Barriers to Credible Innovations:
Collaborative Regional Governance in the Netherlands

Tamara Metze & Melika Levelt

Tamara Metze

Tilburg School of Politics and Public Administration

Tilburg University

PO Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg

The Netherlands

Melika Levelt

Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research

University of Amsterdam

Roeterseiland - Gebouw G, Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130,
1018 VZ Amsterdam

The Netherlands

**Barriers to credible innovations:
Collaborative regional governance in the Netherlands**

Tamara Metze & Melika Levelt

ABSTRACT

More than ever before, Dutch city-regions have to prove the credibility of their innovative ways of collaborating. In times of economic crisis, political distrust and intensified competition about building houses, regional governance is under pressure. Innovative policies are often the very reason for the existence of these networked forms of regional collaboration. This might be increasingly important when its credibility is debated and more institutionalized forms of governing, such as decision making by individual communities and provinces, wait to take over. In this contribution, the question is raised how and why regional collaboration is continued when formal tasks are no longer granted to regional bodies and the economic crisis creates a win-lose situation for the participants. How does collaborative regional governance stay credible to participants and is its innovative power still one of the reasons?

In four Dutch cases of regional governance we studied at which moments internal and external barriers to the credibility of regional collaboration were raised. Each case illustrates how a barrier to credible collaborative innovation was overcome. We studied internal conflicts of interests in the City-region of Arnhem Nijmegen, a province that threatens to take over decision making in the City Triangle, resistance to institutionalization of regional collaboration in the Drecht cities, and political risk avoidance in the City-region of Amsterdam. In each case, innovative collaboration barely survived. It turned out to be the sum of local interests rather than the implementation of an innovative regional vision.

Keywords: Collaborative innovation, inter-municipal cooperation, city-regions, housing governance.

Collaborative regional innovation

In the 1990s, regional collaboration in the Netherlands in many cases started out as a voluntary form of network governance. Municipalities decided to collaborate across their administrative borders to come up with innovative[1] solutions. They agreed to collaboratively address problems at the regional level. They decided that they had better local knowledge than a province or a state, and knew better who needed what or what other solutions could be envisioned. Moreover, they were able to break out of bureaucratic silos (Sørensen and Torfing, this issue) and work across administrative boundaries (Hajer, 2003; van Tatenhove, 2009; Hajer, van Tatenhove and Laurent, 2004; Coenders and Metze, 2009; Metze, 2010; Aarsæther, Nyseth and Bjørnå, 2011). In principle, regional collaboration was not initiated to enhance democracy but – as was the case elsewhere – also in the Netherlands this type of bottom up collaboration was "expected to be more efficient and innovative in the pursuit of a public purpose" (Aarsæther, Nyseth and Bjørnå, 2011: 307).

---

[1] Innovation in the public sector is "the generation, acceptance, and implementation of a new idea or approach to an issue, among social actors, that challenges the prevailing wisdom as it advances the public good and creates public value" (Bland et al., 2010: 2).

In the area of housing and urbanization, for example, the construction of houses has been encouraged by the Dutch national government, which has used financial incentives that were allocated to provinces. Some provinces have allocated targets for housing development (amounts and qualities) at the regional level. Other provinces assign houses that need to be built to the municipal level. Regions can decide to deviate from these provincial numbers when the municipalities collaboratively agree that some municipalities need more or other types of houses than others. Due to this innovative approach, one of the regions secretaries claimed: "we created peanut candy rather than peanut butter" (interview, Secretary city-region, August 31st 2010). Regional collaboration in Holland is a "de-centred form of governance that is based on interdependence, negotiation and trust" (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005: 196). It can be considered a case of "network based form of governance" that is established to "compensate some of the deficiencies of hierarchies and markets" (Sørensen and Torfing, this issue). One of the major reasons for the emergence of this type of networked governance is the need for innovation (Bommert, 2010: 16; Bland et al., 2010: 1; Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004; Keast et al., 2004; Kettl, 2002; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997; Osborne and Brown, 2005; Swan and Scarbrough, 2005; van Tatenhove, 2009).

Until recently, Dutch national government encouraged this kind of cooperation via a Law on Collaborative Arrangements (*Wet Gemeenschappelijke Regelingen-Plus*, *Wgr-plus*) that made it possible to grant legal tasks (and financial resources) to these voluntary collaborations. This law meant that the national government agreed that some problems needed to be addressed at the regional level in an innovative way and not via the 'normal' hierarchical way of the Provinces. However, the Rutte cabinet no longer grants these legal tasks, such as urban planning or youth care, to voluntarily erected city-regions. The state-government believes that provinces and municipalities can do these tasks. The national government seems to consider this type of regional governance an abundant extra layer of politics and administration rather than an innovative and effective way of governing. On top of that, the economic crisis has intensified competition and conflicts between cooperating municipalities, for example on deciding what houses can be built and where to build them. Due to these external institutional and economic barriers to collaboration, all city-regions and municipal collaborations more than ever before face the question of how to legitimize their existence and their innovative regional policies.

