resourcefulness.

I am confident that the Faculty of spatial sciences and the Department of spatial planning and environment here in Groningen, and the cooperation with colleagues, PhD's and students, will offer an inspiring setting for this research in the coming years.

Ik heb gezegd.

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