The formal institutional answer to this question remains that the regions are a voluntary 'extension' of local government. Their policies, programs and decisions are legitimated by the elected city councils of the municipalities (Cie. Toekomst City-regionnale Samenwerking, 2009; Ministerie van BZK, 2008, 2010; Brouwer et al., 2007; Saris et al., 2011; Schaap et al., 2010). Thus, when regions follow the right procedures, regional governance is legitimate. This formal answer has become less satisfactory due to the economic crisis and an increasing lack of political support for regional collaboration. It has become much harder to create innovative urbanization policies at the regional level. For example, the development of regional plans that connect the development of infrastructure, housing and economic developments has become gradually more difficult because of a lack of financial resources to implement these kinds of innovative more integral policies.

Hence, to be legitimate, regional collaboration not only needs to follow formal procedures but also needs to prove even more that it is efficient and provides innovative solutions for regional problems. The question we ask in this paper is how and why regional collaboration is continued when formal tasks are no longer granted and the economic crisis possibly creates a win-lose situation for participants engaged in this innovative form of governing. How does collaborative regional governance stay credible to participants and is its innovative power

still one of the reasons? We answer these questions by studying how regions coped with this new situation and how they overcame barriers to collaboration that were raised in this new situation.

Theoretical framework: credible regional collaboration

How can participants stay convinced of the benefits of regional collaboration when their coordinating body no longer has the financial means to support the group effort, when regional innovations might be nice ideas but cannot be implemented, which is an important part of an innovation (Shepard, 1967); and when other governmental layers such as a province are perhaps better capable of coordinating the collaboration? In a situation in which a regional body lacks formal hierarchy and financial or legal means do not support its authority, regional governance returns to its original state of being an inter-municipal partnership. In this situation, communities will collaborate when they experience interdependency, for example to be more efficient or to innovate. Innovation and efficiency are both important drivers[2] for communities to collaborate in a network (Van den Heuvel en de Wit, 2009; Bland et al., 2010; Gustavsen, Nyhan and Ennals, 2007).

At the same time, there are many barriers to this form of network governance. Based on the literature, we theoretically distinguish three forms of *internal* barriers to collaboration:

   a) *cultural or identity differences* that include predominance of a legalistic approach, of bureaucratic silos, of boundary wars between professionals, and groupthink that prevent innovative collaboration. This barrier also includes conflicting identities of communities, for example rural or urban identities (cf. Sørensen and Torfing, this issue; Halvorsen et al., 2005; Hartley, 2005).

   b) *conflicting interests*: collaborative innovation should be a win-win situation for participants but at moments, for example due to a financial crisis, the interests of participants can conflict (cf. Bland et al., 2010; Sørensen and Torfing, this issue).

   c) *poor institutional design for collaboration*: an absence of a sphere of engagement; no 'safe' space for dialogue, lack of transparency, reciprocity, etc., lack of facilitator, mediator or catalyst (Anselm and Straus, this issue; Metze, 2010).

In the practice of collaboration, these sorts of barriers can cause 'critical moments' (Carvalho, 2008; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999). These are moments at which "there is a realization that something has to change" (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999: 359). In other words, when these barriers occur, participants that usually collaborate can start questioning the cooperation. They no longer automatically believe in it. At these moments the credibility of the collaboration is tested: is it still believable, is it still a 'coherent story', is it necessary? The concept of credibility can be defined in a broad variety of ways (Self, 2009: 435, 449) and is connected to concepts such as trust or legitimacy (cf. Bentele and Seidenglanz, 2008; Ganesan and Hess, 1997; Hovland, Janis and Kelley, 1953). Credibility – mostly in relation to (political) leaders – is composed of elements as consistency (in story), charisma,

---

[2] Other drivers for regional collaboration are, for example, interdependency for problem solving and collaborative lobby activities by position as a region (cf. Van Tatenhove, 2009). Regional collaboration for learning and innovation often includes universities and businesses in the networks (Gustavsen et al., 2007). However, in our cases, we did not come across these intense forms of cooperation in a triple helix (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1997).

believability, reputation, knowledgeableness (cf. Kouzes and Posner, 1993). However, credibility is situational and therefore different elements can be more important in various contexts. In this study, we understood credibility to mean acceptable and believable. The *reasons* for credible regional collaboration were part of the investigation: these were the arguments we came across at the critical moments when municipalities decided to continue to collaborate and to overcome the barriers.

Hence, to develop regional policies, regional governance needs to be *internally* credible, that is believable to participants. Second, outsiders also need to be convinced of its innovative power. This 'external credibility' can be conveyed by participants.[3] They can convince these 'outsiders' (the local, provincial and national government and the general public) of the necessity of the collaboration. Only when participants are convinced and can persuade others to believe in this alternative form of governing will other layers of government that formally have to approve regional policy proposals support it.

In this paper we explore the internal credibility of regional governance, and if and why this type of collaboration remains credible under changing circumstances. We turn to the practice of regional collaboration for urbanization and housing to study how participants – in their conversations and documents – (re)confirm their belief in the innovative power of the collaboration. Thus, the credibility of regional cooperation and city-region governance is gained *in action*. It is at critical moments in the policy practice, when barriers are raised, that a belief in regional collaboration is questioned: Is it still efficient, effective, innovative?

Based on our case studies, in this paper we present four barriers to collaboration:

1. *Conflicting interests*: struggles about numbers
2. *External barrier*: the province directs
3. *Poor institutional design*: Internal hierarchical steering by the region.
4. *Conflicting interests*: Political opportune behavior

Even though these barriers were present in all cases, each of our cases of regional collaboration for innovative urban planning illustrates a barrier. Below, we will describe the barriers and if and how participants and the regional body were able to restore the credibility

Barriers to innovative regional collaboration

There are many drivers for municipalities to work together on the issue of housing: the housing market is regional, people easily move from one community to another and municipalities can compete for the same buyers. Moreover, the region competes with other regions to attract businesses but also highly educated people. Also, municipalities that want to innovate and, for example, develop new planning concepts that combine transport, living and working, this need to do so on a regional level (cf. Stone, 1989; Gustavsen, Nyhan and Ennals, 2007; van Tatenhove, 2009; Bland et al., 2010). However, there are also many barriers to maintaining internal and external credibility of regional cooperation. In this section we will describe four barriers to regional collaboration on the issue of housing. They

---

[3] External credibility can also exist for other reasons, e.g. national government or academic experts that insist that this type of governing is a better form of governing. This type of external credibility was not included.

are based on case studies we carried out in City-region Arnhem-Nijmegen, Stedendriehoek Apeldoorn, Deventer, Zutphen, Drechtsteden, and City-region Amsterdam (see figure 1).

The first region, City-region Arnhem-Nijmegen, consists of twenty municipalities of which two are bigger cities and have approximately 720.000 inhabitants. Until recently, it had a *Wgr-plus* status and legal tasks and financial resources to stimulate urbanization. The second region is the Stedendriehoek. This region consists of seven municipalities and, among other things, they collaboratively established a spatial vision for the area in which around 410 000 people live. Drechtsteden is formed by seven municipalities in the area around Dordrecht and along the river Maas. Together they have about 265 000 inhabitants. City-region Amsterdam includes sixteen municipalities of which Amsterdam is the largest. Around 1.4 million people live in this region. Each of these regions has a regional council that decides on regional policies. This council consists of town council members or aldermen from participating communities. All regions have public administrators that support the regional council.

Figure 1: Inter-municipal collaborations in the Netherlands in 2011

Source: Modification of map from www.zorgatlas.nl, based on CBS data.

Over the last couple of years, all four regions have worked on a regional spatial view and/or on a vision on development of housing for the area. These visions on regional growth and development have been produced in a time before the current economic crisis when much more growth than now seemed to be realistic and much more houses were built each year than over the last two years. In City-region Arnhem-Nijmegen the document Tempo KAN! ("Speed is possible!"), in Drechtsteden the Regional Vision on Housing of 2003 and the Prestatie Afspraken Lange Termijn (Long Term Performance Agreements), and in

Stedendriehoek the Regionale Structuurvisies Voorlanden en Bundelingsgebied are the most important documents relating to housing development. In that same period, City-region Amsterdam designed two regional agreements for the allocation of social rental housing.

In each of the regions these documents needed revision with respect to the housing agreements. In the case of City-region Amsterdam the rules for allocation of social rental housing had to be produced at the regional level for the first time. We have studied these processes of revision and policy development in each of the regions. For this, we conducted and analyzed twenty-five observations of regional meetings. We conducted twenty-five interviews in City-region Arnhem-Nijmegen, fourteen in Stedendriehoek, eighteen in City-region Amsterdam, and we spoke with sixteen people in the Drechtsteden. We spoke mostly to administrators and aldermen of the municipalities.

We analyzed the documents, observations and interviews. First, we inductively constructed a timeline for each region, by outlining critical moments at which barriers to collaborative innovation occurred. Second, we analyzed the types of barriers (internal or external). Third, we studied how civil servants and aldermen of individual municipalities and civil servants working for the regional body responded to these barriers: with what arguments and what role they assumed.

Barrier 1: Internal struggles over numbers

According to national and regional government, City-region Arnhem-Nijmegen needs to urbanize. Between 2005 and 2010, 25 000 houses were built under the Wgr-plus Law. Over the last five years, civil servants of the region catalyzed urbanization. Communities received grants per house built. Over the next ten years another 26 000 houses are planned. However, the region no longer has the (financial) means to provide an incentive to participating communities. Moreover, due to the economic crisis and based on estimated population size, the demand for houses has decreased. Therefore, housing plans had to be revised. Several barriers to collaboration occurred in this revision process. A conflict of interests that surfaced as a disagreement on numbers on population size presented the biggest barrier.

At the start of this revision, the region introduced two prognoses of demographic changes/population trends in the near future: the Pearl prognoses of the Planning Agency for the lived environment, and Primos of a renowned research institute (ABF Research). These prognoses differed in the percent of decrease, especially with respect to the more rural communities. Three types of struggles over the estimations appeared in regional discussions. A first struggle took place about the numbers. Civil servants and aldermen of two of the communities claimed that their population size was not decreasing as much as predicted. Their planning capacity should be maintained. They did not want to adjust the number of planned houses (Regional conference on Housing, November 30th 2010). Second, the numbers were questioned from a legal point of view. One community argued that the regional body and national government were breaking earlier agreements on urbanization and this was going on their (financial) expense. They threatened to go to court (interview, Secretary city-region, August 31st 2010; interview, Civil servant housing city-region, November 24th 2010).

This barrier to collaboration was most of all an internal struggle of interests. It was a struggle about the interpretation of two different prognoses: which one was right, if either one was? Two professional organizations that produced these prognoses disagreed and in the context of regional collaboration this struggle over numbers was also a struggle of interests: what municipality get to build houses, and who does not? This is directly related to the financial

income of these municipalities: who receives revenues from housing development and who does not?

The region and participants coped with this barrier by changing the institutional design for cooperating. Civil servants of the regional body stopped acting as stakeholders who knew what numbers were the right ones. They started to facilitate a joint fact finding process. This was kicked off by a presentation by ABF Research in which a decrease in population size was included. In this presentation 'shrinkage' – decrease of population size – was defined as a relative concept: "it is not a decrease but it is an unexpected course of the population size. There is fear for shrinkage, but it is something 'between the ears'" (ABF researcher, May 2010). This presentation opened up space for discussion.

The changed role of the civil servants of the regional body – from stakeholder to facilitator – created room to turn the discussion on numbers into a discussion that aimed at jointly building a new understanding of the demographic and housing future of the region. The first important sign of such a new understanding was the initiative of one of the most opposing communities (Beuningen) to change their planning capacity from 2000 houses to 880. As they argued, they wanted to start planning "realistically". This convinced others to act in the best interest of the region and engage in collaboration. Thus, the regional collaboration regained its credibility when the regional body altered its role from an organizational catalyser for building houses, to a commander of downsizing housing plans, into a facilitator of a collaborative fact finding process to establish – under new circumstances – what is a realistic planning goal? By making the institutional design for collaboration credible, the credibility of the collaboration was restored and municipalities jointly found a solution to the regional problem of over-supply of plans for housing development.

Barrier 2: External hierarchical steering by the province
A second barrier to innovative regional collaboration occurred in Stedendriehoek. This barrier occurred several times in the collaborative process and again it was about numbers. However, in this case it was an external struggle with the province.

Up to the revision of the housing plans, the participating municipalities had been leading in planning for the region. The region had prepared a Regional Structure Vision that the two involved provinces had agreed upon. This is a reversal from what is usually the case: the provinces make Structure Visions and municipalities implement those. In Stedendriehoek, the region had taken up this task voluntary and successfully. However, in 2009 the role of the province, in the eyes of both provincial and municipal aldermen and civil servants, suddenly changed back to a more hierarchical one: instead of helping the Stedendriehoek to realize the plans, in a new policy document, the Province of Gelderland allocated a much lower amount of housing developments. This meant that the municipalities in Stedendriehoek together had to downsize their planning capacity – except for Deventer that is a community in a different province.

Several times, the municipal civil servants in particular questioned the numbers provided by the province. In response, the civil servants of the province argued that the municipalities already agreed to these numbers in the provincial regional plan for housing (Kwalitatief Woonprogramma). But municipalities claimed that this was not true. Arguments put forward by municipalities were: "the local alderman operating in the regional body have agreed but the plan has never been approved by local councils" (Regional meeting of civil servants on housing, January 11th 2011). And:

> We have accepted the numbers of the province in the Kwalitatief Woon-programma as an important input to the deliberations on a new regional plan for housing [i.e. not a new provincial plan for housing but a plan created by the regional participants], but not as numbers that should be used straight away in the new regional housing plan (interview, Civil servant municipality, June 28th 2011).

Even without this reasoning of a lack of local support for the 'agreement' with the province, municipal civil servants felt that the way in which the province of Gelderland tried to secure the adaptation of municipal plans, was not legitimate. They believed that the region had prime responsibility for regional planning on housing.

The region and municipalities coped with this hierarchical intervention by trying to regain the lead. Municipal civil servants and the aldermen responsible for the regional planning for housing – with financial aid of the Province – hired an external advisor who had already been involved in housing development in the region. This consultant organized discussion meetings with housing developers, housing corporations, housing agents and other parties in each municipality to develop a bottom-up view on the housing situation. Similar to what happened in City-region Arnhem-Nijmegen, the discussion took place on the two different prognoses on population size and about possible competing housing plans. Thus the regional civil servants and the consultant facilitated a joined fact finding process. They tried to gain information to paint the full picture and have that as a starting point for adaptation of municipal housing plans. They started a joint fact finding process to gather regional arguments in the disagreement with the province. This joint fact-finding resulted in a 'memorandum' that included a problem analysis of the regional housing market and plans for development. This memorandum was rejected by the deputy of the province of Gelderland because it disregarded the provincial numbers.

The united municipal aldermen for a second time attempted to take back the lead: again they hired an external advisor. This time the assignment was to create a consensus that fitted the local plans into the provincial regulations. However, some municipalities tried hard to comply with the provincial numbers and others kept on talking about demographic prognoses or about regional ambitions for local and regional planning. As a result, the municipalities could not reformulate a regional vision and the provincial numbers remained leading. In other words: hierarchical steering 'won' over regional collaboration and regional collaboration lost some of its credibility.

Barrier 3: Regional steering in Drechtsteden

A third barrier we came across was most prominent in Drechtsteden. In this case steering by the regional body itself became a barrier to credible collaboration. Participating municipalities started to consider the region as a separate hierarchical layer. This was worsened by the fact that the big city of the region, Dordrecht, took the lead in this communal organization.

In 2010, in light of the economic crisis, housing development plans needed to be revised in this region too. Dordrecht revised its own planning documents and proposed to do this at a regional level: the region needed to know if they could maintain their planning capacity or needed to 'move' some of it – within the region or into the future. In January 2011, the collaborative aldermen decided that a "Moving Document" could be developed for the region. In April 2011 administrators presented a draft document. This is when the barrier became most visible: most municipalities objected to the concepts of 'moving' and 'steering' (interview, Civil servants city-region, April 7th 2010; interview, Civil servant municipality,

June 24th 2011). They also disagreed with the idea of a regional estimate of land development (*grondexploitatie*). These indicated that the region was steering rather than collaborating with the municipalities. One of the regional administrators looked back and concluded: "Immediately the fear is that we will steer, that the region will determine what has to happen but that is not the intention. We do not want to decide the numbers but we want to know the financial risks. We cannot decide for other municipalities" (Interview, Civil servants city-region, April 7th 2010).

Hence, a new document had to be drafted. This was discussed in June 2011. Again it was controversial with participants, mostly for the reason that it implied too much steering by the region. As one of the municipalities argued:

> Not one municipality will transfer its power of decision to the region. The town councils will not approve this. In such a case, you might as well become one city (Interview, Civil servant municipality, June 20th 2011).

In this case, the civil servants and the regional council created their own barrier by steering too much and becoming an institutionalized body. This poor institutional design for collaboration, created a hierarchical structure within collaboration. Recently, a new document has been written. As in the two previous cases, the civil servants of the region have become less catalyzing. They now are facilitating a joint process of finding out what needs to be done in the region.

Barrier 4: Internal political risk avoidance

This critical moment appeared at least twice in the case of City-region Amsterdam. In this case we studied how the region had to come to agreement on the rules for the allocation of affordable rental housing. Without regional agreement, municipalities are not allowed to close their market for affordable rental housing for people that do not live in the region or locality or do not have an economic or social relation with the region or locality (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2010). The allocation of affordable rental housing is a politically sensitive subject on which opinions differ largely in City-region Amsterdam. This is understandable since City-region Amsterdam consists of municipalities that are very different in population size and social housing problems, but also in the types of affordable rental housing they have – from mainly small flats to single family dwellings. Moreover, they differ in the amount of new affordable houses they need to build.

The most critical moment in this case was the rejection of an agreement reached in 2005. This rejection showed how political risk avoidance worked as a barrier to innovative regional policy making. Between 1996 and 2008 a consensus building process was organized on the rules for allocation of affordable housing. Although the region agreed to make the rules more just, more customer-oriented, more transparent, flexible, and uniform (Nip, Rous and van Harten, 2006), it appeared to be impossible to come to truly regional views on these issues. They could not agree on the flexibility that was needed nor decide what is a just policy from a regional perspective? To force a breakthrough, in 2005 the civil servants working at the issue of housing at the regional office organized a special session for municipal civil servants. This resulted in a proposal in which there was room for local regulation but it also added a couple of regional aspects. However, at the very last moment, regional aldermen refused to ratify this agreement. Especially the aldermen of Amsterdam resented the idea of introducing regional rules. As a former regional civil servant for housing put it:

> Housing allocation involves rights people have [to obtain social housing], and as rules for allocation change, they can lose some of these rights, and once they lose them, they've lost them, even though they eventually never might want to use these rights (interview, Civil servant on housing city-region, February 3rd 2011).

We understand this as being a barrier to regional collaboration based on avoiding political risk. The local elections were planned for in May 2006. The alderman of Amsterdam did not want to take the risk of being held accountable for changing the rules for housing allocation. The matter was simply too delicate and created too large a risk for electoral losses – only the fact that rules changed, it was thought, could create losses, no matter what the changes were – that at the very last moment the alderman decided not to bring the subject to vote in the region (interview, Civil servant on housing city-region, February 3rd 2011; interview, Administrator municipality, January 10th 2011; interview, former Mayor, January 17th 2011).

As a result, from 2006 onward, not only the civil servants but also the aldermen of the municipalities were involved in the consensus building process. They negotiated new regional rules and came up with an agreement that was even less 'regional' than the 2005 results. Again, the avoidance of political risk –more specifically being held accountable by the constituency – was the main reason for this cautiousness. This time the new rules were ratified in town councils. However, they did not reflect a regional idea about what the market for affordable housing should look like.

In sum, in this entire process civil servants of the regional office and the chair of the municipal aldermen involved in housing policy were not able to take a lead and steer the discussion towards regional issues. Political risk avoidance at the local level determined the outcomes.

Conclusions: credible collaboration – bottom up, light and reflective

The question we asked in this contribution was if, how and why regional collaboration could remain credible to participants when formal tasks were no longer granted and the economic crisis created win-lose situations for participants in this innovative form of governing. Theoretically we argued that regional collaboration is a form of network-innovation that emerges to be able to cross administrative and bureaucratic boundaries for innovative solutions. This type of collaboration, especially in times of economic crisis, gains its internal credibility in the policy practice and not so much from formal democratic procedures. This credibility is tested at critical moments in the collaboration when barriers to collaboration are raised. It is at these moments that participants realize that collaboration may no longer be in their best interest or deliver on expectations of innovation. They realize something can or should be changed in their collaboration. We studied these critical moments in four Dutch cases of revising of regional housing development plans.

In these four Dutch regions, the circumstances for collaboration changed drastically. The national government no longer supported the regional councils and an economic crisis occurred. These external circumstances created internal barriers to regional innovative collaboration for housing development. We established how participants dealt with these barriers and if, and how, collaboration remained credible.

One main conclusion is that in all regions – usually first the civil servants and second the regional council – struggled with their role in dealing with the altered circumstances and the barriers to collaboration. Initially they all continued trying to convince participating

municipalities of a regional agenda. This is the role the regional councils and civil servants in the previous years had had: Dutch regions had become a rather strong coordinating and directing body. In three of the four cases in this study, the regional civil servants first tried to convince the participating municipalities of a decrease in population size and of a need for change in the numbers or quality in housing development. When this no longer seemed to work, the regional civil servants changed their role into a more facilitative one. Hence, even though barriers to collaboration differed, a change in institutional design for collaboration helped overcome those. The existing collaborative designs no longer suited the changed circumstances. In previous years regional collaboration had become more institutionalized in regional councils and with a regional public administration. The new circumstances demanded a return to a more humble coordinating and facilitating role for the regional bodies.

This brings us to our second conclusion. In all four cases, the civil servants of the regional office indeed tried to improve the regional collaboration by creating a *joined fact finding process*. These improvements were a way to recuperate the credibility of collaborating. These responses resulted in a continuation of a regional collaboration but it was most of all the sum of local interests rather than a continuation of an innovative approach. This indicates that bottom up regional collaboration in which the regional organization facilitates and mediates is most credible and that it is hard to remain innovative in times of crisis. As soon as municipal civil servants and/or aldermen thought that the region had an agenda of its own that did not include their interests, they no longer believed in it. The further institutionalization of collaboration despite its possible innovative power was unwanted: it should be light and local interests should be covered.

A third conclusion – or rather an observation – is that an agreed upon belief in the innovative power of regional collaboration is what can make or break the ability to come to innovative policies in regional collaboration. If this believe is not present, regional policies might still be developed and democratically legitimate, but they will lack the innovational aspect that forms the basis for regional governance to exist. All four cases lacked a well-defined and agreed-upon view on the innovative role that regional collaboration has in relation to the formal layers of government. Moreover, in times of prosperity regional vision had been created, but these were not revised in times of crisis. The civil servants and aldermen merely responded pragmatically to critical moments but did not start a reflective conversation about the necessity of regional innovations. As such, the regional collaboration had become a routine and institutionalized.

For those who still believe in the innovative power of regional collaboration – even though it might be a 'dangerous' road to take for the Dutch regions, as the conclusion might be that they are redundant – reflective conversations about the innovative goals of collaboration seem to be an opportunity. We suspect that a regional view on the use and need of regional policy-making can result in an increase of credibility on decisive moments, and perhaps even legitimate regional policymaking. Key players – such as regional civil servants and the city and regional aldermen but also entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations such as housing corporations – should become more aware of the role they and reflective conversations can play in collaborative regional governance and the way these affect outcomes and credibility.

About the Authors

Tamara Metze is Assistant Professor in Politics and Public Administration at Tilburg University. She has published several books and articles about deliberative governance in urban planning. Currently, she studies collaborative governance, deliberative negotiations, and boundary work in city regions, youth healthcare, welfare, and on the issue of new technologies for energy production. She can be contacted at t.metze@uvt.nl.

Melika Levelt is guest researcher at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, University of Amsterdam. She has carried out a research project on regional collaboration in the Netherlands (with Tamara Metze), co-financed by the NICIS Institute. She currently works for the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. She can be contacted at m.levelt@hva.nl.

References

Aarsæther, N., T. Nyseth, and H. Bjørnå. 2011. Two networks, one city: Democracy and governance networks in urban transformation. *European Urban and Regional Studies,* 18(3) 306–320

Bentele, G. and R. Seidenglanz. 2008. Trust and credibility: prerequisites for communication management. Pp. 49-62 in *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*, edited by A. Zerfass, B. van Ruler and K. Sriramesh (Eds.). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Bland, T, B. Bruk, D. Kim, and K. T. Lee. 2010. Enhancing Public Sector Innovation: Examining the Network-Innovation Relationship. *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal,* 15(3), article 3.

Boltanski, L. and L. Thévenot. 1999. The sociology of critical capacity. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2(3): 359-77.

Brouwer, J. W., T. Buunk, J. Rutjens, J. Saris and A. Schaminee (Eds). 2007. *Grenzeloze regio: Praktijkboek regionale strategieën* [*Borderless Regions: Handbook of Regional Strategies*]. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgeverij.

Carvalho, A. 2008. Media(ted) Discourse and Society. *Journalism Studies*. 9(2): 161-77.

Cie. Toekomst City-regionnale Samenwerking [Advisory Committee on City Region Governance]. 2009. *De stille kracht: Over de noodzaak van City-region's* [*Silent Power: On the Necessity of Regional Cooperation*]. Den Haag: Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten.

Coenders, M. and T. Metze. 2009. Praktische wijsheid in een Community of Practice [Practical wisdom in a Community of Practice]. Pp. 372-83 in *Onderzoekende Professionals* [*Researching Professionals*], edited by G.S.E. Rouwette. Assen: Van Gorcum.

Etzkowitz, H. and L. Leydesdorff (Eds). 1997. *Universities and the Global Knowledge Economy*. London: Pinter.

Ganesan, S., and R. Hess. 1997. Dimensions and levels of trust: implications for commitment to relationship. *Marketing Letters*, 8(4): 439-48.

Goldsmith, S. and W. Eggers. 2004. *Governing By Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector.* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

Gustavsen, B., B. Nyhan and R. Ennals (Eds). 2007. Learning together for local innovation: promoting learning regions. *Cedefop Reference Series,* 68.

Hajer, M. 2003. Policy without polity? Policy analysis and the institutional void. *Policy Sciences,* 36(2): 175-95.

Hajer, M. A., J. P. M. van Tatenhove, and C. Laurent. 2004. Nieuwe vormen van Governance: Een essay over nieuwe vormen van bestuur met een empirische uitwerking naar de domeinen van voedselveiligheid en gebiedsgericht beleid [New forms of Governance: An essay on new forms of governing with an empirical elaboration of food security and area policy. Amsterdam: Onderzoeksteam Perform/ASSR, Universiteit van Amsterdam, available at http://www.pbl.nl/publicaties/2004/Nieuwe_vormen_van_governance (accessed January 13, 2012).

Halvorsen, T., J. Hauknes, I. Miles, and R. Røste. 2005. On the differences between public and private sector innovation. *Publin Report,* D9.

Hartley, J. 2005. Innovation in Governance and Public Services: Past and Present. *Public Money & Management,* 25(1): 27-34.

Hovland, C. I., I. L. Janis and H. H. Kelley. 1953. Credibility of the communicator. Pp. 19-37 in *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change,* edited C. I. Hovland, I. L. Janis and H. H. Kelley. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Keast, R., M. Mandell, K. Brown, and G. Woolcock. 2004. Network Structures: Working Differently and Changing Expectations. *Public Administration Review,* 64(3): 363-71.

Kettl, D. F. 2002. *The Transformation of Governance: Public Administration for Twenty-First Century America.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Kickert, W. J. M., E.-H. Klijn and J. Koppenjan. 1997. Introduction: A Management Perspective on Policy Networks. Pp. 1-11 in *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector,* edited by W. J. M. Kickert, E.-H. Klijn and J. Koppenjan. London: Sage.

Kouzes, J. M. and B. Z. Posner. 2003. *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Metze, T. 2010. *Innovation Ltd.: Boundary work in deliberative governance in land use planning.* Eburon: Delft.

Ministerie van BZK [Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations]. 2008. "Democratische legitimatie intergemeentelijke samenwerkingsverbanden" ["Democratic legitimacy of inter-municipal partnerships"]. Den Haag: Ministerie van BZK.

Ministerie van BZK [Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations]. 2010. "Plussen en minnen: Evaluatie van de Wgr-plus" ["Pluses and minuses: Evaluation of the Wgr-plus law". Den Haag: Ministerie van BZK.

Nip, M., R. Rous and H. van Harten. 2006. Woonruimtebemiddeling en regionaal samenwerken [Housing distribution and regional cooperation]. *Rooilijn,* 39(8): 426-33.

Osborne, S. P. and K. Brown. 2005. *Managing Change and Innovation in Public Service Organizations.* New York: Routledge.

Saris, J., P. van Ree, J. Modder and M. Stamsnijder (Eds). *Stedelijke regio's: Over informele planning op een regionale schaal* [*Urban Regions: On Informal Planning at a Regional Scale*]. Rotterdam: Nai Uitgever.

Schaap, L., C. Geurtz, L. de Graaf and N. Karsten. 2010. Innovations in sub-national government in Europe. *Politica y Sociedad,* 47(3): 145-63.

Self, C. C. 2009. Credibility. Pp. 421-41 in *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, edited by D. W. Stacks and M. B. Salwen. London: Routledge.

Shepard, H. A. 1967. Innovation-Resisting and Innovation-Producing Organizations. *The Journal of Business*, 40(4): 470-7.

Stone, G. (1989) *Regime Politics. Governing Atlanta, 1946 – 1988*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

Swan, J., and H. Scarbrough. 2005. The Politics of Networked Innovation. *Human Relations*, 58(7), 913-943.

Sørensen, E., and J. Torfing. 2005. The Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 28(3): 195-218.

Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. 2010. *Huisvestingswet. Tekst geldend op 08-12-2010.* Retrieved from: http://wetten.overheid.nl

Van den Heuvel, H. and A. de Wit. 2009. *Durf te twijfelen en deel dilemma's: Bestuurders over intergemeentelijke samenwerking* [*Dare to Doubt and Share Dilemmas: Aldermen on Inter-Municipal Cooperation*]. Den Haag: InAxis, FWA Drukkerij.

Van Tatenhove, J. 2009. *Politieke legitimiteit van regionale samenwerking* [*Political Legitimacy of Regional Cooperation*]. Den Haag: Nirov.